

Inspired to Help Others: The Impact of Coach P. and Ravenscroft's Sports Medicine Program

Coach Michelle Piette ("Coach P.") has been an integral part of the Ravenscroft family since 1985 — as she retires from Ravenscroft, we look back at her influence in shaping our second-to-none Athletic Training program.

COACH P. STARTED HER CAREER as the head of the Sports Medicine program at Arizona State University. She loved the interaction she had with the athletic training majors and realized that she was happiest when she was teaching and mentoring students and the athletic teams. She began to envision working with these students on a high school level and at about the same time, she learned that North Carolina would be the first state in the country to require certified athletic training. So, she decided to make the move to North Carolina. Shortly after her move, Piette met Ravenscroft then parent Barbara Goodman, who told her that Ravenscroft didn't have an athletic trainer and could benefit from one. A few phone calls later, and Coach P. found a new home in the Ravenscroft Athletic Department — the place she was obviously meant to be.

In addition to being the athletic trainer, Coach P. wanted to teach similar classes to those she taught while at ASU, including anatomy, physiology and sports medicine. Her goal was to prepare students for college and beyond. "Kids bought into it, they loved being able to learn while they were also out on the fields," she says. "The students I taught were not just athletes either. It was a very popular program and continues to be today."

Piette's duties at Ravenscroft have taken her beyond campus as she served on the North Carolina Independent School Athletic Association Board of Managers for eight years and was also appointed by the Senate Pro-Temp to the N.C. Board of Athletic Trainer Examiners in 2006 where she is currently serving her second term. In January 2010, Piette was named the North Carolina Athletic Trainers' Association Secondary School Athletic Trainer of the Year. She was inducted into the Ravenscroft Sports Hall of Fame in 2006 and has also received Ravenscroft's prestigious Helton Award for Teaching Excellence.

"Most rewarding for me is watching the faces in class when things come together. You can tell when they get it. Or when they walk into class and say 'Coach Piette, over the weekend, there was an emergency while I was playing out on the soccer field. And, I stepped forward and helped out.' It's so rewarding — they are like sponges. You see their confidence build. They are measured. They're still students and have boundaries. But they realize they are gaining in confidence and that's the most rewarding," she says.

Take Maddie Mehr '19, for example. Earlier this spring, Maddie was playing on the softball team when a Cary Academy player was hit in the eye with a flyball. Coach P. and



Tim Savage were at other venues on campus, so Maddie went to the dugout, got ice and the training kit and went to the field as the first responder. "I get notes from kids who've graduated 20, 25 years ago and say they still have those skills that they have never forgotten," says Piette.

Chris Rose '88, who played football for Ravenscroft, was Coach P.'s first student to go on to earn an athletic training degree in college which he earned at Guilford College. Ashley Bratcher '05 started

college in the University of North Carolina athletic trainer program but realized it wasn't her niche. Maintaining a close relationship with Coach P., she felt compelled to admit this fact to Coach P., who in turn, encouraged her to follow her interests. A year later, Bratcher reconsidered and is now a certified trainer.

Just this semester Coach P. had parents come forward to thank her for the experiences their son had experienced in Sports Med class. They said that the class made him look at some of his future academic and career decisions that he had not considered before. "That's what I want to happen. To plant the seed and have them know they've got some basic skills. And if it works out, fabulous," shared Piette.

Tim Savage is taking over the Director of Sports Medicine role next year. "Tim loves mentoring kids as much as I do, and so whether a student chooses specifically to be an athletic trainer or enter another medical or health field, we have had the unique experience to expose them to a wide variety of opportunities. We have students who have gone into nursing, physician, dentistry, physical training — there are a lot of student athletic trainers who simply want to be an athletic trainer as adults."

When Coach P. decided to retire, she never realized her potential replacement might be someone she herself trained, "Over the course of 31 years I have had so many students who have gone into athletic training that I probably could pull off the top of my head a few names and say 'I wish they would apply for this position.' So, when we got Sofia Armstrong's '11 application, I got a big grin on my face."

Armstrong earned her athletic training degree from the University of North Carolina and her Master's

in health education from East Carolina University. She will be assisting Savage as a trainer as well as a health and sports medicine teacher. It has long been a dream of hers to return to her alma mater in the sports medicine department.

"When I was at Carolina, I always dreamed of having her job," Armstrong says. "I respect Coach P. and what she has done at Ravenscroft. I love being on campus Ravenscroft is home — I literally grew up there. It was fate that they were hiring for an assistant the same year I was getting my graduate degree."

"When I think of what Coach P. means to me, it's hard to put into words," Armstrong adds. "She is an icon in Ravens athletics. She is everywhere and knows everyone. Those are big shoes to fill. It's intimidating because I know the impact she has had on everyone, including myself. But I am really excited to get started because I know she is so well-respected and I want to follow in her footsteps. It's reassuring to know I am coming into a well-respected, warm environment."

Hopeful that a former student might return to work in the department, Coach P. shares, "I had hoped that when the job was posted and we shared the job description, that one of the Ravenscroft alumni that had gone into athletic training might just say 'aw that might be fun to go back and actually be an athletic trainer here,'" she says, "and indeed one did!"

"To see the spark in my students, like Sofia, and know that the seed is planted for their future careers, I can't think of a better completion of a 30-year tenure at such a wonderful school," Coach P. says.

And we can't think of a greater legacy of maintaining the health and wellness of Ravenscroft athletes than that of Coach P. *R*



Tim Savage, Coach P. and SOFIA ARMSTRONG '11

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A retirement celebration for Coach P! Pictured: RYAN BARRY '01, NICK RITCHER '11, JOHN RITCHER '01, Dave Monaco, JEREMY BULL '00, Coach P., WILLIE WILKINS '94, Coach Gonet, ANTWAN HARRIS '96, THOMAS DURHAM '97, MARC MURPHY '94, HANES ROBERTS '96