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Forever Linked

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Friday December 9, 2022

Forever Linked

By Eric F. Spina

A small but sturdy silver link hangs from my keychain, a gift from Flyer football coach Rick Chamberlin.

In a tradition he carried over from his predecessor Mike Kelly, Rick gave everyone who ever played for him a link to remind them they're forever connected to the program and each other.

Rick is retiring after a nearly 50-year tenure as a player, assistant coach and head coach after notching his 100th win at his alma mater and being part of an incredible 401 of UD's 701 wins over our history. In no small part, he will be forever linked to Flyer football and the university he never left after graduation. He's the very definition of commitment.

Coach Chamberlin is literally defined by the teams that he has put on the field over the last 14 years — smart, tough, loyal, high-integrity, and a winner. Rick's values are fully aligned with UD's values, and our football student-athletes have benefited as a result — they are doctors, lawyers, engineers, educators, public servants — each and every one contributing mightily to society.

Rick recruited more than just quality quarterbacks, linebackers, and tight ends. He brought in valedictorians and star students.

In 2020, the New Orleans Saints selected tight end Adam Trautman in the third round of the NFL draft. This year, Flyer running back Jake Chisholm was in the running for the William V. Campbell Trophy — college football's equivalent of the Academic Heisman that annually recognizes an individual “as the absolute best in the nation” for his combined academic success, football performance, and exemplary leadership. As a finalist with a near-perfect GPA, Jake won an \$18,000 postgraduate scholarship for med school.

If the Heisman were given out to fabled figures in college football who both played and coached the game, Rick might be in the running for that trophy. As a linebacker, he still holds the Flyer record for tackles in a career (419) and in a single season (152). His .690 winning percentage as head coach over 14 seasons is second only to Mike Kelly's mark of .819. He's only the third Division-I coach (out of 429 with 100 career wins) to play for his alma mater, graduate and never leave the coaching staff. One of those in the trio is Knute Rockne, Notre Dame's legendary coach.

“He embodies everything that is right about our Catholic and Marianist values, our identity,” says Dayton Athletic Director Neil Sullivan. Adds Sports Information Director Doug Hauschild, “The thing that strikes me with Rick is that he was a ferocious competitor — you don't become an All-American linebacker if you are a wallflower — but he is such a caring, compassionate person.”

Coach Chamberlin will be dearly missed on the field, but his legacy at UD as a player, coach, mentor, and person is forever secure — just like that unbreakable link on the keychains of Flyer football graduates.