

# Back to the future

Kyle's return to Wildcat bench ties past to present

In about a month, new NMU hockey coach **Walt Kyle '81 BS** will face off against none other than **Rick Comley '73 MA**—his mentor, friend, coach, former boss, and the only other person to hold the same title in the program's 26-year history.

In June, Kyle was selected to fill the position vacated by Comley, who left to become the coach at Michigan State University. The 'Cats and Spartans will open their respective Central Collegiate Hockey Association slates against each other Oct. 18-19 at the Berry Events Center.

"It'll be strange to see Rick across the rink from me, but hey that's hockey," laughed Kyle, who served as Comley's assistant coach from 1982-92. "We're great friends right up until the puck drops and then again when the final buzzer sounds."

For the past two years, Kyle was the assistant coach of the National Hockey League's New York Rangers. His other NHL stint was as assistant, then associate coach of the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim from 1996-98. Since leaving NMU, Kyle has held head coaching jobs in the American, International, and Western Hockey Leagues.

Kyle transferred from Boston College in 1978, joining his brother **Jon Kyle '82 BS** at Northern for the 1979-80 and 1980-81 seasons. He served as a team captain both years, including for the 1980 squad that finished as the runner-up to North Dakota at the NCAA Championship.

After Kyle graduated, he became an NMU graduate assistant in 1981-82 for a year before being elevated to



Then and now—Top left: Walt Kyle from his NMU hockey days. Top right: Kyle today. Bottom (r-l): Kyle with Rick Comley and Morey Gare.

the assistant's position.

Over the past summer Kyle has been busy "learning and relearning

everything about the program and college athletics in general," he said. He has also been working with assistants **Dave Shyiak '93 BS** and Brian Renfrew to finalize details for the upcoming season, and to familiarize himself with both his team as well as the others on this year's schedule.

"It's been hectic, but I'm having fun," he said.

Kyle added that while Wildcat hockey has entered a new coaching era, the goals are familiar: win games and educate players.

"My goals today are the same as when I was here 10 years ago: give our student-athletes an outstanding collegiate experience on the ice, in the classroom, and at the university in general; and compete for and win league and national titles. The hockey program is in a partnership with the university to build good men. We'll impact futures and that's exciting to me," he said.

## New Wildcat club roars into action

In April, two NMU athletic affinity clubs, the Golden Wildcat Club and the Gridiron Club, merged to form the Wildcat Club. The Golden Wildcat Club had supported all Northern men's and women's athletic teams while the Gridiron Club had been the football team booster group.

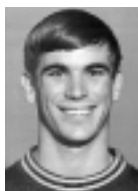
According to NMU Athletic Director Dan Spielmann, membership gifts can still be designated to any of the university's five men's or seven women's programs.

Information about various levels of Wildcat Club membership, member benefits, and membership forms are available on-line at [www.nmu.edu/devfund/affinityclubs.htm](http://www.nmu.edu/devfund/affinityclubs.htm), by calling the Development Fund at 906-227-2627, or by e-mailing [devfund@nmu.edu](mailto:devfund@nmu.edu).

Spielmann said the Blue Line Club wasn't included in the club merger because at the time the hockey coach search had not yet been completed, but that he and Coach Walt Kyle will meet with Blue Line Club governing board members to discuss the matter.

# Six inducted into NMU Sports Hall of Fame

On September 20, five former Wildcat athletes and a long-time NMU sports radio broadcaster were inducted as the 26th class of the Northern Michigan University Sports Hall of Fame. Recently, *Horizons* talked to each of the new Hall members and asked them about their best memory in NMU college athletics:



**James Donnelly '71**  
**BS: Men's Swimming**

**Then:** NMU's first NCAA Division II national runner-up (breaststroke);

NMU's first NCAA two-time All-American swimmer.

**Now:** President of Donnelly Printing in Sarasota, Florida.

"My greatest NMU athletic highlight was finishing second at the NCAA Division II championships in the 200 breast. I was and still am very proud of being NMU's first swimming All-American."



**Mike Berry '78 BS, Football**

**Then:** 1976 Second-Team All-America Defensive Tackle; member of 1975

National Championship team.

**Now:** Teacher, athletic director, golf coach, and former football coach (23 years) at Kettering High School in Waterford, Michigan.

"The highlight of my athletic career at NMU was winning the national championship. I think being a team captain and serving a year as a graduate assistant coach were both very interesting experiences. I found

out that being a team captain meant a lot more than just going out on the field for the coin toss. And working as a GA taught me a lot about what I did and didn't want to do as a coach."



**Ann Van Dyke '79**  
**BS, Women's Basketball and Volleyball**

**Then:** First NMU female athlete to earn eight letters;

team captain in both sports.

**Now:** Physical education and reading teacher for the Harrison County Schools in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

"I had three basketball and four volleyball coaches during my time at Northern. I learned a lot from all of them, but I learned so much from Barb Patrick. I can't even begin to tell you how my NMU experience impacted my life. It was the greatest. I just love Northern."



**Brad Werenka '90**  
**BS, Ice Hockey**

**Then:** 1991 Hobey Baker finalist; 1991 First-Team All-America Defense-

man; 1991 NCAA All-Tournament Team.

**Now:** Defenseman for the National Hockey League's Calgary Flames.

"My first and last NMU hockey weekends are the ones that stand out. My introduction to college hockey was against Wisconsin in Madison. The moment I stepped on the ice and felt that excitement and energy, I knew I had made the right decision when I chose the college route. The other is after winning the national championship: I remember looking

back as the team bus was coming down the hill from the airport returning to campus and there was a train of cars that went on for miles. It was an incredible site."



**Dallas Drake '92,**  
**Ice Hockey**

**Then:** 1992 First-Team All-American; 1992 WCHA Defensive Player of

the Year.

**Now:** Forward for the National Hockey League's St. Louis Blues.

"There are too many great NMU memories, both on and off the ice, to pick just one, but obviously the highlight of my hockey career there was winning the 1991 NCAA Championship. We had a great team and we're really a close bunch of guys. That was the best, simply the best, athletic moment."



**Joe Blake,**  
**Broadcaster**

**Then:** Play-by-play announcer for more than 750 games over

19 seasons; broadcaster of three NMU national championship titles and three NCAA runner-up crowns.

**Now:** Owner of Marquette radio station Q107-WMQT.

"The most awesome game I ever covered was the 1991 NCAA title game for hockey, just because the game was so dramatic and the level of talent on those teams—it's just mind-boggling when you think about it. The 1980 national title game was also pretty amazing, considering the program was just four years old at the time."