Southeastern Welcomes New Coaches for 2010-2011 Seasons

The Southeastern Illinois College men’s basketball team has a new leader. During Tuesday’s Board of Trustees meeting, the board approved the hiring of Justin LaReau to head the program.

LaReau comes to Southeastern from the University of South Alabama in Mobile, where he worked as an assistant to head coach Ronnie Arrow, who himself won three NJCAA national championships in the 1980s at San Jacinto (TX) College.

LaReau fills the position left open by Todd Franklin, who resigned his post at SIC on August 22 to take the head coaching job at Vincennes University.

“What’s great is that the tradition is here,” LaReau said. “In terms of recruiting, that’s an asset in going out and getting the players to build a team that can chase a national championship. Coach Franklin and all of SIC’s past coaches have established that tradition, and that was truly attractive to me as I looked into this position.”

Southeastern suffered some losses in player personnel after Franklin’s departure, and though new players were brought in to fill in, the Falcons will be a bit undersized.

But LaReau said it was his job to make sure they wouldn’t be outworked, on or off the floor. He got a head start on that front by working with the team all last week.

“My number one priority right now is to evaluate where we are from a personnel and talent standpoint, to develop relationships, understand each other, all while maintaining the discipline we expect in our program,” LaReau said, “and to set the tone that education is the most important part.”

“We’re not real big, but I can tell you that we will defend extremely well,” LaReau noted. “We go from a tallest player of 6-6, to all the rest of our roster at 6-4 and under. That’s a hurdle, but it’s something we’ll be able to overcome by playing hard, understanding the rules of our defensive scheme, and causing mismatches on offense, where we can take advantage of our quickness and athleticism.”

Though LaReau comes directly from South Alabama, he’s an Illinoisan by birth and had only been at the Mobile school for a year. He’d previously spent the first 31 years of his life in Illinois.

Prior to last year, LaReau’s last coaching gig was at Kankakee Community College, where he was the first assistant men’s coach. He was involved in scouting, fundraising, game planning, on-court instruction, strength and conditioning, and especially recruiting. The two classes he recruited at Kankakee compiled a record of 54-12.

Before his time at Kankakee, LaReau was a successful high school coach at Donovan Community High School, a small school southeast of Kankakee, where he was a head coach and athletic director. His teams set eight school records in four years, including two top eight finishes in the state, and a 27-win campaign.

Prior to his time at Donovan, LaReau was an assistant at his alma mater, Watseka High School, for four years.

“It’s a bit of a unique situation, coming in this time of year, with the loss of some key players,” LaReau said. “It becomes somewhat of a rebuild and reload season for us…but we’re going to work as hard as we can, we’ve got a great group of kids and they’ve been listening and picking things up well. We’ll take it step-by-step and move forward from here.”

After 33 years of teaching and coaching, and building quite a legacy at Vienna High School, Ross Hill is finally getting a first chance at his initial dream – coaching college softball.

Hill has been hired as the new head coach of the Southeastern Illinois College softball team.

After graduating from high school in Vienna, Hill attended Greenville College. Upon receiving his degree, that ideal coaching dream ran up against reality.

“I always wanted to coach at the college level, but after graduation, I had an opportunity to go back home and teach, and most college coaching jobs paid less than teaching, so I knew I’d have to wait,” Hill said. “I’m thankful that SIC has given me this opportunity.”

The interlude between college graduation and a college job was highly fruitful for Hill, though. He spent his first 12 years at Vienna coaching junior high baseball and basketball, before taking over the high school girls’ basketball and softball programs in 1989.

Hill coached Vienna girls’ basketball for 19 years, and the boys’ program for the past two years, racking up 377 wins on the hardcourt. However, he found even greater success on the diamond. He coached softball for 20 of the past 21 years – stepping away only for a year to watch his daughter play in college. Hill and his wife, Cherie, have two adult children – son Ryan, and daughter Caryn.

In those 20 seasons at the helm of the Lady Eagles’ softball squad, Hill amassed a record of 630 wins against just 193 losses.

“I was really blessed during my time at Vienna,” Hill said. “I had tons of talent, often surpassing what you’d expect to find at a small high school.”

As the coach with over 1,000 combined coaching victories moves up the road to Southeastern, he feels that the talent level he’s seen in the region provides hope for a bright future for the Lady Falcons on the softball diamond.

“I look at (the program) as a gold mine of potential,” Hill said. “It’s been down in recent years, but that leaves nowhere to go but up. Southeastern is in the middle of a hotbed of softball talent. If we can get the best players from schools within SIC’s district, and pull a few more from throughout the deep south, I think we’ll be very competitive.”