

Amy Williams named new USD women's BB coach

By James D. Cimburek
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In her previous job, Amy Williams literally built a national-caliber women's basketball program from scratch. In her new job, she'll have a lot more to work with.

Williams, a Spearfish native and former University of Nebraska standout, will be the seventh head coach in the history of the University of South Dakota, announced Monday at a press conference at the Muenster University Center on the USD campus.

Williams, the former Amy Gusso, replaces Ryun Williams, who left in May to become the head women's basketball coach at Colorado State.

In selecting Amy Williams, USD athletic director David Sayler and the selection committee chose an individual they were confident in from the start.

"I knew within 20, 30 minutes that she was really someone I wanted to focus in on a lot more," Sayler said. "She has ties to this area and she knows how to

recruit this area, and that's really what it came down to for me, the bottom line for me."

Her experience includes stops at Texas-San Antonio (2000-01), Oklahoma State (2001-05) and Tulsa (2005-07), serving as recruiting coordinator at both OSU and Tulsa.

"This program needed a coach that knows what Division I kids look like, they've coached them before, all those things," Sayler said. "The head coaching experience, frankly, taking a program from scratch and having four straight winning seasons before coming here and making post-season, that was just icing on the cake for us. You know she has confidence that she can build a program and have expectations for kids."

At NAAI Division I Rogers State, Williams was the first head coach of a program that started playing in the 2007-08 season. Her Hillcats teams posted winning seasons in each of the last four years, and made the NAAI Division I Tournament the past two seasons. RSU made the quarterfinals of the



Amy Williams was introduced in Vermillion as USD's new women's basketball coach. Williams is a Spearfish native who was a four-year letterwinner in basketball at the University of Nebraska. She comes to the school after serving as the first-ever women's basketball coach at Rogers State in Oklahoma, an NAAI school where she built the program into a national title contender in just five years. Pictured on the left is USD Athletic Director David Sayler.

national tournament this past season, finishing 22-12.

"Part of the reason I was drawn to that job is the unique opportunity to build something from scratch and know, if we were able to build something special, it was because of the hard work that we put into it," Williams said. "To be involved with every decision that was made, to get that program to where it is, it just was a unique opportunity. I really value and appreciated that. I think it has really prepared me well for the challenges I am going to face at USD."

Williams inherits a program that is coming off a second straight WNIT appearance. The Coyotes ride back-to-back 20-win seasons into their first year

of NCAA post-season eligibility.

But that is not all that excited the 1998 University of Nebraska graduate about the opportunity.

"It doesn't take much to sense the excitement that's surrounding USD athletics right now," she said. "You can feel that commitment. You can see. I admired from afar just what they've been able to do in such a short time at the Division I level."

Alexis Yackley, one of two returning starters for USD, had a good first impression of her new coach.

"We were asking her the same questions about style of play, style of defense. It sounds kinda like what I like to play, up-tempo, in your face man-to-man

defense," Yackley said. Williams met with the team just one hour before her formal introduction. "We're excited, and I can't wait for it to be October."

Williams' family includes her husband, Lloyd, and daughters Kennadi (age 6) and Bentli (age 2). The chance for her daughters to experience some of what she did growing up in South Dakota was an added bonus for Williams.

"It was such a neat and unique opportunity for me, but this was definitely that something special for us, the opportunity to move my family to home where my parents and my siblings all live, to be within a little closer day's car ride to see grandma and grandpa. Those were all very attractive for me," she said.

(Photo by David Lias)
"I had such a great childhood growing up in the state, and I'm excited that my girls are going to get to spend time here, too."

Williams earned Academic All-Big 12 honors during the 1997-98 season at Nebraska. She was a four-year letterwinner for the Huskers.

Williams has one sibling who is in the coaching ranks in South Dakota, Emilee Thiesse, an assistant coach at South Dakota State. Williams was on the Nebraska-Kearney staff as a graduate assistant during part of Thiesse's career for the Lopers.

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