Imagine running a business – and doing so with steady, consistent success – over a 12-year span. Now, imagine doing so knowing that your entire workforce will turn over every two years – and half of it every year.

Such a record seems unlikely, if not impossible in most circumstances – but it’s exactly what head coach Todd Franklin has done during his tenure as head men’s basketball coach at Southeastern Illinois College.

The Falcons topped John A. Logan 85-76 on Saturday, January 31 in Carthage, behind 32 points from Austin Hill, 14 each from Mamadou Seck and Troy Long, and 13 from Monie Hudson. The win over Logan was SIC’s 19th of the season, without a loss. They currently stand second in the NJCAA national rankings, just points in the polls behind one-loss Chipola (Florida).

With the win, Franklin reached 300 wins in the middle of his 12th season at SIC.

“It’s not so much for me as it is for the guys, and all the great players who have come before them,” Franklin said. “I’ve just been along for the ride.”

“Looking back, it’s been a pretty good run,” Franklin noted. “If you’d asked me when I started here if I’d be sitting here 12 years later with 300 wins behind me, I don’t know if I’d have said it was possible… it sounds a little over-the-top. And it makes you feel a little old; you’re always preparing for the next game, the next season, you don’t have time to sit back and think about it, and then all of a sudden you’re like, ‘When did all that happen? How do I have that many ex-players on my speed dial?’

Twelve years allows a coach time to make a particular impact, impose a personality and a strategic philosophy on a basketball program. Franklin notes that it’s a constant challenge to assimilate and mold.

“You definitely recruit people that will fit into your system, but no matter who you get, how they’ve been taught, they don’t know the system that we play here,” Franklin said. “It’s always a new team. Even if you return five or six sophomores, you’ve got an equal number of freshmen coming in that have to learn to fill new roles. And unlike four year schools, where you can just sit people their freshman year until they ‘get it’, we don’t have that luxury. It’s teaching, teaching and more teaching.”

Franklin’s style stresses aggression and good conditioning in order to play the kind of intense, man-to-man defense that is the signature of his team’s competitiveness. That dedication, the drive to play with maximum effort and play smart, is the balance that Franklin spends each year trying to drill into his charges.

“We try to stress knowing your role, saying to kids, ‘Here’s your job, go out, do that, cut it loose and just play. The only pressure you have is to play hard and smart and those are both entirely within your control. When our people learn that, and learn I really do mean it, it gives them freedom to succeed,’” Franklin noted.

Hill took over Saturday’s game, taking the ball hard to the basket repeatedly, and hitting 15 of 19 foul shots. But overall, balance is typical with the Falcons. If you’re suited up, you should be ready to play at a moment’s notice. If you’re open – and within your role – you should be ready to shoot. Seven Falcons scored in the first half of Saturday’s game alone, and having three or four players in double figures is a fairly regular occurrence. Last year, seven Falcons averaged more than 8 points per game – but none over 14.

Glory has come to many Falcon individuals after leaving the school, with the most famous probably being Donata Smith, who went straight to the NBA out of SIC a few years back, but that’s not what has gotten the Falcon program to the sustained level of excellence that they have achieved under Franklin.

“We try to be unselfish, but we’ve never had a problem with guys worrying about their stats. I tell them, ‘I almost never have a coach or recruiter ask me what my players’ averages are,’” Franklin said, adding. “When Donata was here, he averaged about 25 points a game, and we had eight other guys averaging right around eight a night. Tim Barnes averaged 20 and about 9 assists. We’ll adapt when we have special talents and special abilities, but I think our best teams have been when we’ve had a multitude of players handling multiple responsibilities and positions.”

The school’s current #2 national ranking ties for SIC’s highest mark ever. The team has made three trips in the last six seasons to the national tournament in Hutchinson, Kansas, and that’s an obvious goal at the start of the year for such a program. But a tough Great Rivers Athletic Conference schedule can quickly shoot down any hopes not backed up by effort.

“We could lose just about any conference game and not have to play too poorly to do it. But we go out every night feeling like we should win every game we play. And we make it a goal not so much the number of wins, but to do something to put up a banner – win a conference, win a regional title, go to nationals,” Franklin said.

With all the wins, Franklin said the best parts of his job are truly personal. Former players have stayed connected to the program. Last year, when former Falcons Damion Staple and LaMar Owen were inducted into the school’s Hall of Fame, virtually every former teammate of the two returned to Harrisburg from across the country to celebrate with them – and those that weren’t were in constant phone contact all weekend, their coach noted.

Franklin said, “Being in the battle with them and knowing it’s worthwhile to be in it with those guys is what it’s all about. These two years determine a lot for these guys. We’ve had great kids throughout. We’ve had kids whose high school guidance counselors said they were good kids, but that they might struggle with grades – and they’ve graduated on time from here and from a four-year school after they were here. And they’re doing so much better than they would have without that chance.

“That’s what’s great about this situation – to be able to help kids take advantage of opportunities. We know a lot more kids are out there who need chances than what we’re able to give,” Franklin continued. “And we don’t want to waste the chances we do have to give.”

With win over Logan, Franklin reaches 300 wins at SIC