

Basketball Coach Looking Forward To First Season

Josh Lewis
Sports Editor

After firing long-time men's basketball coach Mike Connolly last May, the UPEI Panthers turned to Maritime native Matthew Davies behind the bench in July.

Davies, who served as an assistant with McGill for four years after filling a similar role with St. F.X., is happy to be home.

"I always considered Charlottetown my second home," says Davies. "It's a thrill to coach in the AUS, let alone on the Island. It's a very interesting opportunity and I'm very excited about it."

Davies hopes to maintain a culture of integrity entering his first year with the Panthers.

"We're making sure that the work ethic is there, the trust is there, and the respect is there. When you put these things together and add some patience to the mix, you'll be successful... I value the relationships I build with my athletes and with my staff. I think you have to be honest and communicate in an open manner and trust each other."

Davies was hired late in the off-season and says that made recruiting players a difficult task.

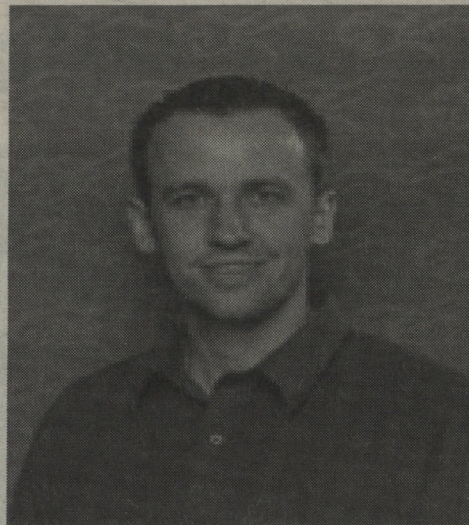
"I spent a whole year recruiting for McGill, and then (early in the summer) I was hired as an assistant coach for Wilfrid Laurier, so then I was recruiting for (them). And then I got hired at UPEI. I pride myself on my recruiting, but I had a little bit of a time crunch... for securing players who hadn't already committed themselves."

Connolly had already attracted Islander Steve Hardy and fourth-year guard Jared Budd, and Davies recruited three more players: fourth-year forward Awale Dualeh, first-year guard Jonathan Cooper, and fourth-year guard Brent McLaren.

The new coach has nothing but praise for Connolly's additions.

"Jared Budd is a former two-time defensive player of the year at Acadia, and a gritty offguard that is a quiet offensive threat. Steve Hardy is showing that he can adapt to the CIS game very quickly. He's a strong intelligent guard that is working hard at contributing to the team right away."

Davies credits Dualeh, a transfer from George Brown College, with "tremendous leadership skills. He's 6'8" with a seven-foot wingspan, so he's going to alter some shots. And



Panthers Coach Matthew Davies

people will underestimate his perimeter game."

He describes Cooper, from Etobicoke Collegiate Institute, as "a slasher, a scorer and a shooter. I think he has tremendous potential as a defensive stopper and in terms of his offensive talent. He just has to get used to the CIS game."

McLaren, a late addition from Capilano College in B.C., led the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association in assists last season.

"He's a strong, smart, powerful, aggressive point guard who can get the ball where it needs to go, and he's quite a shooter. He's a flat-out shooter – pull up, three point mark, it doesn't matter," says Davies.

Panthers guard Tyler Wood played his final year of eligibility last season, but remains with the squad as an assistant coach. Davies is excited to have him on his staff.

"Any time you lose an AUS all-star appointment you're losing his scoring, his communication on the court, his intensity and his maturity. But at the same time I'm extremely excited about the fact that he's an assistant coach because his communication style and his understanding of the AUS game can be transferred on to the younger guys and even the fifth-years."

Davies credits his many years as an assistant coach with helping him get to where he is now.

"I've been fortunate to work with some very experienced CIS head coaches – a few of whom have won CIS coach of the year at least once, which is a tremendous accomplishment. You get to combine all their approaches to the game, which were very diverse, and you come up with your own personal style."

"I also wouldn't underestimate the fact that my work with the National Coaches Institute was also very valuable to me. It helped me understand some of the science behind it. There's an art and a science to coaching. My masters in coaching and sports psychology also helped me understand the science side of it."

The Panthers kick off preseason play at the Mickey Place exhibition tournament, held this weekend at UPEI. They will open the regular season on Remembrance Day against three-time defending AUS champion St. F.X., coached by Davies' old mentor Steve Konchalski.



The Cadre Players of the Week



Congratulations to the Cadre players of the week for Oct. 4-11, Paul Craig and Janelle Blanchard. Paul and Janelle are the first players to receive this prestigious honour for the 2006-07 season.

Craig, a first-year member of the men's soccer team from Charlottetown, has been a force to be reckoned with since his AUS debut in September, when he drew a penalty shot for captain Matt Thomson. He scored a goal and

was named UPEI player of the game in a 3-1 victory Sept. 30 over the hapless Moncton Blue Eagles. A week earlier, he was rewarded with the same honour after turning in a strong effort in a 4-0 loss to the first-place Cape Breton Capers. Talent, grit and versatility – Paul has it all.

Blanchard, a fourth-year striker from Charlottetown, has starred for the soccer Panthers since the season opener, when she pumped in five goals

against Moncton. Since then she has continued to fill the net, including the only goal in a 1-0 win over the Eagles Sept. 30 and a crucial late goal in a 2-0 defeat of StFX the weekend before. She is currently tied for second in the nation – and first in the AUS – with seven goals in only five games. Janelle is a goal-scorer of the first degree. Congratulations to the Cadre players of the week. We sincerely hope this honour doesn't go to your head.

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