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Athletics

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DePaul University Athletics Director Jean Lenti Ponsetto greets men's basketball coach Dave Leitao and his family at a press conference in 2015.

The Heart of a Champion

Athletics Director Jean Lenti Ponsetto retires

By Bob Sakamoto

It's the end of an era at DePaul as Athletics Director **Jean Lenti Ponsetto (EDU '78)** announced her retirement. Ponsetto cited the demands of being an athletics director while battling a third recurrence of breast cancer as the primary factors in her decision.

A talented, four-sport student-athlete at DePaul in the mid-1970s, Ponsetto spent her entire career working in Lincoln Park as an assistant women's basketball coach, assistant athletic director, associate athletic director and senior associate athletic director before heading up the department beginning in 2002—an amazing 46-year run.

"Jean is a Blue Demon through and through," said DePaul President A. Gabriel Esteban, PhD. "Her contributions over the years have been significant, and we wish her well in her retirement."

A widely respected leader in intercollegiate athletics and a fierce advocate for DePaul student-athletes, Ponsetto has been the driving force behind the expansion and development of the university's Athletics Department. During her tenure,

14 of the Blue Demons' 15 programs have represented DePaul in NCAA tournaments. These include 17 consecutive NCAA appearances by the women's basketball program, two trips by the softball program to the Women's College World Series, and NCAA tournament berths for women's tennis and men's and women's soccer following BIG EAST titles.

Overwhelming success in the classroom is also a hallmark of Ponsetto's leadership. More than 1,400 Blue Demon student-athletes have been named to conference academic honor rolls. The golf team was academic national champion four times in the 2010s. In 2012–13, women's basketball was ranked second nationally in the WBCA Academic Top 25. In 2016–17, DePaul led the BIG EAST with six team championships and eight team academic awards, including 170 student-athletes named to the BIG EAST All-Academic Team, a university record. The Blue Demons have led the conference in team academic awards for seven of the last eight years.

Ponsetto was responsible for overseeing the development

of numerous athletic facilities, including the Wintrust Arena at McCormick Square, the Sullivan Athletic Center, Wish Field, Cacciatore Stadium, the Cherry Family Indoor Track, the outdoor track at Lane Stadium and the short-game facility at Ruffled Feathers Golf Club. In the last 18 years, DePaul Athletics fundraising has added 48 new scholarships for student-athletes.

A resonant voice in intercollegiate athletics nationwide, Ponsetto has been highly influential in a variety of national leadership roles including vice chair of the NCAA Council and chair of the NCAA Championships Cabinet, the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Com-

mittee, the NCAA Women's Basketball Oversight Committee and the Collegiate Women's Sports Award.

Ponsetto was a member of the original group of administrators who founded the NCAA Champs Life Skills Program in 1993, and is a past president and board member of Women Leaders in College Sports. She currently serves on the board of the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics and is its president-elect.

She is a two-time winner of the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics Athletic Director of the Year award and has been inducted into the DePaul Athletic Hall of Fame, the Chicagoland Sports Hall of Fame and the National Italian-American Sports Hall of Fame.

"DePaul has been a part of our lives for the past 46 years," said Ponsetto, who is married to former Blue Demon basketball star Joe Ponsetto. "It truly has been our privilege and the honor of a lifetime to serve DePaul as athletics director."



DePaul University Athletics Director Jean Lenti Ponsetto with 2019 Athletics graduates.



On Sept. 1, DeWayne Peevy became DePaul's new director of athletics. Formerly the deputy athletics director at the University of Kentucky, he brings extensive experience in all areas of collegiate athletics, particularly men's basketball. Peevy succeeds

Jean Lenti Ponsetto (EDU '78), who retired this past summer after 46 years with the university.

"I am honored and humbled to accept the position of director of athletics at DePaul," Peevy said. "This is an opportunity that I have long dreamed of and one that I do not take lightly. DePaul has a proud and tradition-rich athletics department, and my family and I are all excited to join the Blue Demon family."

A native of Birmingham, Ala., Peevy began his 23-year career in collegiate athletics in media relations as the sports information director for the University of Montevallo, where he earned a bachelor's degree in accounting. During his 12 years at Kentucky, he played a prominent role in key fundraising efforts, strategic planning and media relations.

Peevy served as the liaison to the Southeastern Conference and SEC Network offices and oversaw Kentucky men's basketball, considered the most successful NCAA Division I basketball program in history in terms of both all-time wins and winning percentage. Previously the chair of Kentucky Athletics' Diversity Advocacy Committee, Peevy strongly believes in the role that athletics can play in providing an inclusive and diverse culture for student-athletes, as well as the entire campus.

DePaul President A. Gabriel Esteban, PhD, says, "A visionary leader who cares deeply about his community, DeWayne demonstrates the Vincentian personalism we value so much at DePaul. We look forward to welcoming DeWayne, his wife Allison and their two children, Kaitlyn and Branden, to the DePaul family."

A Second Chance

The NCAA gives 13 Blue Demon senior athletes a chance at another season

Blue Demon student-athletes were hit hard by the news of a canceled season due to COVID-19.

For 13 DePaul seniors from women's tennis and softball, and men's tennis and track and field, there was a silver lining. The NCAA has granted them all an extra season of eligibility.

Here's how the 13 Blue Demons fared during this unprecedented time.

Women's Tennis

Women's tennis was on a winning streak.

After capturing a pair of BIG EAST titles and NCAA tournament berths during the last three years, the 2019 All-BIG EAST First Team selection was off to an 18-11 start in singles before the season was cut short.

When senior Aspasia Avgeri, from

Athens, Greece, first heard the news via a text from her coach, she cried. But a mere 24 hours later, Avgeri received another text—this one about the NCAA's eligibility decision.

"I immediately stood up and started jumping all over our apartment! I'm blessed that I get one more year to be with these amazing people," she says.

Men's Tennis

News of the bonus season has also been welcome news to men's tennis.

"It means we are able to play our hearts out one more season and have an opportunity to close our college career with a conference championship ring," says Dutch athlete Boris Spanjaard.

Hungarian tennis player Tamas Zador has been hunkering down at his girlfriend's house in California. "Luckily, I have been able to work out, as the weather in San Diego is a lot nicer than in Chicago. And yes, I'm working on my tan right now," he adds.

Track and Field

Adam Nelson was in the middle of a workout when he received the bad

news. Ashton Colaire was sitting in his dorm living room. Rebecca Chouinard had stopped by the fueling station when a teammate showed her a tweet.

Brian Mada was in his dorm room and realized the NBA had already postponed its season. All that Rutendo Chimbaru remembers was seeing an email just before taking an exam.

Coach **Dave Dopek (EDU '96)** later met with the team to go over all the possibilities, but news of the waiver gave the players renewed hope.

"This provides us with an incredible opportunity to come back next year and win the BIG EAST outdoor title," says Nelson, who was second in the 60-meter dash and third in the 200-meter race at the conference indoor meet.

Softball

Three seniors from women's softball—Angela Scalzitti, Jessica Cothorn and Krista Dalgarn—are also thrilled at the NCAA decision.

"I am beyond grateful that I will get the chance to put that uniform on again. I can't wait to compete and finish the way I imagined," says Scalzitti.