



Athletic Excellence

Coaching for Naval Careers By Gary Lambrecht

Larry Bock already had amassed more victories than any collegiate volleyball coach in history, before he had an unexpected opportunity to restart his career at the U.S. Naval Academy. After 34 seasons at Division III Juniata College, where he guided the women's team to 1,252 victories, Bock is an invigorated, rookie Division I coach with high expectations in Annapolis.

Dave Brandt had been running the best Division III men's soccer program in America for more than a decade at Messiah College. Then, in 2008, he decided it was time to take a

career leap and assume the challenging business of revitalizing the sport at Navy.

Cindy Timchal had led the University of Maryland to seven consecutive, NCAA Division I championships and had amassed more wins than any women's lacrosse coach. In 2006, the chance to become the first coach in the sport's history at Navy was too attractive for Timchal to pass up.

Stefanie Pemper had won 83 percent of her games over a decade in the Division III world of Bowdoin College. When Navy athletics director Chet Gladchuk set his sights on Pemper three

*Keith Puryear, Navy
women's tennis coach*

years ago as the spark that would reignite the school's women's basketball program, Pemper decided the time was right to try her hand in the Yard.

The examples go on, and they each point to a trend that has grown more pronounced since Gladchuk was hired to run the athletics department in the fall of 2001.

When it comes to hiring coaches over the past decade, Navy means business. With Gladchuk calling the shots, and with the Academy's administration and the financial clout of the Naval Academy Athletic Association and the Naval Academy Foundation behind him, the school is sustaining its commitment to winning.

It shows in the dramatic upgrade in athletic facilities, starting with the privately-funded, \$43.7 renovation of Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium, the crown jewel of a six-year, fundraising campaign led by the Naval Academy Foundation through December of 2005. It shows in the increase of the athletics department operating budget to more than \$35 million, money that covers substantial improvements in staffing, salaries and recruiting.

It shows in the win-loss column. Two years ago, Navy athletics set school records in overall victories (317) and winning percentage (.670).

And it is reflected in the coaches being hired to run the programs that comprise the 32 varsity sports played at the school—coaches such as Paul Kostacopoulos. He took over the baseball program in 2006, after he already had won more games than any Division I baseball coach before age 40 during stints at Providence and Maine. He promptly led the Midshipmen to three straight, 30-win seasons, marking a first in school history.

"We have set the bar, in terms of what the expectation is. The mindset here



"Navy wants to win and win badly, but winning is a byproduct of everything else here."

*—Larry Bock,
women's volleyball coach*

is we expect to win," Gladchuk said. "The Naval Academy is about success. It's about developing young men and women who leave here prepared to overcome adversity [in the fleet] and don't even think about losing."

"We want coaches with the mentality that speaks to balancing academics and athletics. We want proven winners who are driven by the success they have achieved. We want coaches that have gotten on-the-job training at places that believe in the same things we do. A marginal coach is not going to succeed here, and a coach who is exclusively driven by winning is going to have a tough time here. We have to have better coaches here."

In other words, Gladchuk seeks coaches that typically have been forced to do more with less. Coaches such as Bock, Brandt and Pemper, for example, have thrived at Division III schools, which do not offer athletic scholarships, and are accustomed to maximizing talent without so-called blue-chip recruits.

Those schools also place a premium on academic performance. Navy, which does not offer athletic scholarships but provides government-paid education—in exchange for a military commitment by its commissioned officers for at least five years beyond graduation—struck Bock as the perfect fit.

"Navy is on a very short list of schools I ever would have considered leaving for," said Bock, who was hired in January, after his Juniata women's teams had amassed nearly 150 victories more than any other volleyball coach has

produced. "I had said no to some really good institutions that were interested in me over the years, schools in the Ivy League and the ACC. It was mainly for family reasons, but my youngest daughter graduated from college last May."

Gladchuk originally contacted Bock to gauge his reaction to a list of candidates to replace coach Mike Schwob. During the course of their talk, Bock, who also was tiring of his dual role as athletics director at Juniata, asked if he could throw his hat in the ring for consideration in Annapolis.

"It was just short of impulsive on my part, but there's no question this was the right move for me," Bock said. "Navy wants to win and win badly, but winning is a byproduct of everything else here. I like being at a place where I



Dave Brandt, men's soccer coach

can really say I'm part of the educational process. The priorities here always will be in order. There is no athletic grant indenturing my players to me. They can leave my gym anytime they want. We're a means to an end. This is like athletics heaven."

Like Bock, Pemper was not looking to leave Bowdoin, where she won 235 games over a decade. Navy called her. And once she considered the mission of the school and the self-motivated, goal-oriented nature of its student-athletes—not to mention the luxury of having three, full-time assistants and the freedom to recruit anywhere in the country—Pemper felt compelled to move on.

"I approach basketball as matter-of-fact training for future leaders. That weighs on me huge," said Pemper, who capped her third straight winning season at Navy by leading the Mids to their first-ever Patriot League title and first NCAA tournament appearance in March. "Division III coaches come from a place where we have limited time with



Cindy Timchal, women's lacrosse coach



"We've got to coach with the understanding of what these players go through at this place."

—Paul Kostacopoulos,
men's baseball coach

our athletes. Our players have other lives. That is certainly the case here.

"I love the idea of coaching intelligent young women who have a certain drive and confidence in what they do. They know they're going to make a difference for their country. What also spoke to me was we would have the ability to be successful on the court. We're not spoiled with big egos here. Everyone is accountable."

"[Pemper] holds us to a higher standard, not just as basketball players," said Navy center Cassie Consedine '11, who played her last three seasons under Pemper. "She whipped us into shape. Her philosophy and coaching style was 180 degrees from what we had before. She empowers us to motivate ourselves. I don't think I've ever heard her yell. But she knows how to push our buttons and push us in the right direction."

Kostacopoulos seeks to do the same with his players.

"This is the hardest job I've ever had. You can't just get what you want, starting with the fact that we're not going to get the superstar [player]," said Kostacopoulos, who entered the 2011 season with 653 career victories over 21 previous seasons.

"We've got to get kids who are grinders. We've got to coach with the understanding of what these players go through at this place. There's humility to it, the way we deal with things like the fragility of freshmen, or how you have to allow your players to compete in the classroom. There's no tug of war with these guys."

Kostacopoulos, who like other coaches at Navy has been known to forbid players from traveling with the team if they are

struggling in the classroom, said he has the tools to excel on the diamond.

He said his recruiting budget doubled when he took the Navy job. He finds many players in the Mid-Atlantic, Southern California and Texas. The Midshipmen play home games at Terwilliger Brothers Field at Max Bishop Stadium, which received a \$2.5 million renovation several years ago. Kostacopoulos always has the ear of Gladchuk, who talks to coaches regularly about what they need to continue advancing their programs.

Gladchuk said having the support of the NAAA and the Foundation is crucial. The Foundation's athletic excellence funding is a source that helps Navy stay competitive.

The "margin of athletic excellence" supplemental funding helps Gladchuk address such day-to-day needs as state-of-the-art video and computer equipment, training and medical supplies, travel budget, even nutrition issues at preseason camps. The supplemental funding also helps to enhance the compensation that attracts and retains quality head coaches and assistants.

"There's a fine line between winning and losing here, and the resources we can provide gives coaches that extra edge they need," Gladchuk said. "We want to eliminate the hurdles, clear the path for the coaches, so they're not worried about the things they need to run a first-class program. When you bring in a Dave Brandt or a Larry Bock or anyone with an incredible track record, they trust us to provide resources they need. The ambition of the institution is to succeed."

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Brandt certainly understands that. When he took the job, he inherited the Glenn Warner Soccer Facility, which was built with \$4.5 million with private funding and opened in 2001. Brandt also requested and received the necessary funding to hire a full-time goalkeeping coach.

After winning six NCAA titles at Messiah, he installed a ball-control, possession-oriented offense at Navy, which last fall recorded its first winning men's soccer season since 2005. This, on a team packed with freshmen who battled their share of fatigue as plebes. All of which added to the challenge Brandt relishes.

"Chet's vision was to bring the right coach in and do whatever he could to help. That doesn't mean they're going to build a dome for me," Brandt said. "I'm pretty low-maintenance. I need a team to coach, and I get concrete support."

Brandt, who graduated from Messiah and spent eight years as an assistant before taking over that program, said he realized he needed a new start to get his juices flowing, and he found the school that fit his personality. He was drawn immediately to a student body with a precocious maturity.

"You're dealing with bright, capable, respectful young men. There's a serious tone about this place I really appreciate. Everybody is kind of on edge around

here," Brandt said. "From an academic and leadership standpoint, the Naval Academy has this incredible reputation that resonated with me. At Messiah, maxing out your potential meant you were in the running for a national championship. Here, the goals are a little bit different, but the approach is the same."

Gladchuk's approach regarding the hiring of coaches has been the same since he made his first major move by hiring Paul Johnson to resuscitate the ailing football program in December 2001. Six years later, after five straight bowl-game trips, Johnson left for Georgia Tech, and Navy quickly promoted Ken Niumatalolo, whose 27 victories are the most ever by a Navy football coach in his first three years.

Some other examples include men's swimming coach Bill Roberts and women's swimming coach John Morrison, who each returned to Navy after working previously as assistants at the Academy. Roberts is 97-30 in eight years, including a 12-1 mark and a No. 24 national ranking in 2011. Morrison has guided the Mids to a pair of Patriot League crowns and has been voted the league's coach of the year three times in the past five years.

Women's tennis coach Keith Puryear, who built the tennis program at UMBC from the ground up and took five



Ken Niumatalolo, men's football coach

UMBC men's teams to the NCAA tournament between 2000 and 2007, is guiding the Mids through the second year as a varsity sport. Navy went 13-4 a year ago and had a 22-8 record in year two, as of the end of February.

Then there is Timchal, who in year four of women's lacrosse at Navy was positioning the Mids for a run at their second straight, NCAA tournament berth. Navy goalkeeper Elaina Ponchione '12 said Timchal's legendary achievements at Maryland influenced her decision significantly to come to Navy.

"It was a perfect combination of factors [that helped her decide]. I wanted to come to the Academy, but [Timchal] played a huge role. This lady is a big deal," Ponchione said. "She is like the mother of lacrosse."

"It's like living a dream here. These young ladies are all business, fully committed to lacrosse, serious and passionate about school and serving their country," Timchal said. "I have learned so much as a coach again. You can't just make a recruiting call and get a kid [to commit to Navy], like it was at Maryland. But you know you're going to get great kids here, and you know the Academy is dedicated to putting out the best people they can. At this point in my career, that gives me a sense of meaning." ✚



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