Don’t call him ‘Coach’

The winningest coach in NCAA soccer says game belongs to the players

By Jay Martin | AS TOLD TO AMY WIMMER SCHWAB

ROLE: The men’s soccer coach at Ohio Wesleyan University for 38 years, Jay Martin started out coaching men’s lacrosse, too, and tackled student hazing issues on both teams when he first arrived. This year Martin, also a kinesiology professor, won an NCAA Innovations in Research Grant to develop tools that help coaches assess hazing on their teams. HIS STORY: With a career record of 657-124-61 and two Division III national championships, Martin is the winningest men’s soccer coach in the NCAA.

LESSONS LEARNED: His team plays home games at the Jay Martin Soccer Complex, but in soccer, he says, the coach’s job is to stay out of the way.

I'M NOT A GOOD SOCCER PLAYER. I never was, I never have been, and, at this point in my life, I never will be. I tell that to my team and everybody who cares to listen. I think I started twice in college -- there was an epidemic on the team, and I had to get on the field.

I KNOW I'M GOING TO SOUND LIKE A COMMUNIST, but I've never played football in my life. I played soccer and basketball and baseball in high school, and then when I went to college I played soccer, basketball and lacrosse at Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts.

BASKETBALL WAS PROBABLY MY BEST SPORT. After I left Springfield, I moved to Munich, Germany, and played professional basketball for about four seasons. When I moved to Munich, I was in a soccer culture. Basketball in Europe in those days was not a big sport at all. In preseason we played soccer for fitness.

WHILE I WAS IN MUNICH I got to know Helmut Schoen, coach of the German national team when they won the World Cup in 1974. He and I did nothing but talk about sports -- not always specifically soccer, but about sports. He was a great sportsman and obviously a great soccer coach.

Ohio Wesleyan celebrates its victory over Calvin College during the Division III Men's Soccer Championship in San Antonio in 2011. It was the second national championship for Jay Martin, above. NCAA PHOTOS ARCHIVE
Few can match the achievements that former New York Giants quarterback Phil Simms can check off from his football career. He owns a Super Bowl ring. He appeared in two Pro Bowls during his 14-year NFL career. He holds the record for highest percentage of completed passes in the championship game. And after he retired -- and the Giants retired his jersey -- Simms moved on to a successful second career in broadcasting.

But even after all those career highs, Simms was still missing one thing: a college degree.

This weekend, 36 years after leaving Morehead State, Phil Simms returns for something he left behind.

Simms, seen above with Morehead State Board of Regents chair Paul Goodpaster and President Wayne Andrews, finished his college career with 5,545 passing yards and 32 touchdowns.

“IT’S SOMETHING I JUST WANTED TO GET DONE,” Simms said. “IT’S BEEN HANGING OUT THERE.”

For Simms, who grew up in a family of eight children, Morehead State provided an opportunity no other university offered: an athletics scholarship that allowed him to attend college and play football. Simms says he was serious about pursuing a professional career from his early days at Morehead State, and if he had not pursued that path, he likely would have wanted to remain close to the game as a teacher and football coach.

“GOING TO COLLEGE GAVE ME THE CHANCE TO LEAD A DIFFERENT LIFE AWAY FROM HOME,” Simms said. “I’LL NEVER FORGET THE FACT THAT THEY GAVE ME A FOOTBALL SCHOLARSHIP. I’LL NEVER GET OVER THAT. THAT WAS THE ONLY WAY THAT I COULD GO TO COLLEGE. IT WAS THE PERFECT SCHOOL AND THE RIGHT SITUATION.” – AMY WINNER SCHWAB

LIFE AFTER THE GAME

To a degree

Thirty-six years after leaving Morehead State, Phil Simms returns for something he left behind.

Simms

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But even after all those career highs, Simms was still missing one thing: a college degree.

This weekend, 36 years after leaving Morehead State University -- located two hours east of Simms’ hometown in Springfield, Kentucky -- he returned to campus to receive his bachelor’s degree. He was just two classes shy of his diploma, and Morehead State worked with him to complete his requirements.

“It’s something I just wanted to get done,” Simms said. “It’s been hanging out there.”

For Simms, who grew up in a family of eight children, Morehead State provided an opportunity no other university offered: an athletics scholarship that allowed him to attend college and play football. Simms says he was serious about pursuing a professional career from his early days at Morehead State, and if he had not pursued that path, he likely would have wanted to remain close to the game as a teacher and football coach.

“Going to college gave me the chance to lead a different life away from home,” Simms said. “I’ll never forget the fact that they gave me a football scholarship. I’ll never get over that. That was the only way that I could go to college. It was the perfect school and the right situation.” – AMY WINNER SCHWAB