

Paige begins new chapter at Coe

Written by Jim Ecker

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Morgan Paige has begun a new chapter in her basketball career as an assistant coach at Coe, but it probably won't be her last connection to the game she loves.

The former Marion High School and University of Wisconsin star would like to play pro basketball in a foreign country if possible, and someday she'd like to coach at the NCAA Division I level.

Paige comes from a basketball family. Her parents, Sherryl and Ellis, played at Mount Mercy University and have been coaches. And her kid brother, Marcus, is doing fairly well for himself at North Carolina following his prep days at Linn-Mar.

Basketball runs in their blood.

"I don't feel I can give it up just yet," Paige said Tuesday before practice with the Coe women's basketball team. "I feel like I have so much to offer the game, and the game has so much to teach me still.

"I hope to be involved with it somehow, whether I'm coaching it or playing it. I still think it's going to be awhile before I hang it up."

Paige graduated from Wisconsin this year as one of the most successful players in school history. She scored 1,280 points, made third team all-Big Ten and ranks in the top-10 in five categories at Wisconsin. On top of all that, she was named academic all-Big Ten for three years.

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Paige began spending a considerable amount of time in the Wisconsin coaching office as a junior and senior, getting a first-hand look at what it takes to run a big-time program and to coach at a high level.

"It really intrigued me," she said. "I thought I'd have to try it at some point."

Her parents encouraged her to try coaching, suspecting she'd be good at it.

"I think we have a respect, as a family, for the game," she said. "We can sit and watch any level of basketball and enjoy it."

"My mom always said that I was going to be a coach. And my dad was like, 'It's stupid for you NOT to be a coach.'"

"But I was never pushed one way or the other," she said. "They're really excited that I'm trying it and liking it. I wouldn't be surprised if you see them around the Kohawk games now."

Coe Coach Randi Henderson has known Paige since her high school days at Marion and invited her to join the Kohawks this season. Paige gladly accepted and has jumped right in.

"It's been great so far," she said. "I was excited to get my feet wet in coaching. I'm looking forward to learning. When you have kids who come to practice willing to work, it makes

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everything so much easier.

"It's really fun to have this as a highlight of my day. That's what I look forward to."

Paige has not given up her dream of playing pro basketball. She has an agent and if the right offer comes along this winter, she'll pack her bags and head overseas. Henderson knows Paige could leave before Coe's season is over, but Henderson is happy to have her on the staff for as long as possible.

Henderson said Paige relates very well with the players, who are just a few years younger than their new assistant coach. The Kohawks have a young team, with 13 freshmen and sophomores, so Paige has a chance to help mold young players at an early stage of their careers.

"I'm getting experience, regardless of what my next step is," said Paige. "I'm glad I got the opportunity so early. I knew I wanted to try it, I knew I wanted to get into coaching."

Paige works part-time at Coe. She's also working as a substitute teacher, certified for grades 6 through 12, teaching a variety of subjects. "I try to steer clear of math," she said with a smile. "Everything other than that."

Paige played for her mother at Marion High School and then left for the University of Wisconsin. The Badgers changed coaches after her freshman year and her teams did not have great success, but she greatly enjoyed the experience.

"I wouldn't go back and change anything," she said. "I had a great experience. I got to play a lot. I got to learn a lot about myself."

"I feel like I grew up so much as a player and as a person at Wisconsin. I'm prepared for the next step of whatever it is I'm doing."

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Paige is living at home with her parents and naturally they watch all of North Carolina's games on TV to watch Marcus as much as possible. They plan to attend Iowa's game at North Carolina in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge and also plan to watch the Tar Heels play in an event in Chicago this season.

Marcus Paige, a junior, was named a preseason All-American this year and is a possible first round NBA draft pick.

"He's doing OK," his sister said with obvious pride. "For him to blow up on such a national level, it's been crazy to watch."

Morgan gave Marcus a few pointers along the way as he developed as a player, including some nifty baseline drives. "He drives to the basket because he saw me drive to the basket," she said, "so I'll take credit for that."

As it turns out, she's been a coach all along.

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