

High Hopes: Rex Walters surveys War Memorial Gymnasium, site of what he hopes will be USF's return to basketball glory.



San Francisco Chronicle / Brant Ward

A New Beginning for Men's Basketball

Rex Walters

Born March 12, 1970 in Omaha, Neb.
Grew up in San Jose.

Basketball career

2006-08 Florida Atlantic University
head coach

2005-06 FAU assistant coach under
Matt Doherty

2003-05 Valparaiso assistant coach
under Homer Drew

2002-03 Blue Valley Northwest High
School assistant coach

2000-02 Played for León and Gran
Canaria in Spain and in the ABA
for the Kansas City Knights.

1993-00 Played in the NBA for the New
Jersey Nets (drafted 16th overall),
Philadelphia 76ers, and Miami Heat.

1991-93 University of Kansas

1988-90 Northwestern University

Rex Walters has been named head men's basketball coach for the University of San Francisco. As head coach at Florida Atlantic University since 2006, the former Kansas University star and NBA veteran brings a wealth of experience and an outstanding résumé to the Hilltop.

Walters, named coach on April 14, was the unanimous choice of the search committee formed in March that was led by Chuck Smith, vice chair of the USF Board of Trustees and former president and CEO of AT&T West. The committee, comprised of Jim Brovelli, USF Hall of Fame player and former coach of USF men's basketball, Walt Gmelch, dean of the USF School of Education, and Mario Prietto, S.J., rector of the USF Jesuit Community, worked with executive search firm DHR International, and USF Athletic Director Debra Gore-Mann.

"We have done our very best and hired a high-caliber individual who will lead us to prominence," Smith said.

"His professional reputation, knowledge, and experience in the game of basketball, and his focus on student-athletes make him the perfect fit to lead the Dons," Gore-Mann said of Walters.

Walters replaces Jessie Evans, who took a leave of absence in December and was later terminated by the university. The university brought in Eddie Sutton after Evans' leave was announced to lead the Dons through the remainder of the season. During his stint at USF, Sutton became just the fifth Division I coach to win 800 games when USF defeated Pepperdine Feb. 2.

The USF basketball program has struggled to find its footing in recent years. The team finished in March with a 10-21 record, the third straight losing season for the Dons. But for Walters, the challenge of restoring the program to national prominence was a draw.

"USF set the standard for college basketball and my goal is to make sure that USF gets back to that," Walters said.

In his first season at Florida Atlantic University, Walters guided the Owls to their second consecutive winning season. It was the first time the program posted back-to-back winning campaigns since the team had three straight years of winning basketball from 1989-90 to 1991-92.

In 2006-07, the Owls won 10 Sun Belt Conference games, the third-most for a first-year Sun Belt member. The team also set a program scoring record, averaging 74.9 points per game. Two of Walters' student-athletes were named Second Team All-Sun Belt, the first student-athletes honored with a major postseason distinction under his direction. The Owls were 15-18 overall and 8-10 in Sun Belt Conference play in 2007-08.

"Today is an extremely exciting day for me and my family," said Walters, who attended San Jose's Piedmont Hills High School before going on to graduate from Independence High School in San Jose in 1988. He was recruited by Brovelli, then USF men's head basketball coach, but ended up going to Northwestern then on to Kansas. "I feel

so blessed to have the opportunity to return to the Bay Area and coach at a world class university in an outstanding conference.”

Walters said his biggest goal is to prepare USF players for life after basketball, but that he intends to “win championships and hang banners” at War Memorial Gymnasium. Dedicated to a team axiom of “harder, smarter, and more together,” Walters said opponents can expect a physical game from the Dons in the future, especially in the paint.


Walters rounded out his coaching staff with assistants Danny Yoshikawa, former assistant coach at UC Santa Barbara, Jeff Linder, former assistant coach at Weber State, and Calvin Byrd, former assistant coach at Loyola Marymount who spent two seasons as an assistant at USF under Phil Mathews.

Prior to Florida Atlantic, Walters’ first collegiate coaching job came at Valparaiso, a two-year stint as an assistant under Homer Drew. The 2003-04 Hornets were 18-13 and advanced to the NCAA Tournament after capturing the Mid-Continent Conference with a record of 11-5.

Walters’ pedigree for coaching began as a player, receiving tutelage from some of the game’s legendary coaches. Roy Williams at the University of Kansas and the NBA’s Chuck Daly, Larry Brown, and Pat Riley all mentored Walters during his years as a player.

He starred for two seasons as a player at Kansas. In 68 starts under Williams, he averaged 15.6 points per game, leading the Jayhawks in scoring during both his junior and senior campaigns.

After graduating from Kansas in 1993 with a bachelor of science in education, Walters was selected by New Jersey as the 16th overall pick in the 1993 NBA Draft. He went on to play seven seasons in the NBA.

Walters and his wife, Deanna, have four children, Addison (11), Drew (9), Riley (6), and Gunner (4), and are expecting their fifth child. 

Heinser Grabs Top Tennis Honor




Heinser

USF freshman Jenni Heinser was named West Coast Conference Player of the Year and Freshman of the Year in April. Heinser is the first netter in USF program history to receive either the Player or Freshman of the Year honors for women’s tennis.

Heinser is currently the highest ranked WCC player, checking in at No. 79 in the ITA listing. USF’s Hilary Somers captured co-Coach of the Year honors as selected by her peers. It is the second time Somers has received the honor and first since 2003.

In addition to Heinser, four Dons captured all-league accolades. Mylene Martin earned second team honors in singles, while Jenny Sperry collected an honorable mention singles nod. USF’s doubles tandem of Sperry and Emma Taylor also garnered honorable mention selection.

Heinser is the first USF student-athlete to capture WCC Player of the Year accolades since Scott Cousins (player) and Patrick McGuigan (pitcher) swept the category in baseball during the 2006 season. In addition, Heinser is the first USF underclassman to earn player of the year selection since Aaron Chandler of men’s soccer was selected as a sophomore in 2004. 



USF Legends: Hall of Fame inductees (l to r) Serge Burenin '61, Staale Soebye '94, Wally Hayes, Wallace Bryant '82, Jamie Shadian '99, and Tad Tassone '73.

Six Join USF Hall of Fame

The University of San Francisco celebrated the career accomplishments of six student-athletes at the Fr. Hubert “Hub” Flynn Athletic Hall of Fame Dinner Feb. 15. The event, now in its 49th year, kicked off Homecoming Weekend 2008 festivities. Inductees included:

Wallace Bryant '82 (basketball), considered one of the finest centers in the West Coast Conference, and a two-time All-Conference honoree. Bryant teamed with All-Americans Bill Cartwright and Quintin Daily to lead USF to three consecutive WCC Championships and four NCAA tournament berths.

Serge Burenin '61 (basketball), a member of two conference championship teams who played in USF’s second NCAA tournament appearance. He twice earned All-Conference honors and was named second team All-American in his last year with the Dons.

Wally Hayes, head men’s athletic trainer for more than 20 years and ambassador for USF athletics.

Jamie Shadian '99 (basketball), a starting point guard who was instrumental in two West Coast Conference Tournament titles and subsequent NCAA tournament berths. She was twice named to WCC Championship All-Tournament teams.

Staale Soebye '94 (soccer), a midfielder who led the Dons to the 1991 West Coast Conference Championship. Soebye earned All-American first team honors in 1993 and 1994 as well as four-time first team conference recognition.

Tad Tassone '73 (baseball), a centerfielder who earned All-Conference honors in his sophomore and junior years and was a statistical leader in multiple categories.

FOR THE LATEST NEWS & RESULTS FROM USF ATHLETICS, GO TO:

USF Dons.com