

Monmouth Memories

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Interviewee: Coach Joe Compagni

Interviewer/Transcriber: Eric Kahana, Monmouth University Student

Coach Joe Compagni was born and raised in Cortland, New York in 1964. Early on in Joe Compagni's life he went to elementary, middle, and high school in Cortland, New York. After graduating from Cortland High School, Joe pursued his college life at the University of Delaware for his undergraduate years, then went back up to his home town of Cortland and attended Cornell University for his graduate years.

When Joe arrived at the University of Delaware he wanted to get involved in sports somehow. So he started his college year studying to major in Mathematics. However, Joe stated that this major "didn't last very long." After which Joe stated, "I wandered around like most people do. By the end of my sophomore year I was a communication major and that is what I stayed with." Joe continued pursuing communications for the rest of his time at Delaware, and later at Cornell. But, this did not bring him into coaching. He worked for a year while an undergraduate and another year as a graduate student. Since he was an athlete Joe was still running and coaching some people here and there.

He began formally coaching in Pennsylvania at the University of California, a Division II school, for his official coaching. Though track and field would become "his" sport, it was not the sport that Joe was initially keen to- while at Cortland middle school and high school, Joe played basketball up until the tenth grade. In his town there were winter and summer league teams, and Joe was the guy that got them organized, essentially becoming a player/coach for the team. He likes to think that this early exposure to basketball was considered a coaching position, though the people that he "coached" was people from his town, mostly his friends.

Monmouth Memories

Before arriving at Monmouth University Coach Joe had coached at the University of California in Pennsylvania for four years. This was only a part time coaching position, however, and Joe states that “I really wanted to coach full time. Monmouth was expanding their school, and expanding their program and decided to hire a full time coach. I was fortunate to be the guy they selected.” Although Coach Joe interviewed at some other places, MU turned out to be “a great fit.” At Monmouth, Coach Joe became the first full time coach at Monmouth, becoming the head cross-country and track and field coach.

When asked whether Coach Joe had ever heard of Monmouth University, he said that “I didn’t.” But, before the University was properly dubbed a University, Coach Joe stated that “I remember when I ran at Delaware I remember that we had ran against what was then Monmouth College.” He recalled that the school made a great first impression on him when he first arrived here. He admired the area and the campus, and noted that students and professors were “positive” about Monmouth.

The campus, over the past twenty years that Coach Joe has been here, has improved dramatically both visually by adding more buildings, but also academically. Rebecca Stafford was the President at Monmouth when Coach Joe first arrived (which is why the Stafford Center is named the way that it is). Since Coach Joe has been here he has been able to see three Monmouth Presidents: Rebecca Stafford, Paul Gaffney, and the President during the time of writing this paper, Paul Brown.

When Coach Joe first arrived at Monmouth, he had a team of about fifteen men and fifteen women. Before taking over as head coach, Doctor Greg Burdick was both the Cross Country and Track and Field Coach at Monmouth University, and his women’s cross country team won two NEC conference championships in the years of 1990 – 1991. These

Monmouth Memories

championships were won several years before Coach Joe arrived in 1995. To expand the Monmouth Track team, Coach Joe needed to do a lot of recruiting, and to make a series commitment for track. They also needed uniforms to give to those athletes that they were going to recruit. In addition, Coach Joe needed some assistant coaches. One of the coaches that was with Coach Joe the first seven years here at Monmouth was Coach Mark Al Dankar, who covered the throws and the jumps. Since Coach Joe took over the Monmouth Track and Field team in 1995, the facilities have also drastically improved. All of this has helped propel the Monmouth Track and Field Team to what it is today.

The Monmouth jerseys back in the day were royal blue, as oppose to the navy blue used on the track and field jersey today. The change to navy blue from royal blue happened somewhere around ten years ago, though Coach Joe himself could not pin point the exact date that this happened. In addition, the mascot of Monmouth, though always a hawk, has changed three times in Coach Joe's time here at Monmouth. Coach Joe thinks that the mascot has gotten "better over time," helping solidify Monmouth's sense of identity and evolving as does the school itself (along with the athletics).

Going back to the jerseys: when Coach Joe arrived here, the largest event group was the sprinters, who pleaded with Coach Joe to get them speed suits, as opposed to the basic running shorts and a singlet. The second year, Coach Joe got them speed suits (though they went back to the traditional look shortly after).

Since the interview was conducted in the Athletics building here at Monmouth, there was some further insight in the history of the Athletics building. Coach Joe replied to this question by saying "This building was here, but it was not the Athletic department, this building was the School for Children." When Coach Joe first arrived here his offices where in one of two trailers,

Monmouth Memories

noting, “my first seven years here were in a trailer.” The Athletics Department was move to the School of Children thirteen years ago, and the MAC was built seven years ago.

The recruiting has for the most part relatively stayed the same, although they have branched out somewhat to places such as Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and even Canada. Compared to the athletes that came early in Coach Joe’s recruiting days the expectations have been raised a bit, as the athletes have dramatically improved over the last twenty years. Since Coach Joe has arrived here he has been able to have over sixteen All-Americans in total- ten of them in the last four years.

Coach Joe’s fondest memory was the first time that the Monmouth Track and Field Team won the NEC Conference Championship in 1998 during the Outdoor season. Ever since then, Coach Joe has been able to win over forty Track and Field Championships.

Coach Joe has had a lot of experiences here at Monmouth since his arrival in 1995. Ever since winning his first NEC Outdoor Championship in 1998, he has been able to win over forty conference championships, and recently has been able to leave his mark in the MAAC conference by winning the first two years on both the men’s and women’s sides and both indoor and outdoor championships.