

Comley resigns as NMU's ice hockey coach to take over reigns at Michigan State

By CINDY PAAVOLA '84 BS

Rick Comley '73 MAE resigned as the ice hockey coach at NMU to accept the same position at Michigan State University. He was introduced as the Spartans new coach on March 25. He replaces the long-time, legendary coach of the Spartans, Ron Mason, who is stepping down as hockey coach to become MSU director of athletics July 1.

Comley has been the only coach in NMU hockey history. He has a 538-429-68 mark behind the Wildcat bench in 26 seasons of action.

"I am very proud of Northern Michigan University, its hockey program, and the time I've spent in Marquette," said Comley. "But this is the type of opportunity that comes around only once in a lifetime. I've turned down several jobs over the years, but this was an opportunity too good to say no to."

Comley ranks seventh on the NCAA hockey all-time coaching win list with a career mark of 597-475-71. That record includes three seasons at Lake Superior State, where he was 59-46-3. Comley is one of only eight coaches in college hockey history to win 550 games and one of 10 to post 500 victories at one school.

A two-time winner of the Spencer Penrose Memorial Trophy (1980, 1991) as college hockey's national Coach of the Year, Comley has also been named Coach of the Year in the Central Collegiate Hockey Association (1979, 1980) and the Western Collegiate Hockey Association (1989, 1991), and is

one of two individuals to coach regular-season champions in the CCHA and WCHA.

"Northern is grateful to Rick for his many contributions to the university and Wildcat athletics," NMU President Judi Bailey said. "With Rick as AD during my first four years at NMU, I had a chance to see his



Rick Comley

incredible work ethic first hand. He is a strong leader and teacher."

Comley spent 13 years (1987-2000) in a dual role, serving as athletic director and hockey coach.

"Over the years, Rick has told me there were only a couple of jobs that would cause him to consider leaving Northern, and working with his good friend and mentor, Ron Mason, I know was one of them. I wish Rick all the best for his new adventure," Bailey added.

This is not the first time that

Comley has taken over for Mason. He began his coaching career as an assistant under Mason at Lake Superior in 1972-73. He took over the Laker program in 1973 when Mason left for Bowling Green State University. Comley also played for Mason at Lake Superior on the 1967 through '71 squads, where he was a two-time NAIA All-American and team captain as a senior.

"If Ron were simply retiring and not taking the AD job, I can't honestly say if I'd be headed to Michigan State right now," said Comley. "A big part of my going to MSU is the chance to work with Ron Mason."

During Comley's tenure at NMU he coached seven Hobey Baker Memorial Award finalists, 10 All-Americans (first and second team), four league Players of the Year, and 20 first team all-league selections. His teams have captured three CCHA regular-season titles, two CCHA Tournament titles, one WCHA regular-season and three WCHA playoff titles.

Comley's 1990-91 squad rolled to a 38-5-4 record, a 25-3-4 WCHA mark, won the league's regular-season and playoff titles, and captured the NCAA Division I national title with a thrilling 8-7 come-from-behind triple overtime victory over Boston University.

"It will be very different to see him on the opposite bench when Northern Michigan and Michigan State play," NMU Athletic Director Dan Spielmann said. "It will be difficult to replace him. He has been the

heart and soul of this program."

Comley is a member of the Athletic Hall of Fame at both Lake Superior, where he earned his bachelor's degree in political science in 1972, and NMU.

"I can't tell you how special my time at Northern has been. I plan to stay connected to the university and the hockey program," said Comley. "Don't forget, I'm an alum, too. I want Northern to be very successful as an institution, an athletic program, and a hockey program. I'm a part of the Northern family, and I won't give that up."

Spielmann said he hopes to name Comley's replacement before July 1, following a nationwide search.

Ironically, Comley's last game as the Wildcat coach came in a 2-1 loss to Michigan State in the semifinals of the CCHA Championships in March. Northern's first home opponent of the upcoming season is MSU on Oct. 18-19.

Biondo breaks national 3000 meter record

USOEC short track speed skater and 2002 Olympian Ron Biondo broke the U.S. record in the 3000 meter event by over three seconds at the National Short Track Championships held at the Island Sports Center in suburban Pittsburgh. Biondo skated the event in 4 minutes 47.03 seconds, eclipsing Tommy O'Hare's time of 4:50.120 set November 11 in Sarasota Springs, New York.

Biondo also skated a time of 43.60 seconds in the 500-meter final to break the men's age group Senior record.

Sams to lead NMU gridders

NMU Athletic Director Dan Spielmann announced that Doug Sams will be taking the helm of the NMU football program.

Sams has been the head football coach at Fairmont State College in West Virginia for the past 10 years. His record at Fairmont State was 53-47-0 and his overall collegiate coaching record stands at 58-52-0. Sams won two West Virginia Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Football Championships during his tenure at Fairmont State in 1996 and 2000. For his effort in 1996, Sams was named the WVIAC Coach of the Year.

"We're pleased that Doug has agreed to become our head football coach," Spielmann said. "He has experience at both the professional and collegiate level and has been successful wherever he has coached."

A native of Oregon, Sams went to Fairmont State from the Ottawa Rough Riders of the Canadian Football League, where he was the offensive coordinator from 1989-91. His other head coaching experience came at Urbana University in Ohio where he went 5-5 during the 1988 season—his only season at the school.

Sams' coaching path began at Oregon State University, where he served as the defensive line coach from 1976-78. From there he moved to Northern Iowa, where he coached the receivers and the offensive line from 1979-82. After the 1982 season, Sams moved on to Idaho State University (1983-85), where he was the quarterback, receivers, and tight ends coach, and head junior varsity coach in 1983.

During the 1984-85 seasons, Sams was the offensive line and recruiting coordinator for the Cincinnati Bengals. He then moved north of the border and was the offensive line coach for the Montreal Alouettes of the CFL for the 1986 season. A year later he joined the Edmonton Eskimos as the defensive line and special teams coach. During his stint in Edmonton, the Eskimos won the Grey Cup as the CFL Champions.

Sams holds a bachelor's degree from Oregon State University and a master's degree in physical education from Idaho State University.

New coach hits the high notes

Doug Sams' NMU debut did not take place on the football field. Sams (pictured right) performed the role of Sergeant of Police in the opera *Pirates of Penzance* put on by the NMU music department in late April, under the direction of Robert Englehart.

The gridiron mentor is a former trombone player and an avid theater fan.

"I love football, I just love it. When I'm coaching football I'm having so much fun that I never think of it as a job," Sams said. "It's the same way with theater. It takes a lot of work to really perform a part well, but it's not really work because it's so much fun to challenge yourself that way."

