

Coach: Stringer led Iowa to 269 wins

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does it," Grant said.

That sums up Vivian Stringer the woman.

She grew up in Edenborn, Penn., and attended Slippery Rock State College. She took her first college head coaching job at Cheyney State in 1971 and in 1982 took the team, with close to nothing for resources, to the NCAA championship game.

It was there where she began her reputation as an intense competitor on the court, and a caring person with a sense of humor off it.

In 1983 she decided to look for other challenges, and Iowa, at the time, presented that challenge.

After two seasons of building the Hawkeyes with her own style of intense defense and full-court presses, Stringer had them in the tournament in 1986 with a 20-8 mark. They went to the tournament nine straight seasons after that and in 1993, they reached Stringer's final goal with a trip to the Final Four.

Those people who were laughing at her first press conference were now laughing with joy at Iowa's success.

"She was a wonderful coach," Grant said. "We enjoyed just a tremendous 10-year period."

In her 13 years at Iowa, Stringer won 269 games against just 84 losses.

The ride was fun while it lasted, but after the 1994-95 season, Stringer said she needed a change.

Her daughter Janine had spinal meningitis as a child and was misdiagnosed as having the flu. She was left handicapped because of it. And when Stringer's husband and confidant Bill passed away, life in Iowa City became too much.

"I left Iowa for personal reasons," Stringer said. "None of

those were professional. I loved my team. It was never about the players or the administration. I have a deep love and affection for Iowa.

"I lost my husband and it sort of became a sad place for me. I needed to get away. I thought of my life as a single mom, and I wanted to do more."

Grant said Bill Stringer's death led Vivian Stringer to put more time into the things she still had.

"When Bill died, I think Vivian thought the only way she could survive was to throw herself into two areas: one was her children and the other was the basketball program," Grant said. "Bill Stringer was an exceptional human being. To lose him was like losing a part of herself."

"I don't know if you can understand the determination it took to her to get through that tremendously bad period of time."

Despite her heartache, some people were wondering if there were differences within the program that pushed Stringer to leave a team that did nothing but win for 13 seasons.

"It was a personal decision," Stringer said. "People don't seem to accept that's what happened, but it really was. I think if you've ever lost a loved one you would know. You just need a change of environment, that's all."

Wanting a change of environment turned into another challenge for Stringer.

After falling into a short down period in women's basketball, Rutgers officials were looking for someone to take them back to the promised land.

For Rutgers athletic director Frederick Gruninger, Stringer was the one person he wanted to lead the Scarlet Knights back to the NCAA Tournament and the top of the Big East, and he offered her what he called the best financial

package in the country.

"I've always admired Rutgers and thought that it had always been the jewel of the East," Stringer said. "I was coming back home where I started basketball a long time ago and where I still had a lot of family, where I could still be comfortable."

So in true Vivian Stringer style, she accepted the new challenge.

"I hadn't looked at the team," she said. "I hadn't looked at one bit of footage when I accepted this position."

Three years later, Rutgers is quickly becoming the jewel of the East, as Stringer said.

"I thought when she came into the league they would be at the top of the league — and they are. And they did it faster than I thought they would," said Harry Perretta, head coach at Villanova.

While the Scarlet Knights are back in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1994, success hasn't come as quickly for Stringer as it did at Iowa.

They finished below .500 in her first two seasons there and won 11 games last season.

"I hadn't been used to criticism, and I began to doubt, a lot of people doubted," Stringer said. "I hadn't dealt with that before. The losses themselves were very taxing. Then after a few losses it began the doubt."

In her third season, Stringer has the Scarlet Knights back in the NCAA Tournament and has led them to the Big East championship game where they lost to No. 3 Connecticut.

With a 15-5 conference record this season and a 20-9 overall mark, Stringer has quickly made an impression with a new team in a new conference.

Who knows what those people laughing at her in Iowa are thinking now.

SPORTS BRIEFS

Six named to Pac-10 all-academic squad

Six Oregon basketball players, five women and one man, were named to the Pacific-10 Conference all-academic squad on Wednesday.

Both Natasha O'Brien and A.D. Smith earned first team honors. Smith has a 3.5 GPA in business administration, while O'Brien maintains a 3.72

in the same major.

Mendy Benson was named to the second team for her 3.53 average in Japanese and international studies, while Sonja Curtis, Kristen McKnight and Nicole Strange were awarded honorable mentions.

Eligibility for the award required a 3.0 minimum and a "significant contribution" to the team on the court.

Women's game will be televised on KVAL

The Oregon women's basketball game against Rutgers at 1 p.m. PST on Saturday will be televised live on KVAL (TCI Channel 8).

The game from Ames, Iowa, can also be seen live on Channel 32 in Portland. Saturday's game will also be broadcast on KUGN 590 AM.

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