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Aunt Martha's Coaches

Has Saunders Lost the Magic Touch? Or, Did She Ever Have It?

After the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater won the Division III national championship in 2007, USM President Martha Saunders blogged that during the 2006-07 academic year while Chancellor at UW-W she had hired the first-year coach who led UW-W to the title. Apparently, Saunders believed that much of credit for the UW-W national championship was due to her special talents at selecting coaches. Assuming Saunders has such a “magic touch” when it comes to selecting head coaches, this essay examines whether or not Saunders’ talent translates to the Division I level. Since coming to USM in 2007, Saunders has presided over the hiring of 10 head coaches. These are:

- Scott Berry, baseball
- Howard Dobson, softball
- Scott Ebke, women’s soccer
- Larry Fedora, football
- Ellis Johnson, football
- Ki Kroll, men’s tennis
- Kevin Stephen, men’s and women’s track
- Abbey Sutherland, women’s volleyball
- Raynie Theis, women’s tennis
- Kirsten Voak/Jon Malgradi, softball



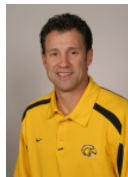
Berry



Dobson



Ebke



Fedora



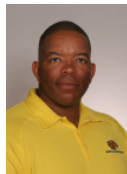
Johnson



Kroll



Malgradi & Voak



Stephen



Sutherland



Theis

USM baseball coach Scott Berry was hired by Saunders in May of 2009, and will begin his tenure with the 2010 season, while softball coach, Howard Dobson, began his tenure at USM during spring semester 2008, Saunders’ third full semester at USM. Women’s soccer coach, Scott Ebke, and football coach, Larry Fedora, began their respective tenures at USM during fall semester 2008, Saunders’ fifth full semester at USM. Kevin Stephen, head of USM’s track programs, was one of Saunders’ first hires back in 2007. Raynie Theis began her tenure as USM’s women’s tennis coach during fall semester 2009, while

Abbey Sutherland began her tenure as the women's volleyball coach in fall 2010. Ki Kroll took charge of the USM men's tennis program in the spring of 2011. Finally, in 2011 Saunders brought in both Kirsten Voak and Jon Malgradi to serve as co-head coaches for softball. Table 1 below contains information on how successful Saunders' 10 choices for head coaches have been since coming to USM to lead their respective sports programs.

Table 1
USM Career Records of Aunt Martha's Coaches

<u>Name</u>	<u>Sport</u>	<u>Wins</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Ties</u>	<u>Win%</u>
Berry, Scott	Baseball	75	43	0	63.6%
Dobson, Howard*	Softball	93	124	2	42.9%
Ebke, Scott	Women's Soccer	16	53	6	25.3%
Fedora, Larry*	Football	34	19	0	64.2%
Johnson, Ellis	Football	0	0	0	0.0%
Kroll, Ki	Men's Tennis	4	20	0	16.7%
Stephen, Kevin	Track	33	89	0	27.0%
Sutherland, Abbey	Women's Volleyball	36	27	0	57.1%
Theis, Raynie	Women's Tennis	21	24	0	46.7%
Voak, Kirsten & Malgradi, Jon#	Softball	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0%</u>
		312	399	8	43.9%

* No longer affiliated with USM

Hired as co-head coaches in 2011

As the data in Table 1 above indicate, Saunders' first eight choices to lead various USM athletics teams have been less than stellar. Dobson's inaugural softball season (2008) produced 30 losses, while his fourth produced 39. He was not retained as head coach after the 2011 season. Ebke's winning clip does little to inspire confidence in the idea that Saunders is going to be able to turn USM's floundering women's soccer program around. Kroll's first season (in 2011) at the helm of men's tennis was a dismal 3-19. When it comes to sports, it appears that Saunders is bringing back the days of Mississippi Southern.