

sports

York loses football coach



Jennifer Crane

Stepping down: York's football coach Nobby Wirkowski discusses his resignation.

One of the most colourful and respected coaches in Canadian university athletics is resigning.

Yeomen football coach Nobby Wirkowski announced October 9 that he is stepping down, after being with York's football programme since he founded it in 1968. Wirkowski will continue to teach at York, as well as working for the athletic department in a promotional capacity.

From 1968 until 1983, Wirkowski was York's coordinator of athletics. He also served as head football coach from 1968 until 1975. He was co-head coach with Frank Cosentino from 1984 until 1987, when Cosentino resigned, leaving Wirkowski to fend for himself.

In addition to his years at York, Wirkowski also quarterbacked the CFL's Toronto Argonauts to victory in the 1952 Grey Cup, the last time the Argos won it before they beat the BC Lions in 1983. As well, Wirkowski also served as the Argonauts' head coach from 1962 to 1964. *Excalibur's* Josh Rubin spoke to Wirkowski in his office last week.

Excalibur: What made you decide a football programme was needed here at York?

Wirkowski: In the university, you should have a total educational programme which should include as wide a variety of clubs as possible. With this, people have an outlet. Emotionally, they get something out of it. With the people who get involved with cheerleading, it's not a case of exploitation, but they may not be athletes and this is their way of participating. It's part of their overall education. There are also people who come to university that want to play a sport. For those, there are three levels of competition: for those who deal in excellence, there is the varsity level, for those who merely want to compete, there is the torch league and for those who simply want to recreate, there is the intramural league.

E: What was your relation with York, in particular?

W: Well, York was looking for somebody at the time, and I thought it was a good opportunity for me to get involved with young people again. I enjoy working with people and, in particular, with young people.

E: What sort of problems did you run into during your early years at York?

W: Naturally, it was a problem finding and recruiting football players and getting them to believe that York is a fine educational institution in all faculties and that eventually York was going to have a good athletic programme. I think that, since then, we have progressed quite rapidly in all areas. In men's women's athletics, we have several national and provincial titles, although that hasn't yet come in football. Football happens to be one of the most competitive university sports in Canada; competitive in the sense that

on any given Saturday in the OUAA, any team can beat anyone else.

E: At the time you arrived at York, what kind of league structure was there in Ontario and nationally?

W: Well, there was always a national university league, which had as the culmination of its season the Vanier Cup which was then known as the College Bowl. There was also the little big four in Ontario, consisting of Queen's, UofT, Western and McGill. When we first got into football, we played in what was known as the Central Canada Football League which consisted of teams such as Windsor, McMaster and Waterloo. Then, around 1970, the Ontario Universities Athletic Association was formed.

E: Despite the fact that you perhaps have not had as much success as you have liked to these past few years, you must still have a few highlights.

W: In 1984 we had what was probably the best defensive team in the Canadian Inter-university Athletic Union (CIAU). I know that we had the best defensive team record in the OUAA. As well, in 1984 and 1985, we had an all-Canadian athlete on our team in noseguard Dirk Lears.

E: What do you make of all the promotion being given CIAU football these days, what with TSN's new deal and the amount of attention these days to the Red and Blue Bowl?

W: I think in Canada, if we've done anything badly, universities haven't promoted their programmes. I like what President Arthurs is doing. From what I understand, he wants to make York the Harvard of Canada. But now you have to go out and sell the fact that York is one hell of an educational institution and our promotion is no different than when any other department tries to promote itself. However, there is no doubt that there are some renegade schools that would do anything to promote their football programme. But it's unfortunate that any athlete gets used by a programme. I'm not for that type of thing. My daughter graduated here and my son received a BBA and an MBA while playing varsity football. He was also an A-minus student. That's the type of athlete that I want.

E: What is your fondest memory of teaching and coaching here at York?

W: The accomplishment of being able to convince people that they were good and they were capable of competing with anyone that they faced. When I took over the team, I thought that over and above the knowledge that I may possess, the number one thing was that these athletes had to be convinced that they were good. They started to believe in themselves. Many of their traits of character probably started to improve along with that, their self esteem.

Tops in Ontario

Field hockey Yeowomen ready for post-season

Pamela Jarvis

Bring on the Blues. The field hockey Yeowomen closed out the regular season with a pair of wins last weekend. York defeated the Guelph Gryphons 4-0 and avenged last week's loss to Western, shutting out the Mustangs by a 3-0 count.

Along with last Tuesday's 2-1 win over the UofT Varsity Blues, the Yeowomen sport a 7-1 record and are alone at the top of their division heading into this weekend's Ontario Women's Intercollegiate Athletic Association (OWIAA) championship.

"They were two good wins, but not brilliant victories," commented York head coach Marina van der Merwe. "Guelph and Western have primarily grass players. They have no artificial game plan. Our kids are schooled to expect turf tactics... when this didn't happen, they had to adjust."

Cathy Timmins put York on the board in the second minute of play against Guelph. Four minutes later Cathy MacGillivray scored from a penalty corner.

The pressuring tactics of Guelph's backup goalkeeper squelched York's early zeal. The keeper came out high and hard, minimizing shooting angles and stopping several York breakaways.

At the other end, York goalie Michelle Capperauld had to employ helmet and hockey to smother a Guelph shooting flurry in the first half.

"It was interesting... they kind of took us by surprise there," said Capperauld. Van der Merwe rated her goaltending effort "outstanding."

Play in the second half slowed to a simmer. "Their play made us undisciplined," observed York

assistant coach Kathy Broderick. York forward Tammy Holt injected some life into the game when she struck in the 48th minute. Holt later deked out the Guelph keeper to seal the 4-0 win.

While Western played back-to-back matches, the playing schedule gave the hosting Yeowomen almost half a day of rest. The fatigue factor may have been responsible for the slow start against Western.

York's shots on goal were wide on numerous occasions. Just before the end of the first half, Holt sprinted down a ball that was about to exit the Western endline. Holt cracked the ball back across the goalmouth where Kelly Thormeyer connected, smacking the ball past the frozen Mustang goalie.

"It was about time (for me)," said Thormeyer. "We had so many shots."

In the end, it was the Western attack that ran out of steam. "We only started to erode the opposition when they tired," said van der Merwe.

Tracey Minaker scored in the second half on a shot from the top of the shooting circle. Minaker then set up Joel Brough for the final tally. Rookie keeper Michelle Kleiss earned the shutout.

With the Ontario championship looming this weekend, hockey fans can pretty much expect a (near-annual) rematch between last year's finalists, the Yeowomen and the UofT Blues. The Blues took both provincial and national honours last season.

However, the Yeowomen have a Blue monkey to shake off their collective back. York defeated Toronto twice in regular season play last year only to be edged out in the provincial final. The Blues have again spotted York a pair of

games but the Yeowomen, ranked second nationally, are hoping the momentum will carry them to a provincial title.

Predictions of the betting-line sort were not forthcoming from the York squad, however the following offerings were extracted (like puling teeth) from the Yeowomen:

Co-captain Karen Hewlett: On turf we're used to a turf style. Last weekend we played teams that played a different style and had to make adjustments. When we come against a team that plays a similar style next weekend, we'll be ready. I feel confident.

Co-captain Cathy Timmins: Our defence is very strong. They're going to have to hold us in until we get going... We have to pressure them (the opposition).

Joel Brough: We have a good chance, since we beat UofT. But we can't get overconfident.

Kelly Thormeyer: It's going to be a more balanced, more even competition than last year.

Kathy Broderick: With the two wins against UofT, we should play with that winning confidence.

Marina van der Merwe: Predictions are extremely difficult. I'll guess that UofT will come out hard.

The bottom line: "We'll be playing for all the marbles." (van der Merwe)

The OWIAA championship starts October 27. All games will be played on artificial turf at Lamport Stadium (King St.W. at Dufferin). York plays Carleton at 2 p.m. Playoffs continue on Saturday, with championship play featured on Sunday. The Canadian championship is scheduled at Lamport, commencing November 2.