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BY JAY C. UPCHURCH

New to OU a year ago, head basketball coaches Jennie Baranczyk and Porter Moser have made Norman, Lloyd Noble home.

Two of a Kind

Each March Joe Castiglione navigates a hectic schedule filled with overlapping spring and winter sports, including NCAA championships for gymnastics, wrestling and basketball, and the early-season challenges of softball, baseball, tennis, track and field, and golf. Toss in spring football practice and the University of Oklahoma athletic director has more than a plateful to keep him going all hours of the day.

When coaches Sherri Coale and Lon Kruger announced their respective retirements from the women's and men's basketball programs within a few days of each other in March 2021, hectic could easily have turned into chaotic.

"It's never easy to replace one legendary coach, much less two at the same time," says Castiglione, reflecting on the challenges that he and the athletics department faced. "With Sherri and Lon, we're talking about two of the best who have ever coached college basketball—two highly respected coaches who accomplished amazing things here at the University of Oklahoma.

"So when we began the search for potential candidates, the bar had already been set extremely high."

Castiglione's reputation for finding and hiring talented coaches is well documented, and as he meticulously maneuvered through the interview process, two candidates quickly emerged from the crowd. Within a few days, negotiations were complete.

On April 2, 2021, OU officially hired Porter Moser to become its 14th men's head basketball coach. Eight days later on April 10, Jennie Baranczyk was introduced as the ninth head coach in the history of the women's program.

Moser came from a Loyola University/Chicago program that he spent 10 seasons building into a national power. During his final four seasons, the Ramblers won three Missouri Valley Conference titles, earned a pair of Sweet 16 berths and made a Final Four appearance in 2018.

Baranczyk's résumé is just as impressive. In nine seasons at Drake, her teams averaged 21 wins a year. They routinely were among the top scoring teams in the country, a fact that helped the Bulldogs string together six consecutive 20-win seasons and make three straight NCAA Tournament appearances.

"We had a chance to look at potential candidates at a variety of places around the country, and both Jennie and Porter, in their respective searches, stood out amongst them all," says Castiglione.

"It is uncanny thinking about the two searches on their own—as I attempted to balance them at the same time—there was an unexpected symmetry within each individual process. Not that they were the exact same process or the exact same person—but when we got down to the things that matter most, everything just crystalized."

In a matter of three weeks, Castiglione not only managed to find and hire two coaches with impeccable credentials, but he did so while facing an even bigger hurdle where both Baranczyk and Moser were concerned.

"Once we identified Jennie and Porter as the two candidates we felt were the perfect fit, one of the challenges we faced was actually trying to get them to leave their hometowns—not just programs where they had invested their time for a number of years—but their actual hometowns," says Castiglione. "And they were both the toast of those towns for what they had accomplished at their respective universities."

Baranczyk grew up in the Des Moines suburb of Urbandale, Iowa. She played collegiately at the University of Iowa and after honing her coaching skills at various stops after college, she took over in 2012 as head coach at Drake University, located about five miles from Dowling Catholic High School where she starred on two state championship teams.

Meanwhile, Moser is a product of Naperville, Illinois, a suburb of southwest Chicago. After earning all-conference



honors three times at Benet Academy in the nearby suburb of Lisle, he received a scholarship to Creighton University in Omaha, Neb. Moser eventually played three seasons there for coach Tony Barone before signing on with Barone's staff as a graduate assistant in 1990. Two decades later, he returned home as head coach at Loyola Chicago.

Both Baranczyk and Moser were enjoying tremendous success at their respective schools when OU began to express an interest last March. In fact, both coaches were in the process of leading their teams in postseason tournaments.

As soon as the 2020-21 season concluded, Castiglione reached out to measure their potential interest—and eventually came to the conclusion that he had found OU's next two basketball coaches.

"Like with anything in life, the more you invest in something, the harder it is to give up. And I invested a decade of my life to helping turn around what had been a struggling program at Loyola," says Moser. "To walk away on the heels of winning several conference championships, NCAA Sweet 16s and a Final Four—that was hard to do, and especially since it was my home.

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"I saw so much potential in this program," said women's coach Jennie Baranczyk. "It's been so much fun to watch them grow and develop as a team."

ties that program offered, it just felt right as I went through the interview process."

Baranczyk took over an OU women's program that made 19 consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances

“Coach Jennie is so energetic and confident as a coach and a person, and those things radiate onto her players.”

"But with that said, I was incredibly excited about the opportunity that OU presented."

In the 10 seasons prior to Baranczyk's arrival as head coach, Drake had managed just one NCAA Tournament berth. The Bulldogs finished 11-20 in her first season but won 20 games two seasons later, and went 53-1 in Missouri Valley Conference play from 2017-19, which helped punch their ticket to three straight NCAA Tournaments.

"My dad always told me to treat each job that you take on like it's the last job you're ever going to have. So that's how I've always looked at coaching, and I have always put everything I have into it," says Baranczyk. "When the OU job opened up, I wasn't looking to go anywhere else. I was coaching in my hometown and very much committed to the program at Drake. But after meeting with Joe Castiglione and the leadership at OU, and seeing the opportuni-

under Coale (2001-18), but one that had failed to produce a winning record for three straight seasons, going 32-52 during that span. Since arriving in Norman, she has spent a great deal of her time and energy building relationships with her student-athletes and implementing an aggressive, up-tempo style of play.

By January 2022, the Sooners had climbed back into the national polls for the first time since early in the 2017-18 season. They ranked second nationally in scoring, averaging more than 87 points a game, and had already surpassed the program's win totals from the previous four seasons.

"I saw so much potential in this program, especially with the history and success that Coach Coale helped create and nurture during her time here," says Baranczyk. "Now that I am here, I can't imagine coaching a different group of players. It's been so much fun to watch them grow and develop as a team.



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During her nine seasons as head coach at Drake University, Baranczyk's teams averaged 21 wins a year and were among the nation's top scorers.

I knew we had a lot of talent, but I never could have guessed how good the chemistry would be or how committed this team would be right from the start.

"It's been a joy for me, really. From the moment I got here, everything has just been amazing."

Senior forward Madi Williams credits OU's new coach with creating an environment built atop a foundation of positive relationships and team unity.

"Coach Jennie is so energetic and confident as a coach and a person, and those things radiate onto her players," says Williams. "She has a great belief in us that has helped bring us closer together as a team. The way she relates to us and communicates—she has a way of getting you to strive for perfection. I feel we are definitely a reflection of our head coach."

OU's quick turnaround comes as no surprise to basically anyone who has kept tabs on Baranczyk's career. That is especially true for former Kansas State head coach Deb Patterson, who gave Baranczyk her first coaching job out of college in 2004.

TOP - Coach Baranczyk rallies her players at the Jan. 12 OU vs. Baylor game. The team, then ranked 18th, edged out 9th-ranked Baylor with a late basket by Liz Scott, winning 78-77. ABOVE - OU senior guard/forward Madi Williams with Baranczyk on the sidelines at the Lloyd Noble Center.

"First of all, Jennie has an amazing basketball pedigree, going back to her high school playing days and then under Lisa Bluder at Iowa. She learned the game from some amazing coaches," says Patterson, who currently serves as director of player personnel at



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Washington State. “Jennie epitomizes everything you want in a coach. She’s extremely positive and very high energy with a great work ethic. She has an amazing intellect and she’s very engaging, which helps make her a great recruiter. And she also has deep understanding of the game and she’s extremely competitive.”

“The key is she manages to balance all of those things together in a way that made you believe she was always going to be a shining star as a coach.”

Moser’s first order of business, once he got the OU job, was to rebuild a roster that was set to return only three experienced players from a team that qualified for the NCAA Tournament in 2020-21.

“Once Coach Kruger retired, there were a lot of unknowns as far as the personnel and roster here, so I was initially trying to build my staff and then I had to build the roster basically from scratch,” says Moser, who had a history of rebuilding programs at Arkansas-Little Rock and Illinois State prior to taking over at Loyola Chicago. “Oklahoma is the first job I’ve really had where I didn’t have to do a total rebuild. That was one of the things that drew me here, along with the amazing leadership.”

“At OU, you also get a place that is all about people and family, and an athletics program that has been wired for excellence for years. Every single sport is plugged into that. I love what the OU brand stands for. You hear people talk about OU DNA and I could



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TOP - Porter Moser on the sidelines at the OU vs. Butler game. ABOVE - Guard Jordan Goldwire, a redshirt senior from Norcross, Ga., smiles courtside with Moser during the Sooners’ Dec. 1 defeat of the Florida Gators.



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OU team members celebrate a 72-48 victory over Alcorn State in their locker room with coach Porter Moser. Moser rebuilt OU's roster, which featured only three returning players.

Porter Moser came to OU after 10 seasons at Loyola Chicago, where he built the program into a national power with three conference titles berths.

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see that from the outside looking in.”

Moser’s 2021-22 squad has helped make the Lloyd Noble Center a destination for OU fans again. Big crowds have turned out for several games, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the new coach, who canvassed the OU campus prior to the season—visiting fraternity houses and dormitories in an attempt to get the student body to re-engage. Moser has even purchased pizza and personally delivered it the student sections before games.

“We’re excited about the possibilities we have here. We have extremely high expectations and know where we want to go. So I realize that we have some big steps in front of us,” says Moser.

According to Loyola Chicago athletics director Steve Watson, there is no hurdle or step too big for Moser, who has two kids playing varsity hoops at OU. Son Jake is a freshman guard for the Sooners and daughter Jordan is a junior forward on Baranczyk’s squad.

“Porter is the best. He’s a great coach and a great person, and that shows in everything he does both on

and off the court,” says Watson. “Porter coaches with an edge. He’s got so much energy. It’s just the way he’s built, and it’s infectious. You can see it in his players and how they compete.

“It was very special to watch what he did here at Loyola. He put our program on the map. He put our school on the map. We are excited for him and his family at Oklahoma. I believe he will do great things there, too.”

While OU basketball is still in the early stages of the Jennie Baranczyk and Porter Moser eras, Castiglione likes the direction things are moving.

“I feel incredibly fortunate to have Jennie and Porter on board at OU,” says Castiglione. “They both do it the right way, starting with creating the type of culture you need to be successful. Plus, they work so well together and both are incredibly supportive of each other.

“What we’ve seen and experienced this season is only a sampling of what we feel they are going to do in the long run.”



Jay C. Upchurch is editor and chief of Sooner Spectator and lives in Norman.