

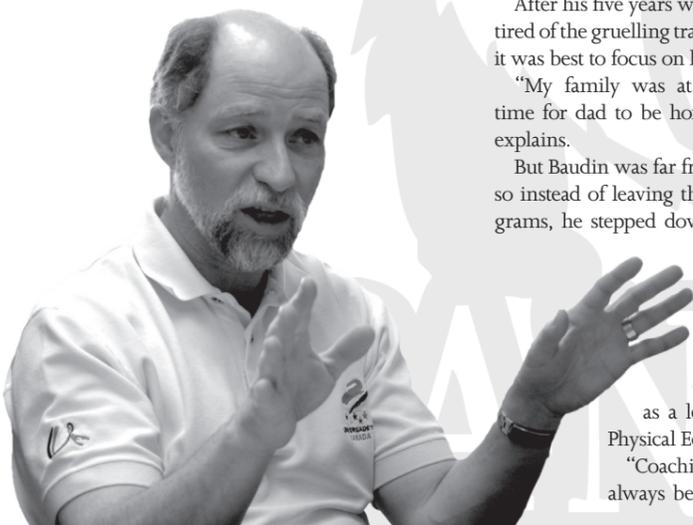
TEAM PLAYERS

PART 1 OF 2

They don't get paid, and they're never in the middle of a media scrum, but assistant coaches are integral part of the team dynamic. Gateway sports editor Robin Collum looks a little further down the bench to profile some of the University's best deputies.

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PHOTOS BY RYAN HEISE AND KRISTINA SULATYCKI

"Coaching the technical side has always been second nature to me. It's the part I enjoy the most, and so that's what I do."



Dr Pierre Baudin
Pandas Volleyball

Most university volleyball teams would have a hard time trying to decide which they wanted on their coaching staff more: someone who has been involved with the sport for more than three decades, or someone with degrees in biomechanics and a specialized knowledge of the science of sport. Luckily for the Pandas, they don't have to choose, as they have both in their technical coach, Dr Pierre Baudin.

In addition to his PhD in biomechanics, Baudin has been coaching volleyball—mostly at the U of A—since the mid-'70s, including two stints as head coach: behind the Pandas bench from 1978–80, and for the Bears from 1986–91.

"I've been on campus, with only a few breaks, since 1971, either as a student, a professor, a graduate student, or a coach," he laughs. "I've been around volleyball for a long, long time."

After his five years with the Bears, Baudin was tired of the gruelling travel schedule, and decided it was best to focus on his personal life.

"My family was at that age where it was time for dad to be home a little bit more," he explains.

But Baudin was far from done with volleyball, so instead of leaving the Bears and Pandas programs, he stepped down to his current role as

technical coach, eventually focusing solely on the Pandas. It's a part-time, volunteer position that he feels complements his day job as a lecturer in the Faculty of Physical Education.

"Coaching the technical side has always been second nature to me.

It's the part I enjoy the most, and so that's what I do," he says.

"It allows me to bring the real world into the classroom, and I can take my theoretical knowledge out with me to coach. Especially the biomechanics and physiology knowledge I have, I can take it to the court—we call it the living lab. For me it's a win-win, and I love to do it."

Because of Baudin's specialization—as he points out, biomechanic volleyball coaches aren't common—Alberta has a certain edge over its competition, which goes a long way towards explaining the consistent quality of players the Pandas program produces. The U of A has made it to nationals 13 times since he rejoined their staff: eight years in a row between 1993–2000, and every year since the 2002/03 season—and have collected seven CIS banners in the process.

"Pierre's volleyball and sports-science background really qualify him to be one of the top technical coaches in the country," says Pandas head coach Laurie Eisler, who feels that the changes Baudin made to the team's blocking last season played a big part in their winning the national championship. "Pierre has a unique ability to analyze the skill execution and have an immediate impact on the athlete's performance and take them from one level to the next level."

"Modest me, but I think [having me] is a big advantage," Baudin says. "How does our third-year athlete compare with a third-year athlete that's at another institution? I would say generally speaking that we take athletes farther than those in other programs, and I think a large part of that is that other programs don't have people like me."

But it's not just him: Baudin gives credit for Alberta's dominance of the national volleyball

scene to Eisler—now in her 16th year at the U of A—and the atmosphere she's created for the coaching staff. He says that she trusts her assistant coaches and makes them feel valued, which brings excellence and loyalty to the program.

"The environment that's created here [helps]," Baudin says. "When we went to nationals last year ... I think our ratio of coaching staff to athletes was one to one. I'm pretty certain there isn't any other university team in the country—of any sport—that has that."

"It's basically all volunteer, and the only reason people keep volunteering is that you are allowed to be a part of that national championship-winning team. I was a head coach, and I never did win a national championship, so I never did have that opportunity, but to be a part of it now—and to actually feel a part of it—that's really important. That's what keeps you coming back."

Eisler, meanwhile, noted that having Baudin's office just a few down from her own eases the pressure she feels, especially when most teams don't have the luxury of having a second full-time employee on the coaching staff.

"Having someone just down the hallway as a sounding board and for unconditional support—coaching can be a very isolating position—to have his ear helps me to sleep at night," she says.



For Cathy Butlin, coaching basketball isn't just something she does on the side. She has a master's degree in coaching from the U of A; leads the senior girls' team at Jasper Place High School, where she teaches phys ed and math; and is the top assistant coach for the Pandas. She does it all because she loves the game, and has a passion for sharing it with others.

"It's very similar to my career as a teacher," she says, explaining the appeal that coaching holds for her. "It's giving back to youth, sharing your experiences with them, and trying to make them better people."

"That's the biggest thing I get from it: seeing people grow, seeing them improve and them being successful, and feeling that you had a part in that."

Butlin has a long history with the Pandas program, having been one herself. She played five seasons here as a

guard from 1996–2001, so she has a lot of personal experience as a student-athlete.

When she graduated, Butlin knew that she was done with playing full-time, but wasn't ready to give up the sport. So she decided to combine her love of teaching and of basketball, and started coaching.

In fact, she liked it so much that she went back to school for a master's in coaching from the U of A—becoming that program's first-ever graduate—before returning to the Pandas. This time, however, she was on the other end of the bench, and found it to be a completely new experience. She also found that she had a lot to learn.

"I considered going full-time with coaching, but at this point in my life, I just didn't feel that it was for me, and that's why I'm teaching instead. I want to get more experience before I step into a role like that," she explains. "That's why I did my master's, too. I knew the basketball side of it, but there's so much more that there was to learn."

Butlin learned quickly, and is now an invaluable part of the Alberta coaching staff—to the point that head coach Scott Edwards will jokingly call her the "associate head coach." She works with the perimeter players during practice, helps lay out strategy with Edwards, and

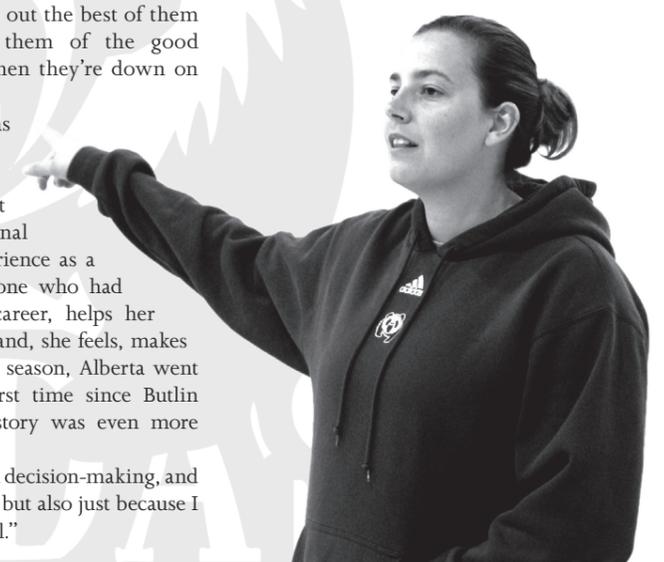
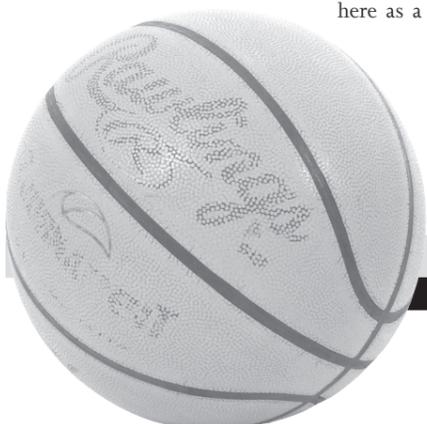
coordinates subbing during games. She is perhaps equally valuable to the players, however, as a role model and confidante.

"She's got a great personality and rapport with athletes; she's young enough to be not that far out of her [playing] career, so she knows what they're going through," Edwards says. "One of her greatest strengths is her ability to talk to athletes on a one-on-one basis and bring out the best of them individually—remind them of the good parts of their game when they're down on themselves."

In Butlin's third year as a player, the Pandas won the national championship, and they brought home silver in her final year as well. Her experience as a Panda, and especially one who had such a distinguished career, helps her players connect to her, and, she feels, makes her a better coach. Last season, Alberta went to nationals for the first time since Butlin graduated, and her history was even more important.

"I have a lot to do with decision-making, and they respect me for that but also just because I played here and did well."

"That's the biggest thing I get from [coaching]: seeing people grow, seeing them improve and them being successful, and feeling that you had a part in that."



Cathy Butlin
Pandas Basketball

Check back on Thursday for the second half of our series on assistant coaches, where we will profile Ron Thompson from the track teams, and Ted Poplawski from the Bears hockey squad.