The Catholic University of America Magazine

LOV E O F FOR G A M E THE UNIVERSITY

Sean Sullivan, CUAs athletic director, understands what a rewarding experience it is for alumni coaches to return to their alma mater.

"As a former Division III student-athlete myself, I had the honor of returning to the University of California-Santa Cruz as a head coach following completion of my degree. There is a great sense of pride, passion, and responsibility that you feel when suddenly you win over: your former team mates. All these memories and emotions combined with an intimate knowledge of how we are supposed to play the game at Catholic, let alone a newfound level of leadership maturity, make for a great coaching experience for our alumni."

Tracy Scanlon, B.A. 2012, a graduate assistant for the women's field hockey team and a student in the master's in business analysis program in the School of Business and Economics, faced her own fears about coaching former teammates.

"I wondered if they would say, "There's no way Tracey's going to coach me, I just played with her," she recalls. "When our head coach told them, so many people had this look of excitement and happiness. I realized then I made the right decision."

Scanlon has had success in her two seasons as assistant coaching the field hockey team. During the fall 2013 season, the team won their third consecutive Landmark Conference championship and advanced to the Elite Eight round of the NCAA Tournament for the first time in the program's history.

For Scanlon, there's a different satisfaction in winning as a coach than as a player. "When you reach your goals and succeed (as a coach), it's rewarding because you get to see the happiness of others."

After baseball player Bobby Picardo, B.A. 2009, graduated from CU A, he went back home to New Jersey to work for the Trenton Thunder, a Minor League Baseball team affiliated with the New York Yankees. His work on the team's sales and marketing was a great opportunity, but he missed being in the dugout.

In July 2012, he returned to Catholic University to work in the athletics department as coordinator of athletic services and to coach. He's currently an associate head baseball coach and will enter the master's in management program in summer 2014.

Picardo had to adjust to working alongside his head coach, Ross Natoli, as a colleague rather than a player. He describes Natoli as "the second most important male figure in my life," after his own father.

Picardo puts in long hours. During the baseball season, he works 10 to 12 hours a day between his job, classes, and coaching. But that doesn't faze him. The most difficult part for him is learning to deal with outcomes that can't be controlled.

"You spend all this time preparing, putting together a lineup, and working with kids in study hall. You want everything to go right. But you have to understand in this game that you fail seven out of 10 times, and yet you're the best hitter in the game. You might make all these plans and then someone gets hurt or a call doesn't go our way. You have to get used to that as a coach."

Still, coaching has its rewards. Picardo recalls one of his players started last year in a hitting slump. After returning from a road trip, the player asked Picardo if he could come in with him on his day off to get some batting practice in.

"He wanted to clear his head," Picardo explains. "We didn't find a flaw in his swing so we just went back to the basics of hitting."

The next game, the team traveled to highly ranked Johns Hopkins.

"In his first at bat, this player got a hit and got to first base. He turned to me and said 'Thank you.' That right there is why I love coaching. I've had great coaches who had a positive impact on me and I want to pay that forward. It's great to coach at my alma mater. How could you not want to be a part of this?"

— L.C.

Field Hockey Team Makes History

For the first time in program history, Catholic University’s field hockey team advanced to the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament last November. The tournament appearance capped off a strong season for the Cardinals. The team won their third consecutive Landmark Conference championship and finished with a record of 15-6. Five players were named All-Landmark student-athletes, three were named All-Region National Field Hockey Coaches Association (NFHCA) student-athletes, and two were named All-Americans. The team finished the season ranked 17th by the NFHCA and fifth in the NCAA South Atlantic Region.