

SPORTS

Behrend coaching legend set to retire

TRACK AND FIELD, CROSS COUNTRY COACH DAVE COOPER IN HIS LAST YEAR AS A COACH FOR PENN STATE

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A journey of 39 years has finally come to an end for one of the area's track and field legends: Coach Dave Cooper. A high school coach for 31 years, and eight years at Penn State Erie, the Behrend College. Cooper will retire at the end of this season as the driving force behind the track and field and cross country programs.

As a coach at Union City High School, Cooper led the cross country program for 28 years, and served six years as the head coach of the track team. He created the girl's cross country program at the high school, and according to the Penn State Behrend website, captured ten conference crowns. He won the Boys' State Cross Country Championship title in 1996 and 1997, as well as runner-up in 1990, and also took 19 league titles, according to the Penn State Behrend website.

Cooper's son, Greg, will be taking over for his father after having him as a coach at Union City. "He developed me into a better athlete," recalls Greg Cooper. "It wasn't just that, though - he gave me an example of what it meant to be a great coach."

Greg, who went to Penn State Behrend for four years and excelled in the program, set the 400 and 800 meter records for the school. He had the interesting perspective of being in the program

without his father as a coach; the year after Greg graduated, his father stepped into the head coach position. "Before he came, there were a lot of great individuals, and it was still fun," he says. "But there wasn't much of a team element."

Brian Streeter, the Director of Athletics at Penn State Behrend, explained that when the position opened for Cooper to step in, both the track and cross country programs were relatively young. "Our numbers were still small," says Streeter. "and both programs were only in their first five years."

Cooper's arrival at Penn State Behrend shook up both programs immediately, said Streeter. "His success in high school definitely paid off here. His demeanor and communication with students made them very comfortable. So, we were able to reach out to more and more students every year."

The efforts of the new coach resulted

in skyrocketing numbers of athletes. Streeter estimates 24 students participated in cross country regularly when Cooper arrived. That number has since risen to over 60, he says. The track and field numbers have also nearly doubled from their original number of 14 athletes, according to Streeter.

Staci Rock, an athlete at Penn State Behrend from 2002 to 2006, was one of the first athletes to experience Dave Cooper as a head coach for four years. "When I look back on my high school and college experience," she says, "track and field was one thing I was so glad that I did, and it was because of him as a coach."

Rock, the current record holder in long jump, high jump, and triple jump for Behrend, said that the best quality of her coach was his sheer determination to help students succeed. "If there's one quality that makes him great," she says,

"it's just how much he cares about students. It's one big family on that team, and Coach [Dave] Cooper always puts students first, and himself second. They really bring the best out in all of the students."

Perhaps the most significant change Cooper made to Behrend was his strategy of bringing in coaches that specialized in different track and field events.

Cooper began to transition to a "retirement track" option, switching to an assistant coach role in spring of 2007. Before then, he led the women's team to two conference titles, and displayed himself as one of the school's best coaches.

Phil Stuczynski, an athlete at Penn State Behrend since January of 2006, says that Cooper's ability to be a mentor set him apart. "He has an amazing ability to be a teacher," said Stuczynski, "he never comes down on you hard. If you do your best, go to your classes, try hard... he supports you, he keeps it fun."

Streeter agrees that his mentor attitude is what makes him a legend at the school. "This guy goes to coaches' clinics, reads medical journals," said Streeter. "His best attribute is that he is a teacher. He taught the sports of cross country and track. He never took a day off."

Never?
"Well, except hunting day."

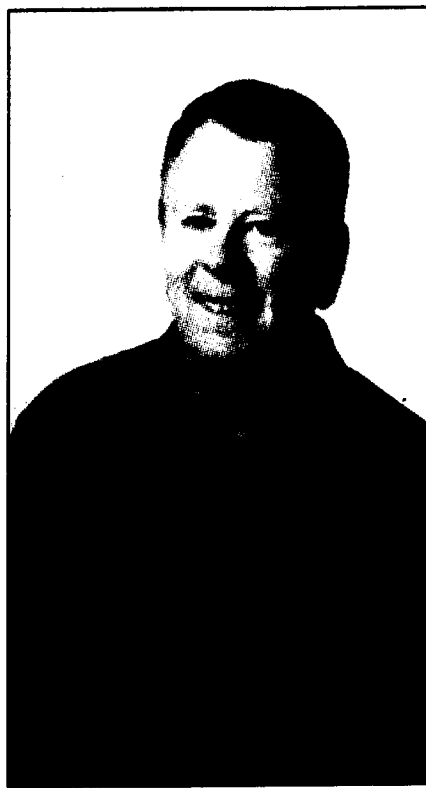
In Cooper's eight year career at Penn State Behrend, to the best of Streeter's memory, he missed eight days of work: the opening days of hunting season.

An avid hunter, Cooper decided to retire to primarily spend more time in the woods. While that will likely include hunting, he says that it is the simple outdoor things that he looks forward to the most.

"I want to cut firewood," says the coaching legend. "You can't do that much as a head coach. I just want to be in the woods, enjoy nature."

Cooper owns several hundred acres of land by Conneaut Lake, and, strangely, his own putt-putt golf course. "Greg and I really liked putt-putt golf," he says. "I decided it would be a cool thing to operate in retirement."

His resignation as coach, though,



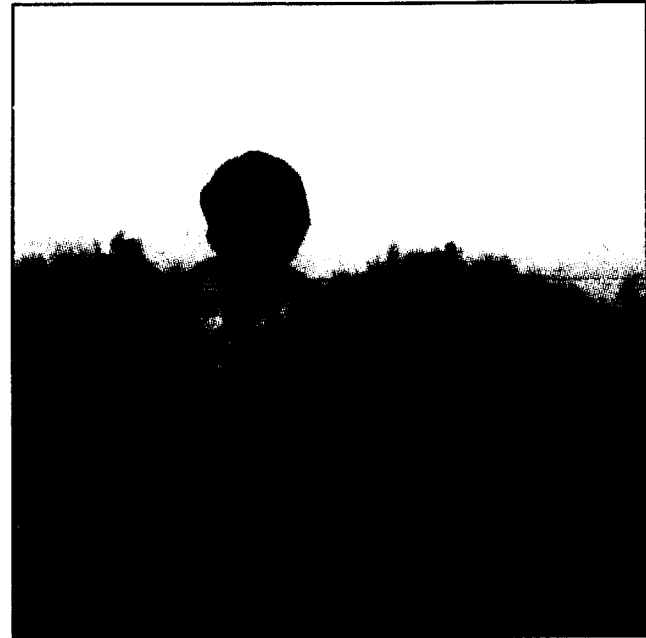
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comes for reasons aside from golf. "Being a coach for 39 years sends you down," he says. "You spend sixty to seventy hours a week working as a head coach in this sport."

He attributes the success he's accomplished in the program to his faith, and the students who have come through the school. "I've been blessed with some outstanding athletes. The students really deserve all of the credit."

Streeter, who watched Cooper develop both the track and cross country programs into the success stories that they are today, knows that Cooper is a once-in-a-lifetime coach. That title, says Streeter, doesn't do the man justice in the job that he does.

"He's not just a coach - he's more of a professor. Most teachers will aim for getting their students to perform well on tests, but the good ones will make sure students understand a concept and can apply it to real life," said Streeter. "That's what Dave Cooper does for his athletes; instead of saying, 'run hard and jump,' he teaches you strategies and techniques. He teaches you the craft, and brings the best out of every one of the students that he's coached."



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Left: Coach Cooper poses for a picture during practice Right: Coach Cooper stands with his 1996 State Championship team.

ENTERPRISE RENT-A-CAR

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Krystal Kovach
Diving
Sophomore

Athlete Spotlight: Krystal Kovach

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This week's ENTERPRISE RENT-A-CAR Athlete of the Week is Behrend sophomore Krystal Kovach.

Krystal Kovach played a major role for the diving team this past week.

Kovach was perfect through the week, winning in each of her four events against Buffalo State and St. Vincent, earning her the AMCC Diver of the Week.

Versus Buffalo State, she scored 230.10 points on the 1-meter, a mere 5.5 points ahead of the Bengal competitor. Then on the 3-meter she crushed the competition by 40 points, scoring a 262.10 to break both the team and pool records in the process.

"It was really exciting to experience breaking those records," said Kovach.

She again had stellar performances in the two 1-meter competitions against St. Vincent, winning both with scores of 179.2 and 254.15.

Kovach is from Scott Township, which is in the

Pittsburgh area. She didn't originally plan on coming to Behrend when deciding on where to go for a college education.

"I got accepted to Washington and Jefferson first, but I really liked the campus, so I came here [Penn State Behrend]," said Kovach. What

it was a fun experience for Kovach learning how to dive. "Well, I was starting from scratch, but it was exciting," she said.

Kovach was very successful her freshman year, especially for an athlete who was new to the sport. She earned an AMCC Championship in her first year.

that keeps her in top form for competition.

The team practices two times a day, in the morning and in the evening.

"In the morning I usually do my lifting and cardio," said Kovach. "The evening sessions are strictly diving."

Kovach is still somewhat undecided when it comes to her education.

"My major is biology, for now," said Kovach. Her plans may change before the end of her college career. Being that she is still a freshman, she has no plans for when she graduates.

Krystal has had a very successful career so far on Behrend's diving team. She is only in the second year of her career and she has already locked down a championship. It is only certain that she will continue diving well for the Behrend Lions.

"I was really solid and really confident."

- Krystal Kovach, Sophomore

is even more unbelievable is how Kovach began her diving career.

"I didn't decide to start diving until I got here," said Kovach. "My freshman year of college was my first year of diving."

Which became her favorite experience of her young career.

"I practiced the same dives all the time," said Kovach. "I was really solid and really confident. I knew I would do well."

Kovach sticks to a very demanding training regimen