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COACH DONIGAN

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. – Dan Donigan, a 47-year-old head coach for the Rutgers men's soccer team, is not just a coach of soccer. He is a coach of life, serving as a mentor, who is more than willing to instill the right values into his players, encouraging and motivating them on a consistent basis.

“Coach Donigan takes an active role in building a relationship with the players,” said Tyler Morris, a junior defender who transferred from William Paterson University. “I remember him telling us to be true to ourselves and that if you want to become the best, you have to think like the best.”

The Trenton native who played as a forward in the Major Indoor Soccer League and the National Professional Soccer League, is currently serving his fourth year as the head coach for the men's soccer team here at the university. While playing professionally for many different teams, Donigan ran youth soccer camps and took a love for teaching the game to younger players.

Due to his passion to win and be successful, he finds it very difficult to balance his time between his personal life and coaching.

“As a player, I hated to lose. Helping my team rack up victories was my biggest priority,” Donigan said. “Now as a coach, the feeling stays the same as ever. I hate to see my guys lose.”

Besides the players' performance, he knows how much the players' attitudes and emotions can change on a day to day basis with ups and downs of a season. They go through emotional roller coasters at some point, just like the rest of us.

“There are many variables that affect our guys, whether that be school, family, relationships, or playing standards,” Donigan said. “I simply try to support them in every way possible and instill what I feel are the necessary behaviors to be successful.”

According to Donigan, players can misinterpret things and find the team's job to be very

unrewarding, which are some of the bad experiences he has with the team. He tries to teach his guys life lessons along with helping them mature as people.

“Guys think it’s punishment when we train the day after when it’s simply installing proper habits or teaching them to work,” Donigan said. “When we say something that’s meant to be a compliment, they interpret the comment as a knock.”

Depending on the coaches’ personality, some like to yell at their players to make them more aware while some tend to keep their cool like Phil Jackson and Brad Stevens, who rarely yell at their players. However, Donigan is one of those who feel that it is appropriate to yell only during certain situations, in which he receives a positive response for the most part.

“Different circumstances dictate for different action. When I yell, the responses that I’ve gotten were mostly great. I mean, most if not all coaches get upset and maybe raise their voices,” Donigan said. “When your players know it’s not personal but intended to be helpful and it’s not ridiculous, it’s usually positive.”

With the players taking advantage of Donigan’s every bit of advice and making both the sacrifice and commitment to personal excellence and team success, making the coach proud presents no difficulty. These guys aren’t rewarded with anything materialistic; they simply get the reward of self-accomplishment.

“The ones that make me most proud are the ones that balance the academics and athletics,” Donigan said. “Most of my guys make me proud because they are able to do that and everything goes well as long as we have a mutual respect.”

However, for a lot of these players, balancing academics and athletics is no easy task. These guys are running and lifting everyday in and out of the season with a very demanding schedule.

As far as academics go, there is no “walk in the park” major offered, but there are certainly majors that are regarded to be more competitive than others. Engineering and business fall under that list, which are typically what many of these players major in.

“The majors for my guys vary from engineering to communications. Many of my guys are in business and economics. Business are the usual majors, which I know for a fact is pretty tough,” Donigan said.

There are other attributes that the coach looks for in his players other than skill. Those attributes consist of many things, which are important for all athletes, whether it be a shortstop or a pole vaulter.

“I look at certain characteristics, which are competitiveness, good work ethics, and passion for life and success,” Donigan said.

The team currently holds a 5-8-1 record and despite the mediocre performance thus far, the coach expects the team to close out the season in strong fashion.

“My guys need to realize the opportunities ahead of them and the postseason gives every team a fresh chance to win it all,” Donigan said.

“We can’t be selfish in life our careers. I just try to help my guys win and teach them life lessons along with helping them mature as people. I don’t consider myself a coach, but a mentor as well.”