Change in Leadership for Men’s Basketball

Just days after men’s basketball coach Dan Lebovitz announced his resignation, Director of Athletics Patricia H. Meiser named John Gallagher as the 10th coach in the history of the University of Hartford men’s basketball program. Gallagher will make his return to the Hartford sidelines after spending two seasons as the Hawks’ associate head coach from 2006 to 2008. He spent the past two seasons on head coach Glen Miller’s staff at the University of Pennsylvania.

“John Gallagher has someone whose passion for the game is unparalleled and someone who has devoted his life to the sport of basketball,” says Meiser. “He brings a high energy level, tireless work ethic, and a set of values we believe our players will emulate.”

“I am ecstatic to be back in Hartford,” Gallagher says. “I can’t wait to get started. The Hartford community means a lot to me, and I cannot wait to embrace this challenge.”

In Gallagher’s two seasons at Hartford, the Hawks compiled a 31-34 mark, including a Division I record 18 wins in 2007-08. That season, the Hawks went on to finish second in the America East regular season and made the program’s first trip to the America East Championship game.

Gallagher spent his two seasons in Hartford implementing a new motion offense for the Hawks. The result was a scoring average of 62.1 points per game in his first year and 70.8 points per game in his second year, both of which led to double-figure wins in each season. Hartford’s perimeter offense also accounted for a school-record 206 three-pointers in his first season and 312 in his second season, which set an America East Conference record.

“I am delighted we have been able to attract John back to the University,” says University President Walter Harrison. “I never would have predicted this turn of events, but all’s well that ends well. I am looking forward to great success for Hartford men’s basketball under John’s leadership.”

Prior to his first stint at Hartford, Gallagher was the top assistant for Fran O’Hanlon’s staff at Lafayette College, where he was the program’s top recruiter and developed the team’s guards. Gallagher arrived at Lafayette by way of La Salle University, where he coached five seasons, two of which came under Big 5 legend Speedy Morris and the final three under Billy Hahn. He jumped right into coaching upon graduating from Saint Joseph’s University in 1999.

Gallagher and his wife, Geneva, welcomed their first daughter, Kenna, in November 2008.
It Was a Basketball Bonanza!

The University of Hartford hosted the first-ever combined men's and women's America East basketball championship March 4–7, presented by Newman's Own. Thousands of fans from Baltimore, Md., to Bangor, Maine, traveled to the University campus to support their respective universities and watch basketball, basketball, and more basketball.

The excitement of the four days was evident throughout the University and captured beautifully by Zach Wallens '10, sports editor of the UofH student newspaper, The Informer.

For four days I wrote, blogged, interviewed, ate, and by the final buzzer each night, practically slept at the University of Hartford Sports Center during the America East tournament. Four days, 17 teams, 13 games—I saw it all. As fast as the thousands of fans, hundreds of student-athletes, and momentary Fan Fest tents came in, like magic, they disappeared.

The America East tournament occupied Hartford for just over 72 hours, but its enduring effect on the University and the conference could take years to comprehend. However, one thing is for sure: this weekend marked possibly the most important and most successful sporting event in the University's history.

Being at Chase Family Arena for 12 hours per day was simply amazing to witness the amount of work the America East and the University put into transforming the Sports Center into a fan-and-media-friendly environment. The Fan Fest behind the arena was constantly packed. The media room, which occupied the usual cardio room and multipurpose courts, was perfect. But it wasn't the rare accommodations that made this weekend special. It was the athletes and packed fan buses.

The America East men's and women's tournament was part of a basketball bonanza in Hartford that first week in March. Just minutes away, the Big East Conference hosted its 16-team women's tournament downtown at the XL Center. The Hartford Courant opined that the tournaments were an economic boon to the city, taking a total of 4,500 hotel room nights and adding nearly $4 million in economic impact.

A Year of Many Firsts for Women's Basketball

A program that has been making a tradition of reaching new heights savoried a plethora of firsts this past season.

Finishing with a 27-5 record, the women's basketball program received its first at-large bid to women's basketball's biggest showcase, the NCAA Tournament. The Hawks also made their inaugural appearance in the national rankings this past season, reaching as high as number 19 in the ESPN/USA Today Poll on March 8.

Hartford soared through the America East Conference regular season unblemished, finishing with a perfect 16-0 mark, another program first. Its 20-game winning streak during the season shattered the previous high of 15 consecutive victories.

Individually, fifth-year senior Erica Beverly became the first player in school history to record 1,000 or more career points and rebounds. Classmate Diana Delva finished the season second in the country in field-goal percentage, making 64.7 percent of her shots. This represents the first time that a Hartford player has finished that high nationally in a major statistical category. To add icing to the cake, the Hawks as a team allowed opponents only 50.4 points a game, which was third-best in America, again previously unchartered territory.

Unfortunately, in a season of firsts, it was a second occurrence that halted the Hawks' record-setting momentum. When Beverly went down with a knee injury one game shy of the America East Championship game, it was the second time such a misfortune cut short one of her seasons. It also jolted the Hawks, who, after playing 30 games with her, lost the final two without her, the America East Championship game and an NCAA Tournament first-round matchup with Louisiana State University.

With six-straight postseason appearances and the same number of consecutive 20-win seasons, Hartford women's basketball has clearly become recognized on the national landscape. So, too, has its head coach, Jennifer Rizzotti has been selected by the USA Basketball Women's Junior National Team Committee to lead the 2010 USA Women's U18 National Team this summer at the FIBA Americas U18 Championship, June 23–27, at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo.