HISTORY OF EVANGEL UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS

By Dr. David L. Stair
2014

FORWARD

When I was hired to work at Evangel College in May of 1976, Dr. Don Pearson was chair of the Physical Education Department and Aundrae Curtis was Director of Intercollegiate Athletics. Sandra Sorbo was a professor of Physical Education and coach of the volleyball and women's basketball teams. Because those three are the icons of the early years at Evangel College, I feel that I am the “middle man” between the early years of the Athletics and Physical Education Departments and the consolidated Evangel University.

I hope to make this document an informative read for anyone with an interest in this part of Evangel’s history. I also hope this history can be interactive and on-going as alumni contribute anecdotes and facts that may be brought to memory through their reading of this document.

There will not be much time spent here in reiterating the history of Evangel as a whole, as that has been done very well by Dr. Barry Corey and Miss Betty Chase in their writings. Neither will there be an attempt to document every coach, athlete, or statistic as that information is available in the Sports Information Office and in the Evangel archives. All of that can be found on the athletics website under each team’s media guide. Pictures of teams and athletes will be utilized here, but again, a more complete file is available in the Evangel University archive. Rather, this will be an attempt to give an overview of the development of the two departments that are intertwined by occupying the same building and utilizing some of the same personnel in teaching and in coaching.

To begin with, I would like to thank Miss Betty Chase, Evangel’s original archivist, for compiling information on Evangel College in the early years, some of which I have repeated here. The current archivist, Mrs. Shirley Shedd, has been a great help in compiling much of the information contained in this history; she is truly a treasure of the university. Also, Mr. David Fillmore and Kevin Kennedy, respectively Evangel’s first and current Sports Information Directors, were a great help in tracking down a variety of information referred to in this document. I owe a debt of gratitude to the work-study students who helped with researching the archives and scanning documents. The IT Department at Evangel has been an invaluable help in producing this document on the Athletics web page to make it user friendly to all who read it. Mrs. Faye Liddle, Athletics Department Administrative Assistant since 1986, has provided ongoing support in the gathering of materials, the organization of this document, and serving as the original proof reader. And finally I am grateful to Elizabeth Chase for the time she dedicated to editing this document.
I owe a debt of gratitude to my wife Carol and to my children Pamela and David for their support of my career over the years. They enabled me to be the “middle man,” putting up with the late nights and weekends, and sharing the mountain top highs and valley lows. They have been a constant support. My career in athletics was formed over the growing up years as my dad began taking me to Berwick Pa. High School football games at the age of five. He erected basketball goals at both houses where I grew up, and continued to encourage me through my years as a coach. He became one of Evangel’s staunchest fans and supported many projects financially over the years. He and my mom attended many football and basketball games for years. My mom continues to be a supporter of the Crusaders to this day.

Last, I would like to thank all of the wonderful coaches, administrative personnel, and athletes who made the Evangel Crusaders great during my tenure as Athletics Director! You were all outstanding men and women and it has been my great joy to have worked with and watched each one of you excel with the talents God gave you. Thank you to the administrators of the university who I worked with for so many years and who supported the program with their attendance and finances. It was a pleasure to work with President Spence for all but the last of my years in this office; he was supportive in so many ways. Dr. Bicket and Dr. Bernet were my immediate administrators and were both extremely supportive and are good friends. I also appreciated my final year in this office working for Dr. Carol Taylor who is very supportive of our department and will do a great job as President of Evangel University! There are so many people to thank that I will stop here.

Those of us who have worked together for so many years in the athletics and Kinesiology departments have shared sad times as our families have grown over the years. But we have also shared many fun times together. We’ll never forget the Christmas dinners with the Secret Santa gift exchange (the word “gift” was used very loosely); and the many occasions to give the “chicken award” to someone who made a noteworthy slip up. Also, we never missed a chance to have refreshments in the office to celebrate something, even if it was just that it was Friday!

As you read this document and are reminded of an anecdote or memory that you would like to share and possibly have added to this online history, please e-mail it to me at staird@evangel.edu.

THE 1950’s

Evangel College accepted its first class of students in the fall of 1955. There were eight faculty members and 78 fulltime students. At the first faculty meeting on August 30, 1955, the minute’s state, “A motion was made and carried that the faculty decide on school colors to be used. It was voted unanimously to accept maroon and white as the traditional school colors. The decision of the faculty made the “decal” Crusaders, the official “decal” of the school.”

The school colors and choice of mascot were given high priority because the bookstore needed to order shirts and other items to begin to build the morale of the student body for the new college.

In the fall of 1956, Donald “Doc” Pearson began a long career of teaching and coaching at the college. He received his BS in Physical Education at Kansas State College in Pittsburg, Kansas, in 1953, and his Master’s in Education from the University of Kansas in 1958. He went on to earn a Doctorate in Education from the University of Arkansas in 1966.
Doc would go on to teach practically every Physical Education course and coach every men’s sport at Evangel at one time or another. He was affectionately known for his great sense of humor and his genuine care for his students.

In 1956, Doc became the head men’s basketball coach and also the college Athletics Director. He remained as Athletics Director for seventeen years and coached men’s basketball off and on for four years from 1956 through 1964. He was also the track coach from 1960-1968 and cross country coach from 1967-1970.

In 1955-1956, a group of Evangel men got together and decided to form a basketball team. They played their games against other local teams in the Senior League at the Boy’s Club across the street from Central Assembly of God on Boonville Avenue. The arrangements to play in this league were made by the Academic Dean, Dr. Richard D. Strahan. David Lawrence was the men’s dormitory supervisor and he organized the basketball team that played the first year. The team was given the name “Trojans” by the Boy’s Club League (interesting because the Crusader mascot had been agreed upon the previous fall). The first game was played on Tuesday night, Feb. 7, 1956. The team did not have uniforms so they wore gym clothes for their games.
Players on the first team included Hugh Mullon, Walter Bacon, Del Wayne Nimmo, Marvin Allen, and Larry Rodahl. The acting team manager was Bond Bayse. When Coach Pearson came to town the following year, he quickly organized a team to begin playing other college teams in the area. The 1957 yearbook shows a picture of the men’s basketball team in uniforms and reports that they won fifth place in the Springfield Collegiate Club League.

The women’s dorm organized a pep club called the “Pepperettes.” They had thirty-one, members which was remarkable since the entire student body only numbered one hundred. Out of the pep club, four girls were chosen as Evangel’s first cheerleaders: Carol Nollsh, Dinah Garza, Caroline Reis, and Nellie Moses.

As is stated in other histories of the College, all of the first buildings were wood barracks built by the military for use as a hospital during and after World War Two. One of those barracks buildings was designated as a “new” gymnasium. It had a hardwood floor, an area of concrete floor on one end that could hold a small set of bleachers, and a locker room. The roof of that building was raised eight feet by Joe Miller to accommodate basketball and volleyball games. Interestingly, this building was originally used as the cafeteria for prisoners of war who needed medical assistance.

The first gymnasium ended up being thirty-five feet wide and seventy-eight feet long from one end of the basketball court to the other. While maintenance was working on the gym, basketball practices were held on an outdoor court that was situated near where the maintenance area is today. The gym court was so narrow that a dotted line was painted down both sides to use as a “throw in line” during games. The
college’s outdoor facilities were comprised of the two-goal outdoor court previously mentioned, along with a softball field.

Because the NAIA would only recognize an accredited institution, Evangel could not join in the 1950’s. However, the basketball program was recognized as an NAIA program long before the university became a member. Although recognized, the team would not have been eligible for NAIA post-season play. The Physical Education program began in 1955 with the teaching of activity classes for both men and women. That first year the men’s classes were taught by Dr. Strahan and the women’s classes by an English teacher, June Droke. When Don Pearson was hired, he began teaching the Physical Education classes for men. In 1960, a minor in Physical Education became possible with the hiring of a second faculty member in the department. During that time Doc began teaching swimming and lifesaving classes at the Boy’s Club swimming pool.

In 1958, Forest Arnold was hired as head men’s basketball coach which freed Doc to concentrate more on teaching. Forest was a basketball All-American from Memphis State who later became the head coach at Central Bible College.

During the 1950’s, Doc was also in charge of the men’s dorm. Therefore, he was in charge of intramurals from 1956-1964. All of the Physical Education classes, intramural games, and basketball games and practices were held in the one small gymnasium on campus! The old gym was torn down shortly after construction of the Ashcroft Center was completed in 1967.

Because it is not clear exactly when the Evangel Alma Mater and Fight Song were written, they will be attributed to the late 1950’s, unless someone can provide additional information. Leslie Stubbs was the first chair of the Music Department and the lyrics for both are attributed to him. In the 1960’s, band director John Shows arranged both so they could be played by the band at various events. The alma mater had to be slightly altered when Evangel College became Evangel University. The alma mater’s original words and music were written by L. Stubbs and it was arranged by Harold Smith.

To you Evangel College,
Our voices we will raise.
As memories softly call us
To happy yesterdays.
Where we choose to wander
Our hearts will faithful prove.
To you, our Alma Mater,
Though we’re far, far from you.

When Evangel became a University, Music Department Chair John Shows changed the first line to read:

To you our dear Evangel,
Our voices we will raise.

The fight song lyrics are:

Fight on, Crusaders
The victory will soon be won
With pride our hearts beat high
We’ll fight to win or die
Rah Rah Rah

Fight on Crusaders
We pledge our love and loyalty
So fight for Maroon and White
And Crusader victory

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The first baseball team at Evangel was started in 1958 and played in the YMCA league.

Dr. Don Pearson served as chair of the Physical Education Department from 1955-1973. During those years there were not enough faculty members to actually be considered a department. From 1971-1973, Physical Education was part of the Department of Education and Behavioral Sciences. From 1973-1976, the Physical Education Department was under the Division of Science and Technology. Then, in 1976-1980, the department was combined with the Department of Social Science. Alex Karmarkovic was chair of that department through 1979. In 1980, Health, Physical Education, and Recreation became a stand-alone department and Doc was named chair. He remained chair through 1983 at which time Sandra Sorbo was named to that position; she served from 1983 through 1999. Dr. David Stair became HPER chair and served as both Athletics Director and Department Chair through 2007. Dr. Keith Hardy took over the chairmanship in 2007 and the department was eventually renamed the Department of Kinesiology.

THE 1960’s

In February 1960, a basketball game against Tabor College became the first Evangel Homecoming athletics event. In order to take advantage of having a basketball game as part of the festivities, Homecoming that year was held on February 12 -13. The game was played in the O’Reilly Gymnasium on the corner of Glenstone and Division. Evangel College won the game 79- 65. The high scorer in the game was future Evangel University Vice President for Advancement Jim Williams. Basketball games were the norm for homecoming for the next few years until 1968 when a soccer game against Ottawa University was played. This game was made possible by the addition of bleachers to the athletics field and was the first fall homecoming in Evangel’s history.

Soccer was continued as the homecoming game through 1974 when the sport was dropped and basketball scrimmage games were instituted for home coming for 1975 and 1976. Then football became the traditional homecoming event beginning in 1977 through the present day.

1960 saw the birth of the Women’s Athletic Association at Evangel organized by the women’s Physical Education Department. Mrs. Enke was the sponsor and it was only open to women. They helped start women’s intramural sports in ping pong, basketball, tennis, and volleyball.

In 1960, Coach Pearson started a track program at Evangel because that was his area of expertise. Once again, Joe Miller came to the rescue by scooping an oval out of the athletics field with an army surplus grader; it was not a full quarter mile but was used for practice and meets in the early years. The pole vault pit at the time presented some challenges because it was sand rather than a padded pit. The pole vaulters spent anxious moments on the way down after clearing the bar! At times, the Evangel track team used the track at Drury for meets and actually competed against Drury for a number of years. In the middle 1960’s, Cliff Creek joined Doc as a coach of the team and the 1966 track team was undefeated with a record of 10 wins and no losses. When Cliff became agitated about something he became known for the strongest language he ever used, “good gravy honk!”
During the early years, players and coaches alike piled into cars to travel to away contests. Eventually, Joe Miller purchased a couple of Army surplus buses which Cliff Creek fixed up to transport the teams. Cliff also became the bus driver for the teams, swimming classes, and in later years, the nurses traveling to Cox hospital for their classes. One of Cliff’s early memories of the away track meets was of five or six cars going down the road with poles and javelins roped to the outside of the doors because there was no other way to transport them to the host school.

In 1963, men’s tennis was added as a varsity sport under head coach Ralph Dodge. According to the school newspaper, the Lancer, team members included V. Wayne Klemin, Steve Tatum, L. Combs, Roger Quigley, and Bob Heide.
In 1964, men’s golf was added under head coach Stanley Burgess. Players were Dave Sloan, Dave Wahl, Lynn Freiheit, and Bill Pollard.

A new faculty member and coach was added in 1964 when Sandra Sorbo joined the Physical Education faculty. During those early years, Sandra not only taught classes but coached every sport for women at Evangel. Tennis was the first sport on the list begun in 1966 followed by volleyball, softball, and track in 1967. Basketball started in 1968 and field hockey enjoyed a one year season in 1969. Sandra eventually was forced into retirement by MS which she had battled valiantly for many years.

Marilyn Gallaher Jansen commented on Evangel University's link regarding Sandra:

"Sandra was not only my coach, but my friend. When I had no money for books she made sure I had what I needed. She was always considerate and kind and helpful. Later when I took a turn at coaching she was such a great mentor. It was such a privilege to call her friend."

Donna Pittman has some fond memories of Sandra that she shares for this document:

“My sister, Carol (Pittman) Burns (‘70), and I (Donna Pittman ’71) transferred to Evangel in 1968 from Oral Robert's University. Carol was a junior and I was a sophomore. Having been involved with girls' basketball all our lives in Northern Missouri growing up, we immediately became interested in participating in the new women’s sports at Evangel.

Sandra Sorbo was our coach from the beginning to the end of our years there. Sandra also got me interested in volleyball which our high school never had for girls. On occasion she even talked Susie Catozzi and me into refereeing some intramural and high school games. Susie was quite good at it, being a physical education major. But me, not so much.

Besides all the spiritual growth, studying, and side jobs in which we were involved, we needed the physical outlet of sports to round out our college experience. We enjoyed playing with our teammates and forging great relationships with the players and our Coach Sorbo.

Sandra Sorbo was a great coach and teacher. We had great respect and admiration for her and all she accomplished in her years at Evangel. We went back to visit her several times over the years because of that special Christian relationship and kinship we shared over the years.

The first year we were living in the "barracks" and we didn't even have real uniforms for our basketball team, but that didn't matter. We played our hearts out anyway! Besides all
the fun times, I remember one away trip that wasn't fun and never happened. Our van overturned, and one player, Sandy Plummer, was seriously injured. I also remember in that second year of women's' basketball that we went to full court. That took some adjustment, especially for those of us who had started out with half-court b-ball. We had rovers for a while, and while I was there we never had 3 point shots out at the top of the circle, and that was my favorite spot.

Carol asked me to include her in this trip down memory lane since she is traveling the next few days, so I have gladly given you some insight to what the beginning of women's' sports at Evangel University was like for the two of us. It is probably the biggest reason we transferred to Evangel, besides being closer to family.

Thanks for letting me go back in time and remember. I got tears at one point writing this, and then I started laughing thinking about how awful of a ref I was. It has reminded me of so many teammates I haven't seen in years. I had to get out my Excalibur and look up pictures of days gone by. Thank you, again.”

Polly Duncan Cartright (Class of 1974) also shared memories of her time with Sandra as her basketball coach:

“As a 1970 freshman, I was excited to be a part of Evangel College. By Christmas break I had gained my freshman 20 (pounds) and realized that I badly needed exercise. Rhonda Jennings (Jenkins) and I became roommates in January and we both decided to join the basketball team. Rhonda was very athletic and I was only on the team for the exercise. I never worked so hard in my life. On the day that Coach Sorbo handed out uniforms I was very excited. I had arrived. After the first game, when I didn't even make it on the gym floor, I decided that I should wash my uniform and make it ready for the next game. We had white shirts with maroon trim on the neck and sleeveless armholes. After washing my uniform in hot water and drying it, I realized that something was terribly wrong. My uniform had faded and I had a "pink" uniform instead of a white one. When I walked into the gym for the next game, my teammates and Coach Sorbo just laughed. There was nothing I could do. I was stuck with a pink uniform for the remainder of the season. I was so embarrassed at every basketball game. When the season was over, I had lost the 20 pounds I gained my first semester and I quit the team. I decided that cheerleading would be my future because I wanted a different uniform. To this day, I'm sure that no one has worn a pink uniform representing Evangel.”

In 1967, the men’s basketball program at Evangel became a member of the NAIA. The NAIA had not yet begun offering championships for women, so they competed in the Missouri Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (MAIAW Div. II). It was not until 1983 that the women’s program joined the NAIA.

In 1967, the Ashcroft Center was opened for use, designed for a campus with a future enrollment of 600. At the time Doc Pearson stated he could not imagine how we would ever use all of such a large building. The Ashcroft Center was designed after an airport terminal that had been constructed in Texas by a supporter of Evangel. He stated he would supply the labor if the university would build a similar building on campus. Over the years, the playing surface has been updated, basketball goals improved, many offices added, and a weight room added and enlarged. Needless to say, the university long ago outgrew the Ashcroft Center and badly needs a new Activities Center to house the quality of teams that compete there. When the Ashcroft Center was constructed, it was not anticipated that football would become a varsity sport with the need for a large locker room, coach’s offices, and training rooms. Many alumni jokingly state that they hope a new building will still “smell like the Ashcroft Center!” The Ashcroft Center was used as a chapel during the opening weeks of the fall semesters from 1977 to 1980. At times, it was also used for graduation, special meetings, etc.
From Springfield Leader and Press, Oct. 18, 1966, pg. 1 (and the paper only cost 5 cents at that time!)

“Evangel Ready for Hurricane

A hurricane in the Ozarks? It’s not likely, but Evangel College will be ready. Bill DeWitt, a partner in DeWitt-Newton, Inc., contractors for the new Evangel activities building, told the Council of Evangel College yesterday that a building of the same type construction withstood a hurricane in Corpus Christi, Tex. “A building of this same type of construction, hyperbolic paraboloid thin shell, in Corpus Christi, Tex., withstood a hurricane,” he told council members. “The roof,” DeWitt said, “spans 150 feet without obstructions and this design is no more expensive than any other type of construction with a comparable unsupported roof span.” Evangel College President J. Robert Ashcroft said future college buildings will harmonize with the library and activities building, but hyperbolic design will probably not be appropriate for all structures.”

There are many stories about Doc that have been told down through the years; following is one of those from an Evangel alumnus, Greg Wiles, Class of 1991:

“I was in a swimming class taught by Doc Pearson. We met at the local YMCA and used its swimming pool facility. On the first day of class, Doc (I am guessing was in his 70’s at the time) presented a challenge for the class. He stated that if someone wished to race him the length of the pool and back and, if they beat him, they would receive an automatic “A” in the class. I and several other PE majors immediately accepted the challenge. I remember thinking we were young studs in our 20’s getting ready to make our first easy “A”. I thought there was no way a 70-year-old man could beat a few vigorous young men in a swimming race. The challenge was on! The whistle blew and we all dove into the pool and swam our arms off. I was the first student to touch the side of the pool and I did a fist pump to celebrate my automatic “A” in the course. Then I looked up and saw Doc Pearson soaking wet from the swim standing on the edge of the pool. He not only beat us, but beat us by such a margin that he had plenty of time to get out of the pool to watch us all finish, smiling the whole time. Moral of the story: never judge your opponent on age alone. Thanks Doc Pearson for the great memories!

I am certain those of you who played football at Evangel remember the huge rainstorms that inevitably led practices into the gym. During one of those times, we were running routes inside the gym and I ran a 5-yard-and-out route. The ball was thrown a bit outside of my reach and I did what any normal receiver would do – I dove for the ball. I failed to realize how close my route was to the wall and flew into it full speed. I laid there pretty much dazed from the impact. Coach Charles Linn was standing close by and came to help me. After asking me if I would be okay and if I thought I could stand he said, “That’s the hardest hit you’ll take all year!” No glory in the fact that it was from the gym wall! Thank you, Evangel, for these and other innumerable, wonderful memories!”
Sometime during the late 1960’s or early 1970’s, the practices of initiation activities into the Letterman’s Club were begun. Many of these activities took place at Roaring River State Park and included new athletes passing through lines of upperclassmen who paddled them with wooden paddles as they went down the line. Another initiation activity that was reported by an alumnus occurred in Springfield. New student athletes were blindfolded and driven to the old fountain at Cox Hospital on Boonville, stripped to their underwear, dropped into the fountain, and left to walk back to campus. Naturally, that type of activity would be considered hazing today and would be illegal.
In 1969, Glenna Donaldson was hired as secretary to the athletics department and served in that capacity until 1986. In May of 1986, Glenna was killed at the intersection of Glenstone and Kearney on her way to work. Her killer was a driver under the influence who was being chased by the police department. He ran the red light and T-boned her, sending her to intensive care where she only lived for a day. Her sudden death was a shock to everyone in the department at that time!
Men’s wrestling and women’s volleyball were both begun in 1968.

Jeff Heikenfeld, Class of 1972, writes:

“I was a member of the first wrestling team (club). Dr. Pearson was driving one of two vans on the return trip from an away meet. Our first van passed a radar car and we were not speeding "Doc" was a bit behind and trying to catch up. Instead he caught a traffic citation. We met as previously planned at a restaurant. Dr. Pearson was quite unhappy and wanted to know why we did not signal him. The wrestlers offered to pass on dinner that "Doc" could use the money to cover the ticket. With his usual thoughtfulness he refused. The kidding was fairly subdued until the waitress took the orders and I said then give the ticket to the guy at the end of the table needless to say it got a bit rowdy after that. Dr. Pearson decided at the end of the season to give letters out to the wrestlers.”
Also in 1969, Evangel first fielded a women’s basketball team. Sandra Sorbo was the first coach. The same year men’s track actually hosted all home meets on the on-campus track. Women’s tennis and women’s softball also started in 1969.

Men’s soccer was first played in 1968 and the team was invited for the first time to the NAIA District Championship in 1972. The 1973 team was ranked number twenty in the nation in NAIA polls.

**THE 1970’s**

The 1970’s were characterized by teams being transported in the “Silver Eagle” and the “Great White Whale.” The Silver Eagle was a donated Trailways bus and the Whale was a white Army Surplus bus. Both were driven by Cliff Creek and Leland “Sarge” Wilkinson. If Sarge was driving and a bus broke down, he would always blame it on Cliff for not fixing something. If there was a breakdown when Cliff was driving, he would always blame Sarge for running it into the ground!

Steve McKinney (1970) remembers:

“During my freshman year (1968-9) we had a basketball road trip to play Park College in Kansas City, and the old bus broke down about half way there. Coach Aundrea Curtis hitchhiked to the next town and rented a Buick and drove back to the bus and picked up
six players (Mike Gammell, Steve Grant, Bill Wagner, Don Jenkins, John Gregg, and Steve MacKinney - all of us 6’3 to 6’6) and packed us and our travel bags into the car. We arrived at the gym five minutes before the game was to start. They gave us a couple minutes to warm up which was barely enough time to shoot a few layups, and started the game. Coach Curtis warned us to avoid fouling since we had only six players. We fell behind 17-0 as we were still cold and stiff and afraid of getting in early foul trouble, but once we got loose, we went on a run and took the lead. The rest of the team arrived quite a bit later and watched from the bleachers since there wasn’t much time left in the game and we had a comfortable lead.

During the 1970-71 season, we had a game in Arkansas and Coach Jerry Wheeler drove his car and Chris Minor drove his. (There was probably a third car, maybe driven by Wayne Tesch who was the assistant coach). Chris was driving down a long hill on a two lane highway with a ditch on our side and a steep hill going down from the other side. Also in the car were Gary Ragain, Roy Gibbs, John Porter, and Steve MacKinney. (There was probably one more but I don't recall who). There was 6” of snow on the ground and the roads had not been plowed so Chris was driving slowly. A large sheet of snow blew off a truck in the other lane and landed on our windshield, totally blocking our view of the road. Chris hit the brakes and we started sliding from side to side as he was steering into the skid and trying to avoid going into the other lane. It seemed like we slid forever since we were going so slow and the hill was so long. We slid into the ditch and settled into a snow drift. We were all dressed up in our pregame clothes, but we piled out into the snow to try to push the car back onto the road. We were not able to move the car, but we did manage to get snow and mud all over us. A man in a pickup stopped and pulled us out and we continued on to the game. Very soon after that, the school started renting vans for our road trips.”

Mike McCorkle (1970) has some interesting memories of the early years:

“When I arrived at Evangel (1966-1970), the only new building on campus was the library. While I lived in Springfield and was a commuter student, most of the athletes resided in Dorm 257, a two story barracks from the old O’Reilly hospital. Across the street, in an apartment in another barracks, lived chemistry professor Joe Bohannon. Big Joe was then single and quite hefty. One of his favorite things to do, I am told, was to enter Dorm 257 about 2 AM on a weekend evening, making as much noise as he could, yelling: “Rapture practice, rapture practice, everybody up!” Joe’s size and faculty status gave him immunity from retribution, despite the angry jocks he left in his wake.

While at Evangel, I played on the EC golf team. But my favorite golf tournament was the AG Open, a campus tournament played with real golf clubs and balls in the long barracks hallways of the old hospital. A nine hole golf course was set up primarily inside the buildings, though there was at least one hole that required a chip across a parking lot from one set of barrack stairs to another. Some of the holes measured over 200 yards long. The hardest were the doglegs, since they required stopping your ball at the intersections of the crossing hallways to hit toward the hole. To penalize errant shots “toilet paper traps” were constructed along the sides of the hallways. You could use more than one club, so some contestants even “employed” caddies, including comely coeds and Dr. Bohannon. Someone also tipped off the local media, so Channel 10 showed up with a video camera and news of the tournament made it onto the 10 o’clock news. Each participant paid an entry fee and all the money was then spent on trophies. My third place trophy is still one of my proudest possessions.
We had this old surplus public school bus that provided transportation for athletes for away games and meets. I remember one trip we made up I-44 to Rolla, where the golf, tennis and track teams all competed against the University of Missouri at Rolla. On the way back, the bus broke down. Fortunately, the bus driver was track coach Cliff Creek, also a seasoned mechanic. But even Cliff decided he could not repair the bus, especially in the dark. So we all piled out and pushed the bus the mile to the nearest gas station.”

One night, Cliff was driving the men’s basketball team back from a game north of Lake of the Ozarks. The brakes gave out coming down a hill leading up to the dam at Lake of the Ozarks, Cliff managed to keep the bus on the road and got across the dam with everyone in one piece. Another time, Sarge was driving the women’s basketball team to William Woods College and ran out of gas on the Jefferson City Bridge. Naturally he blamed Cliff for not filling both tanks to the brim! Sarge always carried a billy-club under the bus seat “just in case someone needed an attitude correction!”

Sarge had a gruff exterior but inside was a heart of gold. The following blog from basketball alumnus Jose Rivera illustrates who Sarge really was:

“Recently I was thinking back on when I spent a few years in the Midwest. It was in the late 70’s. I was attending Evangel College in Springfield, Missouri at the time. It was wintertime and for some reason I felt it would be helpful to polish up on my swimming skills. So I signed up for a class. Once a week a bus would pick us up and transport us to another campus cross town which had a beautiful indoor swimming facility. Our bus driver’s name was old Sarge. He was probably in his sixties at the time and seemed like a nice enough fellow. One day after returning from swimming lessons I happened to be the last student exiting the bus. Before I hopped off, Sarge nudged me and asked me to wait, because he had something he wanted to give me. He quickly reached over to the left side of the driver’s seat and handed me a big brown paper bag. I had no idea what it could be. I curiously reached into the bag and pulled out a beautiful brand new winter coat! Amazingly, he had taken notice that I didn’t own a coat so he went out and bought me one! Sarge knew that the weather in the Midwest was a bit more brutal than California’s mild climate. He told me he wanted to make sure that I stayed covered up and warm for the winter, it was so kind and thoughtful of him. It made me feel so good that he took it upon himself to genuinely look out for me! I thanked him and have never forgotten his kindness.”
1973 was an important year for Evangel’s cheerleading squad as male cheerleaders made their first appearance.

Aundrae Curtis began his basketball coaching career in 1972 and was named Director of Intercollegiate Athletics in 1974. He filled that role until 1981.
In 1974, President Robert Spence decided that the soccer program would be discontinued. It was often thought that this was to make way for adding football, but the discussion to begin a football program did not occur for another year.

In November of 1974, Evangel students and CBC students played the first “annual” CBC vs. Evangel football classic. Evangel won the game 12-0 with Bill Houseman scoring both touchdowns. In April of 1975, Evangel and BBC played a football scrimmage in full uniform (uniforms borrowed from BBC) which Evangel won 12-6. This game was played on Evangel’s “newly acquired” athletics field. These football games were strictly on an intramural basis and were not played under the auspices of the athletics department.

Football vs. CBC – Nov. 1, 1974

Football vs. BBC – April 26, 1975
In 1976, David Stair joined the Evangel faculty as an assistant professor in the Physical Education Department and coach of the women’s tennis team. He was named women’s basketball coach in 1978, and began work on his doctoral degree in 1978. In 1982, he was named Director of Intercollegiate Athletics. He later held the dual role of Director of Intercollegiate Athletics and Chair of the Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation from 1999 to 2007. He coached Tennis at Evangel from 1976-1983 and Women’s basketball from 1978-1984. During his years as tennis coach, he recruited and coached Evangel’s first female All-American, Tracy Zinn. During his tenure as basketball coach, his 1979-1980 team was ranked seventeenth in the nation in AIAW Div. II. This was Evangel’s first nationally ranked team in any sport.

In the fall of 1976, President Spence announced to the campus that Evangel College would field a football team beginning the fall of 1977. Evangelist Denny Duron was announced as the first football coach and the program was run from the Public Relations office rather than from the athletics office. Athletics Director Aundre Curtis was instructed to build a schedule for the 1977 season, and John F. Kennedy stadium at Parkview High School was secured as the site for home games. David Fillmore was hired by Neil Eskeline, Development Director of Evangel College, as the first Sports Information Director. His office was maintained in the Public Relations office area. David was a graduate of Evangel and would go on to gain many accolades as District 16 Sports Information Director as well as the Heart of America Athletics Conference SID. The NAIA bestowed its highest award, the Ike Pearson Award, on Dave in 1999. David Fillmore passed away at a young age in 2008 of complications from mesothelioma.
Evangel Athletics was not yet associated with a conference, so building a schedule was a daunting experience. In the early years there were many outstanding football players recruited to Evangel, but it was still difficult to win games. The only teams who would consent to play Evangel were teams who felt they could beat us. It was often necessary to pay a guarantee for teams to come to Springfield to beat us! The first game was played on Sept. 10, 1977, with William Jewell narrowly beating the Crusaders 7-0 at John F. Kennedy Stadium in Springfield. The first homecoming game was played at JFK on October 8 against Arkansas Tech and resulted in a 58-15 loss.

Coach Duron was able to recruit assistant coaches who, like himself, had been professional players; the roster of coaches included former players from five professional teams. The buzz created by the startup of the football program and the publicity gained through Coach Duron speaking around the country resulted in a huge enrollment increase for the university. Over the next few years, the enrollment jumped almost 400 students.

The Public Relations office arranged for the football team to stay overnight on away trips to minister in local Assembly of God churches on Sunday morning. The team was formed into a choir, players and assistant coaches gave their testimonies, and Coach Duron preached. Although the wins were few and far between, the team had an impact on increasing the enrollment dramatically and in ministering to many young people in churches around the Midwest.

The early years of football saw the production of a syndicated weekly hour-long highlight TV show. This show was produced by KY3 TV and hosted by sportscaster Ned Reynolds. The show featured highlights of the previous game, testimonies by the players, and an interview with Coach Denny Duron. Guests on the show included Terry Bradshaw of the Pittsburgh Steelers, Pat Tilley of the St. Louis Cardinals, and Roger Carr of the Baltimore Colts.

An interesting sidelight is that future Athletics Director David Stair was eventually tapped as the home game public address announcer for the football program. He was eventually followed by Jerry Breaux who handles those duties to this day.

The 1978 football team created quite a buzz when they defeated Southwest Missouri State University 33 – 21 at JFK Stadium. The next year, SMS got revenge at their home field but only by 8 points, with a final score of 17-9.

It was during the mid-1970’s that Evangel was blessed with two of the greatest athletes ever to play at the College. Leon Neal was recruited by Coach Aundrae Curtis to play basketball; and Tracy Zinn was recruited by David Stair to play women’s tennis, volleyball, and basketball. Tracy came from Kickapoo High School in Springfield, and Leon came from Cuesta Community College after growing up in Watts, Los Angeles. Both would go on to become the first All-Americans in college history and both are still renowned as one of the best athletes in their sport(s) in Evangel history.

During the 1970’s and into the 1980’s, the crowds at men’s basketball games were electric! Many games were sold out with people standing in the corners of the Ashcroft Center. In those days, Evangel played in District 16 of the NAIA and that District included almost all of the colleges and universities in Missouri. The 1979 women’s basketball team started the season undefeated at 9-0 and ranked seventeenth in the nation. All of a sudden, crowds were great at the women’s games as well. Teams commonly played by both the men and women included Missouri Southern, Missouri Western, Lincoln University, Southwest Baptist, Drury, and even SMS. With the pep band playing and the arena filled to capacity, the Ashcroft Center was the best home court atmosphere in the NAIA!

John Ferguson shares the story of an Evangel vs. Drury basketball game in 1975:

Drury’s All-American, number #15, Jerry “J.D.” Alexander was the centerpiece of the Drury basketball program from 1975 to 1979. With “J.D.” leading the way the 1979
Drury team claimed the NAIA national championship while fashioning a 33-2 record. He was a two-time NAIA First Team All-America selection and was the Drury program's all-time leading scorer with 2,280 points. In 1975 Evangel’s Crusaders were visiting Drury for a preseason game. Evangel first year players, Mark Brattrud and I (Jon Ferguson) were substitutes, sitting at the far end of the bench, with no possible hope of getting into the game. Our bodies becoming antsy as we grew bored of our situation didn’t slow down our minds that were racing 100 mph. So we thought of ways to entertain ourselves. We started using the team water bottles to squirt unsuspecting fans and then would secretly watch as they tried to figure out where the water was coming from. At the same time, Evangel was not faring too well as the game progressed especially with Mr. Alexander wreaking havoc. Then a group of my hall mates from Scott 2nd North dorm began chanting, “We want Ferguson, We want Ferguson.” An idea was beginning to form in my mind. I thought, I can guard Mr. Alexander better than we are doing at the present, so I decided - Why not? What could it hurt? I am not going to get into the game anyway. With Mark’s prompting I casually stood and walked behind the player’s bench to the scorer’s table. No one paid any attention to me. I told the scoring official that I was substituting. When play stopped the referee waved for me to enter the game. I replaced the young man guarding J.D. As play started up again I kept one eye on Mr. Alexander, while trying to guard him, and the other on head coach Aundrae Curtis. After several short seconds a surprised coach bounded out of his chair, as if stung by a scorpion, grabbed the assistant coach and excitedly spoke something to him. The assistant, Mr. Munnerlyn, quickly shook his head back and forth signifying an emphatic NO! The head coach then quickly grabbed the nearest player off the bench and half drug, half carried him to the scorer’s table. He was inserted into the game taking my place and I was hustled out and back to the confines of the far end of the bench. The coach turned beet red and was so proud of me he was unable to speak. I had been on the court a total of maybe 17 seconds.

The 1970’s also featured some of the best baseball teams that Evangel has ever had in its history. During that era, Evangel was considered one of the top four baseball teams in the state of Missouri at any level.

Barbara (Roach) Jenkins (1977) writes:

“We have never had the opportunity to meet. I graduated from Evangel in 1977 with a BA in Physical Education and a double minor in Psychology and Spanish. I have wonderful memories of my years there. Our PE professors in those days were Coach Moon, Coach Creek, Coach Curtis, Mrs. Wortz, Miss Sorbo and Doc Pearson. Coach

1978 Basketball Team

Barbara (Roach) Jenkins (1977) writes:

“We have never had the opportunity to meet. I graduated from Evangel in 1977 with a BA in Physical Education and a double minor in Psychology and Spanish. I have wonderful memories of my years there. Our PE professors in those days were Coach Moon, Coach Creek, Coach Curtis, Mrs. Wortz, Miss Sorbo and Doc Pearson. Coach
Moon left after my freshman year. If I recall, Coach Curtis was the AD and Doc Pearson was the Department Head.

There were great times spent and many laughs to be had officiating intramural sporting events as part of our grade in Miss Sorbo’s Sport’s officiating class. I remember most of us being really nervous about taking Kinesiology because as underclassmen we would see students coming out of that old classroom with the proverbial “deer in the headlights” look. Perhaps that served us well because I do remember Miss Sorbo telling us we were the most competitive class she had to that point. I remember the final term paper and classroom presentation—we had to analyze a sport skill. I chose the “Front Crawl” in swimming. I remember typing it on my suitemate’s electric typewriter because I had a manual one and I remember having it done for an entire week before it was due!

I remember going on the bus (“Sarge” was the bus driver) to the Boy’s club for swimming class with Doc. While this was an elective class for those outside the PE department, it was mandatory for us. Although I was a fairly good swimmer, I was petrified of going off the diving board!! Everyone knew it but I conquered that by using a skill from Doc’s gymnastics class—diving in backwards—which most others were scared to do—go figure! That summer during one of the “day camps” held on campus Grant Jones and I accompanied a group of “kids” on a boy’s club field trip. We played water polo with them.

Coach Curtis and Coach Creek were among my all time favorites. Coach Creek’s wife June was the college receptionist and was a gem herself! Coach Curtis usually served as an “advisor” during New Student Orientation. I remember being assigned to his group as a student assistant my sophomore year. At the end of the week he invited everyone in his group to his home.

My student teaching semester was memorable for all the obvious reasons, but, here was a highlight. I was a traveling elementary school PE student teacher and went to 4 elementary schools and 2 Jr. Highs. During one of the times that Miss Sorbo came to observe me—it was close to Easter break—and I had a kindergarten class that day. With Miss Sorbo at my side I told this group of 5 year olds that we had a special visitor that day—one kid shouted out “The Easter Bunny?” She and I both laughed, but when I told them it was “my teacher” they seemed pretty impressed by the fact that I still had a teacher. I remember that Miss Sorbo thought it was pretty amusing watching me march around the playground with 5 year olds.

At the end of this month it will be 35 years since my graduation from Evangel. Although I did some substitute teaching my career took a different path into Social Services/Law Enforcement. I thank God continually for leading me to Evangel College in the fall of 1972. In fact, when I applied for admission there, I applied nowhere else. There are so many people who God used to make an impact on my life—so many. Thank you for sending this email. Thank you for the opportunity to relive, if just for a few minutes, some of my great memories!”

THE 1980’s

In 1981, then women’s tennis coach David Stair’s father donated $61,000 to install six lighted tennis courts on campus. These were state of the art courts and served the tennis teams well for many years. Unfortunately, the university maintenance budget was not sufficient to keep them in good repair. Cracks
developed and they were no longer acceptable for competition.Presently, an intramural fieldexists where the courts were once located.

In the early 1980’s, the university was not able to provide funding for a variety of projects that were necessary to keep the athletics program afloat. Doc Pearson and Dr. Stair chose to do much of the work themselves. They put new roofs on the wooden baseball dugouts, installed a privacy wall in the women’s visitors’ locker room, and carpeted the classrooms. They scrounged the carpet from the Assemblies of God Headquarters when they were told the missions department had replaced theirs and it was now stored in the warehouse.

![David Fillmore – Far right, and Sarge – center, working a basketball game](image)

The Crusader Athletic Hall of Fame was initiated in 1983 by Athletics Director Dr. David Stair to honor athletic achievement and also meritorious service to the department. Currently there are individual athletes, coaches, and entire teams honored in that Hall. Following is a list of the Hall of Fame inductees through 2013:

1983: Ken Cornwell
      Dr. Donald Pearson
      Wayne Tesch
1984: Bob Curtis
      Lauren Ward–Parsons
1985: John January
      Norman Trzaskoma
1986: Peter Lima
      Dr. Fred Mihm
      Joye Wampler–Steir
1987: Don Jenkins
      Steve Maruszak
1988: David Bittinger
      Clifford Creek
      Merry Gunnett
      Gary Hines
      Rodney Hoover
1989: Sandra Sorbo
      Arthur Stair
1990: Rev. Ben Kaufman
      Ian Ferguson
1991: Aundrae Curtis
      Sam Der-Yeghiaan
Terrill “Terry” Velin
1992: Leta Stanton-Amon
1993: Dale Frankum
      Leon Neal
1994-1996: No inductees
1997: Celeste Johns-Jenkins
1998: No inductees
1999: Denny Duron
2000-2005: No inductees
2006: Jim Bailey
      Steve Jenkins
2007: David Fillmore
      Jim Mittan
2889: Kirt Hartzler
      Sandy Jacobson
      Don Decker
      Lynn Bowen
      Marcy Snider
      Kirk Spain
      Jay Hellwig
2009: Camilla Hartzler
      Aimee Lanter
      Barry Kemp
2010: H.C. Pfeifer
      Steve Richardson
      Summer Naegel
      John Wachob
2012: NAIA-II Men’s Basketball National Champions
      1966 Undefeated Men’s Track Team
2013: 1988 NAIA National Semi-Final Football Team

Also in 1986, a group of men volunteered to scrape the asbestos shingles off the old baseball field house and re-side it with 4’x8’ sheets of board siding. That job was all done in one day. No one knew then the asbestos siding was dangerous to your health! Following that project, baseball coach Shawn Kuhn took it upon himself to nail 4’x8’ sheets of plywood over the entire interior of the field house, vastly improving its look and usefulness. He also installed heat which made it useful all winter. One weekend during this era, when the university would not agree to paint the inside of the gymnasium – which was badly needed – the
coaches and players pitched in and painted it in twenty-four hours! In 2010, SID Kevin Kennedy actually painted it again with little help.

In 1986, Faye Liddle became the Administrative Assistant to the Athletics Director, following the tragic death of Glenna Donaldson. Faye became not only the “secretary,” but developed into the ticket manager, accountant for almost 100 budget lines, work study coordinator for the department, and confidant to coaches and students. In 2012, she received the Alumni Award for Meritorious Service at Homecoming.

In 1987, Ann Steketee became the secretary for the HPER department, and later the Administrative Assistant to the Chair of Kinesiology, replacing Mary Virden. As the department grew with new majors added, her responsibilities increased at the same time.

In 1987, Evangel’s athletics program took a giant leap by joining the Heart of America Athletics Conference. Joining the conference meant that all teams had a ready-made schedule and only needed to line
up a few games each season to round out a full schedule. This was particularly important for the football team to be guaranteed a majority of their games against schools that were similar to Evangel.

In 1988, the football team had an outstanding season by going undefeated in the regular season and then advancing to the semifinal round in the NAIA playoffs. Unfortunately, it was discovered that year that two seniors had competed in preseason scrimmages during their “redshirt year.” Although it was not the fault of any of the players, including the two seniors who had participated, the university was compelled to step forward and vacate the conference championship. Interestingly, not many years later, the NAIA changed the rule. Playing redshirts in preseason scrimmages is now an accepted and legal practice. Those were difficult days for players, coaches, and administrators, but it was a decision that had to be made for the future integrity of the program. In October 2013, the 1988 team was inducted into the Crusader Hall of Fame as one of the best football teams in Evangel’s history.

The first athletic trainer, Phil Laporta, was hired when football was started at Evangel. He and his wife were residence hall directors and Phil also served as an assistant football coach. After a few years, Betty Tilleman was hired as Evangel’s first full time athletic trainer and she worked tirelessly for many years. She was eventually hired by CoxHealth and left Evangel in the early 2000’s to work in high school athletics. CoxHealth eventually began furnishing two athletic trainers to Evangel and in 2011 Evangel hired a head athletic trainer, Sarah Walters, to oversee the care of the athletes.

Additional baseball field improvements took place in 1988 with the donation of a major backstop by Cliff and June Creek, and the installation of sod and a sprinkler system donated by Cliff and June along with then baseball coach Gary West.

Greg Wiles recalls an interesting incident from his semester taking a swimming class from Doc at the local YMCA. On the first day of class Doc – who was in his 60’s – presented a challenge to the class. If someone could beat him in swimming two lengths of the pool they would get an automatic A for the class. Several of the young studs in the class immediately took Doc up on his challenge and the race was on. Greg was the first student to touch the wall and was already counting his automatic A. However, when he looked around for Doc, he found him already out of the pool, standing on the deck, watching all of the students finish well behind him!

Greg also remembers the time when the football team was practicing in the Ashcroft Center on a “rainy day.” He dove to catch a pass and ended up head first into a wall. Coach Linn was standing over him and after asking if he was okay he made the comment “that’s the hardest hit you’ll take all year!”
The 1980’s were characterized by a fierce but friendly basketball rivalry between Evangel and School of the Ozarks (now college of the Ozarks). Coach Jenkins and Coach Waller were the best of friends, but when Evangel went to play at Point Lookout in Branson, Al pulled out all the stops. Every year he would capitalize on the fact that some Evangel students at one time labeled School of the Ozarks as “The Farm.” When Evangel went to play them, they had Farmer Night complete with cow pie throwing contests, hay bales, and Al’s staff dressed in bib overalls with red bandanas.

One year we decided to turn the tables when “the farmers” came to the city to play at Evangel. Evangel’s coaches dressed in tuxedos and the Springfield Mayor was present to give Coach Waller a key to the “big city.” It was a fun night!

THE 1990’s

In the 1990’s, Evangel’s football team would become known as the “winningest” college football program in the State of Missouri. The 1990’s began with the football team taking part, in the summer of 1991, in the first ever football games played in China. The volleyball team traveled to Guatemala the next year in 1992.

In March 1990, football coach Keith Barefield reported an invitation from the Chinese government for Evangel’s football team to play in the first ever football games played in mainland China. Evangel was allowed to choose the team that would travel with them to be the opponent on this three-week trip. Coach Barefield knew the head coach at another Christian school, Pacific Lutheran University from Tacoma, Washington who accepted the invitation to join in on the trip. The traveling party consisted of sixty people from each school with the Chinese government picking up all of the cost except for the air fare over and back.

Traveling to China was an unforgettable experience with football games played in Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. But the highlights of the trip were all of the cultural sites visited, meals eaten in some of the best
restaurants in the country, and the many, many friends made during the trip. The Chinese government
treated the teams like royalty and made this the trip of a lifetime.

Some of the funds for the trip to China were raised by a golf tournament organized by Coach Barefield’s
brother Ron, and a banquet and auction attended by then Governor John Ashcroft. Friends of the program
bid large amounts for footballs that would be brought back after being used in the historic first game in
Beijing and for other football memorabilia. Faye Liddle, Administrative Assistant to Athletics spent a huge
amount of time organizing the banquet and the auction to follow.

Both KY3 and KOLR TV stations sent photojournalists along on the China trip and later produced
documentaries to show live on local TV in Springfield. Their expensive video cameras were confiscated at
the Beijing airport upon our arrival and not returned until we were on our way back home. So they had to
use the personal video cameras of people in the traveling party to get their footage. Fortunately, the finished
product turned out to be very professional.

Alex Bryant was a member of the football team that went to China and he writes:

> One of my fondest EU memories is when the football team took the trip to China. I
> remember walking along the streets of Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou and having the
> little Chinese people come up to and rub my belly and call me Buddha. All over the
> country no matter where we were, The Great Wall, Tiananmen square, or the Forbidden
> City - they would all come up to me and smile real big and want to rub my belly and say
> "Buddha". NICE!

In May of 1992, Coach Dani Helm took the Volleyball Team to Guatemala where her brother-in-law Dave
was a missionary. Dave arranged for the Guatemala Government to provide a bus and a guide to take the
team to a variety of towns and cities in the country to play volleyball, give their testimonies, and see the
sites. The team played against the Guatemala National Team in Guatemala City and played exhibition
matches in several other cities. They also put on clinics for the children in each place.
In one small town marketplace, the team had just reunited after an hour of shopping when a short Guatemalan gentlemen in an old plaid green sport coat came up to the group carrying a guitar. Before leaving the states, the team had learned several gospel choruses in Spanish so they could minister in area churches. All of a sudden, the man began to strum and sing one of the choruses the team had learned. Before long he had gone through the entire list of choruses the team had learned in Spanish. By that time a crowd had gathered and the team had a chance to hold a street meeting right there in the market! We all believed we had witnessed the ministry of an angel in a green plaid sport coat that day!

Coach Helm was in her first pregnancy on this trip and all the traveling over mountain roads was difficult for her. Her personal sacrifice of comfort paved the way for a ministry trip that those who participated will never forget!

The football locker room finally got a facelift after twenty-two years, coming close to being condemned by the health department due to a continuing staph infection. Originally, the old “temporary” lockers were thrown together using particle board when the program was initiated in 1976. The idea was that they would soon be replaced with permanent lockers. In 1998, AD David Stair initiated a bid process with Pepsi Cola and Coca Cola that resulted in a huge ten-year contract for the university with Pepsi. A portion of those funds were designated to enlarging the football locker room and weight room. One hundred permanent lockers were purchased for the locker room. In order to stretch the dollars as far as possible, Football Coach Charlie Linn along with several football players spent the summer of 1999 using a jackhammer, shovels, and wheelbarrows to remove a section of the floor to install floor drains before the new lockers were installed. This is just one more example of the “can do” attitude of Evangel’s athletes and coaches over the years.

A large void was felt in the Department when Doc Pearson retired in 1993. During his retirement years he enjoyed woodworking and visiting with his grandchildren. He and Georgia lived at Maranatha Village for a number of years and then Doc spent many years in a nursing home due to a loss of memory. He is sorely missed at Evangel.

In 1996, the NAIA announced that there were not enough member schools playing football for them to continue offering two divisions. From the 1997 season on, Evangel was no longer in Division II in NAIA football. That left basketball as the only sport divided into two divisions in the NAIA.
Sandra Sorbo retired in 2000 due to health complications brought on by her long time fight with MS. She continued her interest in supporting her sister who was a missionary in India.

The early 2000’s were highlighted by the 2001-2002 men’s basketball team winning the first NAIA national championship in any sport at Evangel. Coach Steve Jenkins was named NAIA Coach of the Year after the historic win hosted by College of the Ozarks in Branson.

A new baseball and softball field house was completed in 2007 after an anonymous donation made it possible. They installed four indoor batting cages, offices, locker rooms, and training rooms in this state of the art facility that still exist today. At the same time, the softball field was turned 90 degrees and both baseball and softball received new concrete dugouts. The baseball outfield was also filled in to make a safer playing surface. The planning for this facility received much input from softball coach Jerry Breaux and baseball coach Al Poland. Since the completion of that project, Coach Breaux and Coach Lance Quessenberry have added press boxes to their fields and Lance has added chair-back fan seating down the sidelines of the baseball facility.

During the 2000’s, Coach Steve Jenkins, Coach Leon Neal, and Coach Mary Whitehead raised funds to improve the men’s and women’s basketball locker rooms and the volleyball locker room respectively.
The 2000’s saw the advent of the athletics missions program labeled T.E.A.M., The Evangel Athletics Ministry.

After accompanying the football team to China in 1991 and the volleyball team to Guatemala in 1992, it became a burden for AD David Stair to involve more of the Evangel athletes in missions’ projects. With the hiring of assistant football coach Chad Gehring that desire became front and center, as Chad had the same vision for Evangel athletes. Beginning with the 2008 football team trip to Kyrgyzstan, this program came into fruition. Chad has organized many trips, including taking the baseball team to Mexico, cross country to Peru, the football team twice more to Kyrgyzstan, tennis to Italy, track to Jamaica, and volleyball, women’s basketball, and softball to Guatemala. Two future trips to Guatemala are planned for 2015. Chad has also organized opportunities for Evangel athletes to work with the Salvation Army and Convoy of Hope. Coach Breaux organizes a softball team trip to the Hillcrest Children’s home each fall, and Coach Illum involves the football team with the Boys and Girls Clubs on a regular basis. The dream for T.E.A.M. is alive and well!

Evangel track celebrated two individual NAIA national champions in the 2000’s. Josh Hacker won the Outdoor Track Discus title in 2002 and Macy Mitchell won the Indoor 400 meters in 2003. Evangel’s cross country and track program continues to send participants to the NAIA National Meets on a regular basis.

The 2000’s saw the athletics department honored in several ways: Dr. Stair was inducted into the NAIA Hall of Fame in 2006, the Springfield Sports Hall of Fame in 2007, and the Berwick Pa. Sports Hall of Fame in 2007. These accolades would not have been possible without the great job done by all members of the Athletics Department. On the academic side, Dr. Stair received the Clark Award for excellence in teaching in 2004.

In 2007, Dr. Keith Hardy was named chair of the Health, Physical Education, and Recreation Department. Since then, that department has greatly expanded its offerings and had its name upgraded to the Kinesiology Department. Then, in 2009, he received the Orvil and Jewell Mills Young Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Dr. Keith Hardy

The 2007-2008 basketball season saw the Heart of America Conference playing in NAIA Division I for the first time in history. The Crusaders would make the DI national tournament for the first time in the spring of 2008.
Under Coach Debbie DeAlmeida, the women’s tennis team began gradually improving to become a force in the Heart of America Athletics Conference. In the spring of 2013 the tennis team made an appearance at the NAIA National Tournament.

THE 2010’s

For many years Steve “Hollywood” Walton has been a fixture on the Evangel campus and at athletics events. As of this writing Steve works full time with the Physical Plant and continues to keep his own personal scorebook at all men’s and women’s basketball games.

Sandra Sorbo passed away in 2012 due to complications from MS. She had lived in her own home until the last year of her life when she moved to assisted living at Culpepper Place. She is very much missed!
Coach Steve Jenkins has been inducted into three Halls of Fame in recent years. First was the Springfield Sports Hall of Fame in 2011, and then came the Missouri Basketball Coaches Hall of Fame in 2012, followed by the NAIA basketball coaches’ Hall of Fame in 2014.

Coach Leon Neal was inducted into the Springfield Sports Hall of Fame in 2012, followed by the induction of daughter NaTasha Neal in 2014.

As of this writing, Doc Pearson is living in a nursing home in Mount Vernon, Missouri, and maintains his trademark positive attitude about life in general.

Upon my retirement on July 15, 2014, I pass along the reins of this great Athletics Department and its outstanding staff and student athletes to the care of the next administration. My prayer is that the next Athletics Director (Brenton Illum) and Administrative Assistant (Becky Bryant) will oversee the growth and development of Evangel athletics with the same love and energy that Faye and I have attempted to bring to the job every day! God bless Evangel Crusaders!