

Petersen created fond memories at Kirkwood

Written by Jim Ecker
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Bryan Petersen did not go hunting for a new job after leading the Kirkwood Eagles to their second NJCAA Division II national title in four years this past season.

As it turned out, an attractive new job found him.

Petersen, 32, has left the Kirkwood men's basketball program to become an assistant coach at South Dakota State, an NCAA Division I program that competes in the Summit Conference. Tim Sandquist, who led Rock Valley College to the championship game of the NJCAA DIII tournament this year, was hired last week as Kirkwood's new coach.

Petersen compiled a 157-38 record in six years at Kirkwood with national titles in 2016 and 2019. And although he was not looking for a new job, he was receptive when new South Dakota State Coach Eric Henderson offered him a spot with the Jackrabbits.

Henderson and Petersen have known each other for 10 years. Henderson worked with the Iowa State men's basketball program when Petersen played for the Cyclones as a junior and senior, and they communicated quite a bit the last two years when Henderson helped recruit Kirkwood All-American Doug Wilson to South Dakota State.

When Henderson became the head coach at South Dakota State this spring, he called Petersen and popped the question. "If I was going to leave Kirkwood, there were only a few places where I felt comfortable," he said. "This was one of them."

Petersen did not accept right away, but quickly became intrigued by the possibility of coaching at the NCAA Division I level.

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"It took a little bit of prying," he said. "You know my love for Kirkwood and how I felt about that place. It was a really tough decision.

"I had an excellent situation at Kirkwood. It was a tough decision, but I felt the timing was right."

Petersen was an All-American point guard at Kirkwood before moving to Iowa State. He returned to Kirkwood as an assistant coach, then became the head coach at age 25 when Doug Wagemester stepped aside to become the school's full-time athletic director.

Petersen thanks Wagemester for giving him a chance to become a head coach and for his guidance along the way.

"When I took over at Kirkwood, I thought it was the greatest job in the world," he said. "It still is an awesome job. I loved my time as being the head coach and the leader of the program."

South Dakota State began summer workouts this week, looking to replace four starters for next year's team. Wilson, a talented 6-foot-7 forward, is squarely in the picture after being named the Junior College Player of the Year.

"We're expecting quite a bit from Doug being an impact player right away," said Petersen.

Petersen's wife, Renae, is scheduled to join him in Brookings, S.D. this week. Renae has been working for Transamerica in Cedar Rapids as an accountant, and the company has allowed her to keep her job and work from home in South Dakota.

Now the Petersens are beginning a new chapter in their lives.

"It was a great six years," he said.