

Huckaby Steps Down as ASU Head Coach

Written by Pat Clifton

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For the first time in the modern era of Arkansas State rugby, a Huckaby is not the head coach of the Red Wolves. Matt Huckaby discretely passed the head coaching baton to Alex Houser in October.

“I’ll still be helping out, but my wife and I have a new baby girl and a two-year-old and I’ve kind of stepped back a little bit,” said Huckaby, who took an administrative job at ASU. “I can still go out there and coach what I coach. It’s going to be business as normal as far as ASU rugby.”

Huckaby said he and his wife had been planning the move for some time, and now seemed like the right time to go through with it.

“(The program’s) in a real good spot, and I wanted to transition when we had a lot of returners and the team was strong. I didn’t want to do it whenever we lost everybody during a rebuilding year, so just felt this was a good time to do it.”

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Houser, an All American at Cal, joined the Arkansas State coaching staff last season, moving west after working with Dan Payne at Life.

“He’s helped out this last year, and I wanted to pick somebody I could kind of groom,” said Huckaby of Houser. “He’s definitely got the rugby IQ, but it takes a little while to learn the actual logistics, paperwork and the administrative stuff that takes so much time as a head coach. He’s a real smart guy.”

Houser spent this summer under the tutelage of former 7s Women’s National Team head coach Julie McCoy, sharpening his 7s chops. McCoy coaches the Little Rock men’s 7s team. A couple of months after taking over at ASU, Houser led the Red Wolves to the program’s first-ever national title – USA Rugby’s College 7s National Championship. Arkansas State beat Houser’s alma mater, Cal, and former employer, Life, en route to the title.

Houser always wanted to be a coach, but didn’t think his first crack at running a team would come with such a high profile program.

“It was something that has kind of been a goal of mine ever since I started playing since I was 14. For whatever reason, I just really wanted to be a rugby coach,” he said.

“That kind of just grew throughout my playing days. I didn’t necessarily expect it to happen at a program the quality of Arkansas State. I kind of thought maybe I might have to go somewhere and help build somewhere else, but obviously when this opportunity came up, I jumped at it.”

Huckaby’s father, Curt, resurrected the Arkansas State rugby program from its ashes and coached it for 14 years before handing off the head coaching reigns to Matt, also a former All American and Eagle.

“It is no secret that our success in Division I closely parallels Matt’s becoming the assistant head coach,” [said Curt in 2010](#). “Matt’s expertise has undoubtedly been the main ingredient for

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our success at the D-1 level.”

Matt's crowning achievement as head coach may have been taking the Red Wolves to the DI-A final in May, where they lost 49-42 in a thrilling championship match aired on the ESPN family of networks and taken in by nearly 9,000 live fans at Rio Tinto Stadium in Salt Lake City.