

JMU NATION

'All I've ever wanted'

Coach helps bring a national championship to her alma mater

BY CHRIS BROOKS

"IT'S UNREAL!"

Those were the first words spoken by James Madison lacrosse head coach Shelley Klaes-Bawcombe ('97) to an ESPN sideline reporter following the team's 16-15 win over Boston College to claim the first NCAA championship in program history.

"This means everything to me. This has been what's driven me, to take James Madison to the top," Klaes-Bawcombe said. "Taking them to the national championship is all I've ever wanted. I've had opportunities to move on to other programs, but I always felt it would be that much more special and mean that much more to do it at my alma mater."

In her 12th season as head coach, Klaes-Bawcombe guided JMU to a program- and conference-record 22 wins, becoming the Colonial Athletic Association's first 20-win team. JMU won its third Colonial Athletic Association championship in four seasons, earning the No. 3 seed for the NCAA Championship.

The Dukes' road to the championship included wins at home against Virginia and sixth-seeded Florida, followed by Championship Weekend triumphs against second-seeded North Carolina and fourth-seeded Boston College in Stony Brook, New York.

JMU was a veteran-laden team in 2018, returning nearly every starter from last year's squad. The outlook was bright heading into the 50th season of lacrosse at JMU, and the group of student-athletes was the perfect mold of a future national champion. There were no egos, everyone understood



Shelley Klaes-Bawcombe ('97), lacrosse head coach, enjoyed many moments of celebration during the 50th season of the sport at JMU.



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—SHELLEY KLAES-BAWCOMBE ('97), lacrosse head coach

their role with the team and the Dukes treated every game the same. Even prior to the national championship game, Klaes-Bawcombe told a team official that it felt like just another game. That mentality is what allowed JMU to make history.

"As a coach, you're always trying to search for players who fit your coaching philosophy," Klaes-Bawcombe said. "I wanted to be the best, but I wanted to enjoy being the best. I wanted to have fun. Ultimately, it's supposed to be fun. I didn't

want to lose sight of that at the highest level. These athletes completely embody this philosophy. They were the perfect balance of seriousness and focus, but they were also so much fun to be around, so lighthearted and they engaged every aspect of the process."

The group of eight JMU seniors won more games than any other class in school history, finishing their careers with a 61-23 record. They became the third class to win three conference championships and make four NCAA Championship appearances. Above all, they'll always be known as the first to hold up the national championship trophy.

"They did a great job of taking information the program had already learned and using that to make us better," Klaes-Bawcombe said. "The legacy they leave is not only one of confidence and the willingness to do extra work, but it's also the love of the family environment and their appreciation of paying it forward."