

sports

Former Columbus Crew assistant coach begins career at AU after leaving Urbana University

DEAN PAOLUCCI
Reporter

Nick Roberts will take the reigns as the new head coach of the Ashland University men's soccer team. The university announced the move earlier in May 2020, when former head coach Oliver Slawson decided to take on the associ-

ate head coaching job at Coastal Carolina University.

Roberts previously was at Urbana University, where he had been head coach since 2008. While at Urbana, Roberts was named the Great Midwest Athletic Conference Coach of the Year in 2012 along with the Mountain East Coach of the Year in 2016.



Photo retrieved from: goashlandeagles.com Roberts pictured above.

Roberts also spent time as an assistant coach and head scout of the Columbus Crew for four years, a professional soccer club.

"[Nick Roberts] is respected throughout the country for what he accomplished at Urbana," Al King, Athletic Director at Ashland University, said on the announcement of Roberts as the new head coach for the Eagles.

"Nick is a thorough teacher, an exceptional communicator and coach who understands X's and O's. As a head coach he's been known as someone who's adept at developing the total student-athlete."

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference suspended all fall sports competition until January 2021, a transition that Roberts found difficult.

"The transition was, as you can imagine, quite a roller coaster," Roberts said. "I was very lucky in the sense that the timing of [getting hired] was right. Like anything, you just kinda roll with it and that's what we have been doing."

Prior to calling plays and making substitutions on the sideline, Roberts was a player on scholarship at Mercyhurst University, another Division II program.

"The Division II area was my background, I played there and I understood it," Roberts said when discussing the background of the coach and moving forward. "It was so exciting to coach a great Division II program and help build up that program. Here I am now at Ashland, which is another very strong Division II institution."

One thing has been vital to the success of Roberts, the relationships with the student athletes. Roberts believes that the relationship with the players is key.

"Like anything in life, it's about relationships," Roberts said. "Here at Ashland, it's gonna be about the relationships with the kids. I take the approach that I want to treat them like adults. Due to my time in the pro-game, I'm not going to micromanage them. For me, it goes beyond the four years. I want them to go on and do great things."

Roberts has experience in getting players to perform at high levels. During the time at Urbana, Roberts coached 40 players who received All-Region honors with four also being named All-Americans.

"It's about the players. It's a player's game and the coaches are there to set the foundation and create the environment," Roberts said. "Those 40 guys were very special

players and we have some special players here, but I can't take all the credit. It comes down to them."

Due to the lack of any fall sports competition until January, Roberts said that this will be a different year for a coach in a new environment.

"Unusually, I am out recruiting and at a lot of high school games right now which is something I never do in the fall because of the season," Roberts said. "There are some advantages to this suspension, but ultimately the kids that came here to Ashland to play soccer want to get out there and play and hopefully we can here soon."

Roberts did say that there was a seven-game spring schedule followed up by the GLIAC Tournament which was proposed to Ashland and other conference schools, however nothing official has been announced by the conference.

Softball team welcomes new assistant coach

JORDANN LOPATA
Sports Editor

New softball assistant coach, Anna Kirk, comes from a long line of experience. First, finishing a college career at Ohio State University in 2017, she always knew she had a passion for the sport and for coaching.

"I'm a female in a sport, but I am also a loving female, and somebody that you can count on, to say 'hey it's doable, you can do it,'" Kirk said. I always knew I wanted to be a coach."

At Ohio State, Kirk was a sports industry major with a minor in human development and family sciences. On the field, she was the starting third baseman and eventually a volunteer assistant coach.

Before starting her freshman year at OSU, Kirk tore her ACL and meniscus her senior year of high school during basketball season and questioned whether or not she would be able to play softball again.

She made the decision to play, after talking to her college coaches and input from her family. Kirk talked about how this experience made her feel more relatable to her players that she coaches now.

"I was in that situation where I didn't even know if I was going to play softball and that's where my heart lied. It's a blessing in disguise," Kirk said. It made me a more positive person, to find the bright side of every situation, I can relate to my athletes a little more."

Last year, Kirk was an assistant coach at D3 Muskingum University and she talked about the

differences between coaching at other levels.

"Going from Ohio State to D3 program was really weird, because I didn't have the scholarships to worry about. To be back working with scholarships is really enjoyable in my aspect to say, 'hey here you go, here's what we can have for you,'" Kirk said.

The competitive nature of being at a D2 school is what Kirk talked about. She is a very competitive person, and she has always been that way.

The decision for her to come to Ashland was easy, she wants to win and be a part of the family that she

said 'yes, please come.' Ashland is a good spot to be."

During her senior year at Ohio State, Kirk was named to the Big Ten all defensive team. Kirk loved the competitive nature, and she compares that to the reputation that the softball team at AU has for her. "Ashland has a good feel to it, it's not big but it's not small. The reputation that exists here I wanted to be a part of it," Kirk said.

Her time spent at Ohio State was well worth it being from Columbus and getting that chance to play and experience the environment that the school has.

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"Ashland has always been on my radar, it's always been a spot in my heart."

- Anna Kirk, Assistant softball coach

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to be able to put on that Scarlet and gray, and play and then to be able to coach, it's amazing," Kirk said.

Kirk knows that Ashland's goal is to win. The goal is to be competitive and dominate in the conference. She knew when Coach Knerem was looking for someone to fill the position that she wanted to be here at AU.

"Ashland has always been on my radar, it's always been a spot in my heart. I am thankful Coach K-

lumbus, so I'm a Buckeye at heart, to be able to put on that Scarlet and gray, and play and then to be able to coach, it's amazing," Kirk said.

Kirk appreciates the fact that AU has a Christian based background. Her ability to coach and be connected through faith is something that is important to her and her family.

With her busy schedule recruiting, and taking care of the offense, Kirk makes it a priority to keep up with her family.

"We have Sunday dinner almost every Sunday, between my parents, my sister and her husband, their two kids, and then me and my finance, we somehow make it work."

"Whether it be at like one



Photo retrieved from: goashlandeagles.com Kirk pictured above.

o'clock on a Sunday or six o'clock on a Sunday. Family is important to all of us."

Kirk wants to build relationships here and be that person that not only her softball players can go to, but for anyone.

She reflected on times that were challenging for her as a coach, but the main goal was to always be someone that her players could count on and go to for anything that they needed.

"To be able to be a rock for these girls, and make sure they know that it is doable. Yes times are going to be hard but we have shoulders for a reason, stack em' on top and let's go," Kirk said.

Kirk is devoted to this team, and has been ready to work at AU for a long time coming.

"I know the coach makes the team feel like a family, which is enjoyable."



Photo retrieved from: goashlandeagles.com Players on AU's softball team pictured above.