RMU Hockey Powers Toward Inaugural Season

By Marty Galosi, CAC Executive Director

Think your life is hectic? Try living in Robert Morris University Hockey Coach Derek Schooley’s skates.

“They say the highest stress moments in life are starting a new job, having a baby, moving and buying a new house,” says Schooley. “In a six-week period, I experienced all of that.”

Schooley was named to head the inaugural Colonial ice hockey team on Aug. 21, 2003. He and wife Alicia’s first child, daughter Kaitlyn, was born five weeks later. Sandwiched in between the first two life-changing events was a move across country from Colorado Springs where he served as an assistant coach at the Air Force Academy the past five years. Seven days later, the Schooley’s closed on their new house in Moon Township.

It’s been a whirlwind ever since. Schooley and assistant coach Mike McNeill have traveled thousands of miles recruiting players to compete for positions with the only NCAA Division I hockey program in Southwestern Pennsylvania. They’ve been as far west as Nebraska, as far north as Montreal, as far east as Boston and as far south as St. Louis. To compete in College Hockey America with the likes of Niagara, Alabama-Huntsville and the aforementioned Air Force, RMU must run the gamut.

“Granted, the stronghold of our recruiting will be the Great Lakes region,” says the 33-year-old Schooley who played collegiately at Western Michigan University and two seasons professionally. “But we will see some diversity. We’ve gotten commitments from Pennsylvania to Minnesota and from Ontario to Alberta.”

Schooley admits the ’04-05 Colonials will be small but quick and skilled offensively and bigger on the blue line defensively.

Still, the program is heading into just its first year. Not since 1994 has Robert Morris added a men’s intercollegiate sport. That was the football program, and its success is well-documented. There are many areas to cover when you’re starting a program from scratch as football coach Joe Walton would attest.

In Schooley’s case, skate rivets, practice pucks and helmets were just the start. Fortunately, the five-year-old state of the art RMU Island Sports Center came turnkey ready.

“We have a very nice overall complex that we hope with 1,000 seats will be a very loud and very exciting place to play,” says Schooley. “We have stuff that other facilities don’t have.”

Schooley readily points to four incoming Colonials who will help to generate excitement in the arena beginning this fall. They are left wing David Boguslawski (Cottage Grove, Minn.), right wing Jace Buzek (Greensburg, Pa.), center Rick Varone (Woodbridge, Ont.) and defenseman Rob Cowan (Calgary, Alb.).

And if you’re wondering what kind of chance this team has of being successful, you can either hearken back to the ’94 football team that won its first five games en route to a 7-1-1 record or consider that there are only 59 NCAA Division I programs in the nation. There are only six teams in the CHA (Wayne State in Detroit and Bemidji State in Minnesota are the other two in addition to those already mentioned). That means all Robert Morris has to do to qualify for an automatic NCAA tournament bid is win three games at the league tournament in March of 2005.

“People should be excited about college hockey in Pittsburgh,” says Schooley. “We’re getting national exposure because of hockey. Being in the CHA helps lend immediate credibility to the program.

“I’ve felt more like a general manager these last nine months than a head coach. It will probably hit me the day the players report to practice in early October. Then, the first game is just two weeks later.”

And the coach gets to face life in the fast lane all over again.

Derek Schooley leads the inaugural Robert Morris University hockey team into action this October.
The Year in Review (2003-04)...
A look at some of what the Colonial Athletic Club did to support RMU Athletics

* Awarded two recipients of the $750 Colonial Athletic Club Scholarship. Sophomore cheerleader Brittny Malinowski heads into her second year on the scholarship in ’04-05, while field hockey freshman Andrea Tasker embarks on her first in that team’s inaugural season.

* Raised a record $7,625 in support of the CAC Scholarship Fund at the August, 2003, golf outing presented by Comcast.

* Purchased $7,000 in weight equipment for use by all student-athletes in our 22-sport program.

* Underwrote costs of all plaques for the Athletic Hall of Fame in the fall and the annual All-Sports Banquet in the spring.

* Hosted halftime hospitality area at all home football and basketball games at Moon Stadium and Charles L. Sewall Center, respectively.

* Paid for all or part of the following: football team VCR; cheerleader flags; football alumni 10th anniversary reception and t-shirts at homecoming; volleyball team Northeast Conference championship and NCAA tournament banners; track and women’s soccer video camcorders; stipend for department strength and conditioning coach Steve Sarigiannis.

Where Are They Now?

Jake Newman

Jake Newman was the first quarterback in Robert Morris football school history directing the Colonial offense from 1994 through 1997. Known for his toughness and smarts, Newman was the perfect choice to lead the inaugural team. His record during that time was 30-9-1. He threw five touchdown passes in a 1995 victory over Waynesburg. Twice he was named MVP in Colonial ECAC Bowl triumphs (1996 over Duquesne and 1997 over Georgetown). For his career, he completed 426 of 833 passes for 5,771 yards and 61 touchdowns as a four-year starter. Newman received a bachelor’s degree from Robert Morris in '98 in marketing and later an MBA from the University of South Carolina. The Powell, Ohio, native worked for Black & Decker in Columbia, S.C., initially out of Robert Morris. After receiving his MBA, he moved to Southern California for one year to work in Black & Decker’s corporate office. While there, he got engaged to Amy Reed (now Newman). He again moved, this time to Atlanta, to work as a Black & Decker district sales manager for the Southeast Region. After one year in Atlanta, Jake accepted a position with BSN-Medical in Charlotte, N.C., as an assistant product manager. Just recently, he was promoted to product manager. He, wife Amy and dog Jasper currently reside in Charlotte.
Q & A with RMU Track and Field’s Nicole Downing

Nicole Downing is quickly becoming one of the most decorated student-athletes in Robert Morris University track and field history. This year alone, she has been named the most outstanding field performer at both the Northeast Conference indoor and outdoor championships. In the latter, the Colonials’ second-place is the best in school history. Last year, she qualified for the NCAA regional championships in the hammer throw, and this year she has done so in the hammer, javelin and discus. She has won four NEC titles while at RMU, three of which have come this year alone.

Q: What is the secret to your success?
A: “Sticking with the training program through the entire summer last year really helped. I got stronger between my sophomore (2002-03) and junior (2003-04) seasons and everything clicked.”

Q: You came to RMU for volleyball originally and switched to track. What was that like?
A: “I played volleyball and basketball all through high school, and I was on the track team, but I didn’t throw that much. I was mostly a hurdler and sprinter. After my freshman year of volleyball, I still didn’t really like track, but I gave it a try.”

Q: What are you doing this summer?
A: “Teaching English at Sewickley Academy as part of their summer enrichment program. My major is English and Communication Education.”

Q: Do you have any preliminary plans for life after graduating from Robert Morris?
A: “I would like to move down south, possibly to the Carolinas, and get a master’s degree and teach full-time in high school. If I could get a doctorate, I could teach in college. I like outdoor activities, but at the same time, I’m a ‘spur of the moment’ type of person.”

NCAA Rules Refresher...
As athletic boosters, it never hurts to keep in mind the rules of our national governing body.

You are a “representative of athletics interests” if you’ve ever been a member of any RMU sport support group or booster club, have made a donation to the athletic program, have ever helped arrange or provided summer employment for enrolled student-athletes or been involved in the promotion of RMU athletics in any way. A “prospective student-athlete” is a person who has begun classes for the ninth grade. The fact that members of the Colonial Athletic Club are representatives of athletics interests means there are several do’s and don’ts when it comes to contact with high school and junior college coaches, prospective student-athletes and currently enrolled student-athletes. Questions? Contact the RMU Compliance Office today at 412-262-8431.

CAC Highlights
* There are 132 Colonial Athletic Club members this school year. We’ve brought in $14,065 in dues alone this year. That’s a 15% increase over ’02-03.

* The CAC Scholarship is in its third year, and we’re looking for applicants. To receive an application, contact assistant athletic director Marty Galosi at 412-269-4865 or galosi@rmu.edu.

* The 2004 CAC Golf Outing Presented by Comcast is Saturday, August 7 at Black Hawk Golf Course. Contact Marty Galosi to register your foursome or to purchase a hole sponsorship.
By Marty Galosi, CAC Executive Director

Ryan Mikita is equally adept with irons as he is poles. Just as comfortable in skis as he is spikes. Loves the snowy slopes of a winter resort as much as he does the plush green ones of a country club.

Well, let's not get carried away. This two-time All-Northeast golfer isn't leaving the links behind anytime soon. But, by the same token, skiing to him isn't just a passing fancy. The Colonial senior-to-be first took up skiing at age 11. In fact, for each of his four years in high school, he spent the winter months at Killington Mountain School in Vermont perfecting his skiing. The rest of the time, the Aliquippa, Pa., native did the same with his golf game at Center High School. And he admits that the downhill runs have helped his golf game.

"Skiing is an aggressive sport," says Mikita. "So I take more aggressive approaches to the pins."

Colonial golf coach Jerry Stone agrees.

"There is one word to describe Ryan," says Stone. "‘Fearless.’ He won the Duquesne Invitational last year with an unbelievable four-wood over the trees and a birdie on the last hole. From where he was off the tee, he had no business making birdie."

Normally, Mikita is long off the tee. Really long. In fact, when he has his A-game, his tee shots literally fly straight out of sight. Problem is, when he’s off his game, they go sideways. But in golf, long off the tee makes for a good scoring average. Mikita finished the 2003-04 season with a team best 75.5 shots per round, good for 33rd in the region. In nine tournaments, he had five top 10 finishes and three other times placed in the top 12. So he's consistent too.

"The strongest part of my game is driving," he says. "I hit it long, and I'm usually pretty close to the green. But my short game isn't great, and that is something I have to work on."

"But golf is so mental. Before, I would start off a round three-over through three holes, and I'd fall apart. Now, mentally, I can stay in the game. I've found a way to keep it together mentally."

But enough about golf. What about this love of the downhill slopes?

"I started skiing when I was about 11 or 12, going down the bunny slopes at Seven Springs," he says. "I joined the Western Pennsylvania Race Club shortly thereafter and continue to ski when I can."

While at Killington, Mikita qualified for the Eastern Regionals. His senior year, he made the Junior Olympics. Mikita is proficient in all disciplines of skiing -- downhill, slalom, giant slalom and the Super G. And while he’s aggressive when it comes to skiing and golf, that's not one of his dominant personality traits.

"Ryan is a very quiet young man," says Stone. "He speaks when he is spoken to. He lets his golf game do the talking."

The immediate future for Mikita includes caddying at nearby Sewickley Heights Country Club and playing in as many as 15 Tri-State and West Penn amateur tournaments this summer. He’s also looking to qualify for the U.S. Amateur Open. Still, the guess here is that, after that, he’s one of the few folks in this area looking forward to another snowy winter!