

Building a top Division III program

Alumna builds a top hoops program and raises money for cancer research BY DAVID DRIVER

After interviewing for the head-coaching job at York College of Pennsylvania in 1997, **Betsy Witman** went to the office of then-York athletics director Jeff Gamber.

Gamber, who has coached men's basketball at York for 32 years, says, "I can remember the interview like it was yesterday. We came back to my office, and we talked basketball for a couple of hours. I was convinced right there. We liked her background. Her philosophy fit our style. She is just a fantastic person."

A former JMU basketball standout, **Witman ('87)** grew up in Hanover, Pa., and was hired as York College's women's coach in August 1997. The Division III team has made steady progress under Witman, who had been an assistant at Division II Millersville University and an assistant at Delaware before taking the York job. Her JMU degree is in physical education/sports management.

York advanced to the Capital Athletic Conference title game for the first time in 2004 and won a then school-record 19 games. Even more impressive, this past season York made its first-ever appearance in the NCAA Division III tournament after getting an at-large bid. Witman's team advanced to the Sweet 16 with wins over Christopher Newport and Baruch as York hosted the first two rounds of the NCAA tournament. The memorable season came to an end with a loss to Scranton, but York finished 27-3 overall.

"It was exciting for our team, because it was the first time we had ever gotten there," says Witman, who is also an associate athletics director at York. "I think this year was really special, with having six seniors. We had great team chemistry and leadership and a lot of unselfishness. We shared the ball very well. No one really cared how many points they scored."

That could also describe the teams that Witman played on at JMU in the mid-1980s. She was a member of two teams that

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— SHEILA MOORMAN, *former JMU women's basketball coach*



Betsy Witman ('87) coaches the women's basketball team at York College of Pennsylvania.

made the Sweet 16 in the NCAA tournament, and Witman's last-second shot beat host Providence for the Lady Dukes' first NCAA tournament win in 1986. Witman scored a career-high 30 points at Virginia Com-

monwealth University in 1985 and finished her college career two years later with 1,193 points.

"She was part of what I consider my first recruiting class," says Sheila Moorman, who resigned as JMU coach in 1997 after posting a 302-134 record in 15 seasons. "Betsy was what I call a sleeper. She played the post in high school and her game sort of looked effort-

less and smooth. She was such a good athlete; I don't think any of us had a clue what a [successful] outside shooter she would be."

Witman says some observers compare her style on the sidelines to Moorman, and Witman takes that as a compliment. "What I learned is you don't have to scream and yell and act like an idiot to motivate your players," Witman says. "Coach Moorman's demeanor is something I have taken on."

Moorman recalls that Witman's parents attended nearly every home game and then listened to a tape of the game that night as they drove back to Hanover. Moorman was not surprised to see Witman go into coaching. "It became apparent to me very quickly that she had an eye for talent," says Moorman, who would run into Witman on summer recruiting trips in the 1990s. "I knew that from day one."

But Witman, who is a member of the Hanover High School Athletics Hall of Fame, has done more than win basketball games at York. Several of her recent teams have ranked nationally in Division III for having the best overall grade-point average.

And along with Gamber, York's longtime men's coach, Witman has been involved in helping to raise money for cancer research. Gamber and his wife, Donna, began the "Three Point Attack" in 1995 at York as a response to the program devised by the National Association of Basketball Coaches. York has been No. 1 at Division III for money raised during the past decade and has ranked in the top 20 at all levels.

This past season the York women also held a Pink Zone game that benefited breast cancer research for the Kay Yow/WBCA Cancer Fund, named for the former North Carolina State coach who died in January.

Earlier this decade, York's men's and women's teams began hosting a two-day Coaches vs. Cancer Classic event the first weekend in January to help raise funds. For both Witman and Gamber, that means individually signing all letters sent out to potential donors, scheduling games and making appeals to former players and other York alums. "It's a real grassroots effort," Gamber says. And Witman has been on the ground floor of that effort while also building a top Division III program just a few miles from her hometown. ■