

Jans named coach at Bowling Green

Written by Jim Ecker

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Chris Jans is living proof that the Kirkwood slogan of "Start Here, Go Anywhere" applies to its former coaches as well.

Jans led the Kirkwood Community College men's basketball team to a national title in 1999, just three years after inheriting a club that went 11-20. Most recently, he helped Wichita State reach the Final Four of the NCAA Tournament in 2013 and win 35 straight games this year before losing to Kentucky in the NCAA tournament this past weekend.

Now Jans is leaving his post as the associate head coach at Wichita State to become the head coach at Bowling Green, his 10th stop on a successful career, but his first job as a head coach at the NCAA Division I level.

"That is a pretty neat deal," Kirkwood athletic director Doug Wagemester said Monday night. "A well-deserved deal, if I may add."

Wagemester and Jans are good friends. They played basketball together at Loras College and served as the best man at each other's wedding. They've never coached together, but Wagemester succeeded Jans as the head coach at Kirkwood before stepping aside last season.

Wagemester knew all along that he wanted to get into coaching, but Jans had other ideas for his career.

"I tried to talk him into following me into coaching, but he had his mind set on Wall Street. He was going to make the big money," Wagemester said. "I think his first full-time job was being the

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manager at a Sherwin-Williams paint store in Mason City and that didn't suit him."

Jans got into coaching as an assistant at Elmhurst College in 1992, the start of a long and winding road for the product of Wapsie Valley High School. He worked at Grand View, Kirkwood, Idaho, Independence (Kan.), Howard (Texas), Chipola (Fla.), Illinois State and Wichita State before landing the job at Bowling Green this past weekend.

"Chris' road has probably been one of the longest, hardest roads anybody can take to get to a Division I position," said Wagemester. "He is as hard a worker as I've ever been around and a smarter worker.

"He is in the business of getting things done and finding a way to get things done. Ultra-competitive and doesn't like to be told no. He's going to find a way. It's nice to know that can pay off, regardless of who you are and where you come from."

Wagemester stepped aside from coaching after the 2012-13 campaign at Kirkwood to focus on serving as the school's athletic director and to spend more time with his young family. He did not rule out the possibility of joining Jans at Bowling Green if invited, however. They spoke Monday, but not about Wagemester moving to Bowling Green.

"That would be a question for him," said Wagemester. "I would say this: The coaching thing is in my blood. The itch is always there. I would say the temptation to be able to coach at that level ... that will always be there. There are just a lot of neat things that can come of that.

"If he feels like we can help him over there, I'm sure he'll reach out and we'll have that discussion and we'll have a decision to make. But as of right now we haven't talked along those lines."

Bryan Petersen served as Kirkwood's interim head coach this past season while Wagemester took a year off from coaching. Kirkwood has not announced who will run the show next season, although an announcement could come later this week.

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In the meantime, Wagemester is happy that his good buddy is finally getting a chance to coach at the Division I level. "We're proud of him," he said.