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Cope resigns as Montana basketball coach

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BASKETBALL COACH

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The University of Montana will have a new basketball coach next year when it opens its 1970-71 cage campaign.

Robert D. Cope announced Wednesday that he resigned his position as head basketball coach for the Montana Grizzlies. The resignation is effective April 1 when Lou Rocheleau, present Tip cage assistant, takes over as head mentor.

UM athletic director and head football coach Jack Swarthout announced Wednesday that Rocheleau was the new Tip coach and said, "We are sorry to lose Bob. He and Lou have done a tremendous job rebuilding our basketball program. We are glad that Lou is staying with us to continue their fine work."

Cope leaves the University to enter private business and carries a 17-35 record with him after two years as Grizzly coach. He said, "I regret leaving the University of Montana but I think I can help the school in my new business. President Pantzer, coach Swarthout and everybody I've been associated with here have been very helpful and cooperative. I thank them."

While Cope's record in rebuilding the Grizzlies dips below the 500 mark, his overall coaching record is still quite impressive. He has chalked up a 261-127 record in 19 years of coaching.

Lou Rocheleau also brings an impressive record to his first job as a head college basketball mentor. As head hardcourt coach at Missoula's Sentinel High School, Rocheleau recorded a 314-79 win-loss mark.

Rocheleau said, "I'm very happy to return to the University as head coach, but regret the loss of Cope. I just hope I can continue to build the fine program he initiated two years ago."

more

MONTANA'S NEW HEAD COACH

Lou Rocheleau has been Cope's assistant for the past two years and has been in charge of the Grizzly defense and scouting Tip opponents.

He is a World War II veteran and was an outstanding basketball and track athlete at Montana. Rocheleau graduated from the Missoula university in 1948 and was a head prep basketball coach from 1951-1968.

As football, basketball and track coach at Beaverhead County High School in Dillon in 1950-51, Rocheleau guided each team to divisional championships.

He has been at Missoula County High School (now Sentinel) since then, working as head basketball and track coach and B squad football coach.

Rocheleau has never coached a team that has had a losing season, and his teams have taken three state and nine conference or divisional championships. His finest seasons were the undefeated ones of 1962-63 and 1963-64, when the Spartans were 22-0 and 27-0. He has produced 26 all-state players.

As head track coach through 1965, when he stepped out of that post, Rocheleau led his teams to 75 wins and 12 losses, seven Interscholastic titles, three second-place finishes at the state meet, and 11 divisional championships. He coached 11 state record-holders.

As B squad football coach from 1951-1962, Rocheleau saw his teams win 69 and lose 12, with six undefeated seasons.

Rocheleau was named Montana high school basketball Coach of the Year in 1958, 1959, 1960 and 1963. The award was originated in 1958.

In 1958, he was also given the Sportsman of the Year Award by the Missoula Chamber of Commerce.

COPE'S OUTSTANDING CAREER

Cope began his coaching career in 1951 at Suffolk County Air Force Base on Long Island NY

After studying for his Master's Degree, which he received from the University of Montana in 1955, Cope returned to Long Island as head cage coach at Syosset High School until 1957. He then moved to California, where he was head coach at Piedmont, Calif. High School until 1962.

From 1962 to 1964, he coached teams at Southwestern College in Chula Vista, Calif., where Gary Meggeline and Dennis Biletnikoff, Grizzly cagers in recent years, played junior college ball.

In the 1964-65 season, he was head coach at the Naval Training Center in San Deigo, and then he was selected as head coach for the national All-Navy team competing in the world-wide Intra-Service Basketball Championships.

Cope's athletic career has included sports other than basketball, although he is best known here for still holding several UM cage scoring records.

In 1946, he was the national high school javelin champion while at Missoula County High School.

He was named to the Helm's Athletic Foundation All-America basketball team in 1948, and played professional baseball in 1951 with the Billings Mustangs of the Pioneer League.

In 1961, he was named high school coach of the year by the Berkeley, Calif. Gazette for the Bay area. His Piedmont High School team of 1961-62 won the Northern California Acker Tournament championship, and three members of that team went on to play major college basketball.

His accomplishments in university brought about his selection as a member of Silent Sentinel, UM senior men's honorary. He is a member of the UM Basketball Hall of Fame and the State of Montana Athletic Hall of Fame.

His wife, Renate, earned a Master's Degree from Columbia University, and taught in the health and physical education department of San Francisco State College when former Grizzly football coach Doug Fessenden was chairman of the department. Bob and Renate have one daughter, Edith.

No assistant basketball coach has been named yet for the Grizzlies.

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