

The paths of Marian's National Coach of the Year finalists

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Marian stands for many things. It stands for education, empowerment, spirituality, belonging and, at its core, a collective tradition of excellence. Boasting a proud 72 state athletic championships, the blue emblem has become synonymous with the highest level of competition. In order to achieve this tier of success, not only must the athletes be the best of the best, but so must the coaches leading them.

This year, two of Marian's coaches were nominated and selected as National Coach of the Year finalists. Only eight coaches for each category are selected, with coaches B.J. Christiansen and Teresa DeGeorge each securing finalist recognition for their respective sports. The award demands devotion and dedication, a reflection not only of wins and losses, but the hours put in developing athletes and refining philosophies. As a result, it should be no surprise that the Marian blue will be represented at the national stage this year.

Before bringing Marian four state swimming championships, Coach Christiansen started his coaching journey at Marian the

2014-15 school year. "I thought [coaching] could be something fun to do," Christiansen said, "and after a few years, I thought it was something I could do long term, but I never expected success."

Coaching today looks very different than what it did even a few years ago. From mental training to nutrition, coaching means more than just overseeing

the physical aspects of the sport. As a young coach, Christiansen "was very focused on the Xs and Os, how to run drills and just the physical nature of the sport. But now, I focus way more on the team culture and mental aspect, where we can train the whole athlete, not just what they are doing in the pool."

High school may only last four years, but the lessons learned last long after the cap and gown are hung. Christiansen wants his athletes to take away that "sports, as a whole, is a microcosm of life. It's going to be hard at times, easy at others, and hopefully fun as well. Being able to navigate the ups and downs, the successes and failures, is essential."

The swimming team will test their success at the State Championships Feb. 26-28. In the meantime, another Marian dynasty is gearing up for their spring season.

No discussion regarding Marian athletics is complete without soccer. The soccer program has brought back 14 Nebraska School Activities Association (NSAA) state championships, marking the most

titles of any soccer team in the state. Led by Coach DeGeorge, the soccer team continues to be a consistent and dominant force in the state today.

Senior Kamryn Wray said, "[DeGeorge] goes out of her way to help and improve your skill and love for the sport. She has created such a powerful program and pushes everyone to their full potential, whether we see it in ourselves or not."

DeGeorge has headed the Marian soccer program for 12 years, during which she has coached and built relationships with classes of Marian athletes. For her, "building relationships and teaching leadership" have been the best moments of her coaching career. The close-knit culture of the soccer program leads DeGeorge to hope that her athletes "look back and realize they made their closest friends through sports."

Sports are a unifying force, one that has the ability to forge the deepest bonds in the unlikelyst of places. It is these collective relationships that allow a culture of camaraderie to persist, pushing athletes to accomplish feats much greater than themselves.

"Winning championships doesn't just fall into your lap. You have to work hard and put in the time. Everything has to be earned – both in sports and in real life," DeGeorge said.

DeGeorge exem-



Coaching from the side. Coach B.J. Christiansen encourages swimmers from the sideline. Under his leadership Marian has won the state championship four times. Photo by RubyScanlan.

plifies the binary nature of coaching, the ability to instill and cultivate a love for a sport while also commanding excellence from her athletes.

Marian Athletic Director, Rochelle Rohlf, said "[DeGeorge] is a confident female leader, who is really good role modeling for [Marian] girls. She demonstrates that women can use their voice to state expectations and be both demanding and compassionate."

Whether or not either of Marian's coaches win, a nomination for National Coach of the Year is an especially prestigious honor that should be celebrated. Their nominations are proof that Marian's success is not accidental, but built, practice by practice, season by season.

"An incredible coach can take a group of athletes and take them from good to great," Rohlf said. "They don't just coach during a season – and during their season, they don't just coach a practice. At Marian we strive for more, because it's not just another high school team."



Half time talks. Head soccer coach Teresa DeGeorge outlines the plan of attack for the second half of the game. Chloe Travis '25 and Abby Nelson '28 listen intently. Marian fell to Lincoln Southwest in the state championship. The final score was 2-1. Photo by Elizabeth Buescher.