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IU Kokomo adds women's basketball, hires Kokomo native as coach

KOKOMO, Ind. — Indiana University Kokomo announces today (November 25) that women's basketball has been added to its team sports program, and hires a local basketball standout as its coach.

Whitney Farris, 26, currently an assistant coach for the men's team, plans to begin recruiting almost immediately for the 2014-2015 season.

"It's a dream come true to coach in the town where I grew up, where I played basketball for so many years, starting with Little Dribblers at the YMCA," Farris said. "I look forward to the opportunity to build new traditions, starting this team at IU Kokomo."

Farris is well known among Kokomo area basketball fans. She led Kokomo High School to a 4A state championship in the 2002-2003 season, and was a four-year letter winner in women's basketball at Valparaiso University. She was IU Kokomo's sports information director before becoming assistant coach.

Todd Gambill, vice chancellor for student services and enrollment management, is happy to start the team with local talent.

"We are so fortunate to have someone of Whitney's character and ability right here, to grow a program with us," he said. "Her genuine commitment to the academic success of our athletes makes her the right person for the job. The fact she is a local product is a bonus. This is a tremendous day for IU Kokomo."

North Central Indiana's deep pool of women's basketball talent makes the sport a perfect fit for the campus, Athletic Director Brandon Podgorski said.

“There are a lot of talented players in the area,” he said. “It’s also a good fit because we have a men’s basketball team, so they can travel together and play double headers. Whitney is the right person to take us into the future.”

When Farris interviewed for the sports information director job in 2012, someone joked that maybe the campus would start a women’s team, and she could be the coach.

“I didn’t think it would ever happen,” she said. “I still wanted to be in sports in some way. This is a dream come true.”

She looks forward to recruiting in the region, and has already started attending high school games.

“I love watching basketball, so that’s not a hard part of the job,” she said. “This is a great area to recruit from, with some of the best pickings out there. I want to get kids who will be good students, and who want to graduate in four years. Definitely I want players who are coachable, who want to play a defensive game, who have fundamental skills, and ball handling skills.”

Farris expects to sell players on the value of an IU degree. She can speak from experience, as she will complete her Master of Business Administration degree in May.

“The IU degree is a huge selling point,” she said. “A lot of kids in this area want to stay close to home, and earn an IU degree. This is also an opportunity to start a program from scratch. That opportunity doesn’t come along often.”

She’s had excellent examples of coaching to learn from, including her high school coach, Charlie Hall, and her college coach, Keith Freeman. She admires Duke men’s coach Mike Krzyzewski and Notre Dame women’s coach Muffet McGraw, and is gaining valuable experience working with the Cougar men’s coach, Jace Thompson, this season.

Fundamentally, she doesn’t expect a huge transition from coaching a men’s team to coaching a women’s team.

“They’re all people at the end of the day,” she said.

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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