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Steve Lappas

PROFILE



Position:
Head Coach

On the spring day of April 14, 1992 Steve Lappas returned to Villanova University with a mission of establishing a potent program of national scope.

Clearly, he has delivered on that promise.

Under his guidance the Wildcats have scaled new heights. Twenty wins have been recorded in six of the past seven seasons. There have been four trips to the NCAA Tournament in that period. No Big East squad has recorded more 20-win seasons since the start of 1993 than Villanova.

Lappas came to the Main Line from Manhattan College, where he constructed an excellent program from the ashes of one of America's worst Division I entries. At Villanova, Lappas set out to continue the reputation he had built at Manhattan.

After an initial season of rebuilding, his 1994 squad did a complete about-face, bringing a special brand of basketball to the Main Line. That year, Villanova finished 20-12, posting its first 20-win campaign since the 1988 season, winning 14 of its final 17 contests, and capturing the school's first National Invitational Tournament title. Lappas was named the Coach of the Year in the East region by Basketball Times, Coach of the Year by Big East Briefs, and received a Special Recognition Award from the Philadelphia Big Five after the Wildcats' special season.

In 1995 Lappas and Villanova made the nation sit up and take notice. With future All-American and Big East Player of the Year Kerry Kittles leading the way, Villanova finished the season 25-8 overall and set a school record for Big East victories (14). The Wildcats won the school's first-ever Big East Conference Tournament Championship and returned to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in four years. In 1996, winning once again was the norm. Lappas guided

Villanova to a school-record 26 wins against only seven defeats, and returned to the NCAA Tournament for the second-straight season. That season, Villanova also reached its highest-ever ranking in the AP poll, checking in at No. 2 in December.

In 1997, Lappas led the Wildcats to Villanova's first Big East Conference regular-season crown since 1983, as his team posted an overall mark of 24-10 and league record of 12-6. Tim Thomas became the first Wildcat in history to earn National Freshman-of-the-Year honors, and the Wildcats advanced to their third NCAA Tournament in as many years.

The Wildcats returned to the limelight in 1999. The Top of the World title in Alaska set the tone for an entertaining campaign that included upset victories over Arkansas, Syracuse and St. John's on the way to a 21-11 finish. An NCAA Tournament bid was again Villanova's reward.

In 1999-2000, Lappas earned his 200th win as a college head coach on Jan. 12 against La Salle (80-72). Weeks later, he notched his 150th win as the head coach at Villanova, when the Wildcats defeated St. Joseph's 68-61. With 88 Big East wins to his credit, Lappas ranks seventh all-time in conference victories.

Winning is not the only benchmark of the Lappas regime, as player development has also become an important signature of his tenure. When players come to Villanova, improvement inevitably follows. Kittles is a prime example of this. The New Orleans, La., native was not ranked among the nation's top 50 high school prospects when he arrived on the Main Line in 1992, but left Villanova as one of the most heralded players in school history. Kittles earned virtually every Big East Conference honor during his four-year career, including selection as a first-team Associated Press All-American as a senior. Kittles' isn't alone either. Center Jason Lawson improved his game drastically in his four years in Lappas' charge, and point guard Alvin Williams developed his shooting touch over the four years he spent on the Main Line.

The developmental theme continues today. In 1999, John Celestand was selected with the first pick of the second round by the Los Angeles Lakers and remained on the roster throughout the 1999-2000 season. Celestand played four seasons on the Main Line.

The National Basketball Association has taken notice of the work Lappas and Co. have done. Kittles and Thomas were both lottery picks, as Kittles was selected with the eighth choice by the New Jersey Nets in 1996. He went on to become one of the league's class rookies, earning second-team All-Rookie acclaim in 1997. Thomas, meanwhile, earned the No. 7 spot in the NBA Draft in 1997, selected by the Nets and later traded to the Philadelphia 76ers. The second round saw two Wildcats taken, with Lawson drafted by the Denver Nuggets (and traded to the Orlando Magic), Williams selected by the Portland Trail Blazers and the selection of Celestand by the Lakers.

Prior to his arrival on the Main Line, Lappas authored a remarkable turnaround as the head coach of Manhattan College. The New York, N.Y., native earned Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference Coach-of-the-Year honors in 1992 after guiding the Jaspers to a 25-9 overall record, their best finish in school history, and a third-round NIT appearance.

It was the culmination of a four-year period in which the Manhattan program had done a complete about-face. Lappas had engineered a conference championship out of a team that had won only 75 games from 1980 until his arrival in 1988. In addition to league honors, Lappas also earned National

Association of Basketball Writers District II Coach of the Year, and was named New York Metropolitan Coach of the Year.

Prior to his successful seven-year run as a collegiate head coach, Lappas made his debut on the Main Line as an assistant for Rollie Massimino in 1984-85. Throughout his four seasons as an assistant, Lappas helped guide the Wildcats to their unforgettable National Championship 1985, an NCAA final eight appearance in 1988, and an 87-53 record along the way.

Lappas' career began after his graduation from the City College of New York in 1977 when he served as a volunteer coach at York College for one season, followed immediately by a one year stint as an assistant coach at Fort Lee High School. He then took over the reins of the Harry S. Truman High School program, in the Bronx, NY, in 1979, where he served until 1984. Just as he would in his three collegiate positions Lappas began his coaching career with incredible success at Truman. He compiled a 91-32 slate during his tenure, including a 27-3 record in 1983-84 and the New York State Class A Championship. Twice he was named Coach of the Year by the New York Daily News in 1981 and 1984.

Before he took to the hardwood as a coach, Lappas spent three years in the gym as a basketball letterwinner for CCNY, earning a bachelor's degree in elementary education. Team captain as a junior, Lappas initially set his sights toward becoming a teacher. His father, Thomas, had always stressed the importance of education while young Steve was growing up in New York. Although Lappas ultimately chose a different career path, the Wildcat mentor found a way to fulfill the goals inspired by his father by teaching his student-athletes the fundamental skills of basketball, and also the importance of values gained off the court. Achievement of goals is the cornerstone of Lappas' philosophy, and he has instilled that drive in the student-athletes that play basketball at Villanova. He is truly an educator of young men, in basketball, and in life. It is but one more mark of success in the life of Steve Lappas.

The 45-year-old Lappas and his wife Harriet are the parents of two children, Kristen (12) and Peter (9), and reside in Broomall, Pa.

The Fight Against Cancer: Coaches vs. Cancer

Lappas Lends a Hand

Villanova head coach Steve Lappas and his family have been involved in variety of community programs in his tenure on the Main Line. At the top of that list is Lappas' work on behalf of the Coaches vs. Cancer.

Coaches vs. Cancer was founded on Oct. 18, 1993 in the wake of the death of former North Carolina State coach Jim Valvano along with the news that former Missouri coach Norm Stewart's was battling the disease. The National Association of Basketball Coaches formed a partnership with the American Cancer Society. In 1995, the Women's Basketball Association joined the partnership.

Lappas joined forces with the other five Division I basketball coaches in the metropolitan Philadelphia area to help fight the disease. A golf outing is held each year in October and since its inception the event has raised over \$115,000 for the American Cancer Society.

In addition to the golf outing, each school - Drexel, La Salle, Pennsylvania, St. Joseph's, Temple and Villanova - participates in the 3-Point Attack Program where alumni and friends pledge money per 3-point shot during the regular season and then make a final donation at season's end.

In 1998 a new tradition was borne to benefit the local Coaches Vs. Cancer chapter. A tipoff breakfast was developed and in each of the past two years that event has been held the Monday morning following NCAA Tournament Selection Sunday.

"There is no doubt about the impact cancer has on so many families," Lappas said. "That's what makes the work being done by Coaches vs. Cancer so essential. The more we can do to increase awareness and raise revenue, the better the chance that a cure can be found."

Those interested in the Three-Point Attack program or in making a one-time donation can telephone (215) JOIN-ACS or contact Coaches Vs. Cancer at the American Cancer Society, 1626 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

VILLANOVA SEASON HIGHLIGHTS STEVE LAPPAS, 1992-00

1999-00 (20-13 overall, 8-8 Big East): It was business as usual in 'Cat Country as Villanova notched its sixth 20-win season in the past seven years. Senior Malik Allen was the emotional leader, averaging 14.2 ppg and converting game-winning baskets against Bradley in December and Pennsylvania in January. In its first season of complete round-robin action in the Philadelphia Big Five, the Wildcats earned a share of the City Series title with a 3-1 record. A strong stretch run was highlighted by wins over Georgetown (72-69), Notre Dame (86-69) and Seton Hall (87-74). Villanova became only the third team in 21 Big East seasons to win 19 games and not hear its name called on Selection Sunday by the NCAA Tournament committee. It did, return to the NIT, however, for the first time since winning the event in 1994.

1998-99 (21-11 overall, 10-8 Big East): With the lessons of '97-98 fresh in their memory, Villanova bounced back in strong fashion, winning 21 games and earning its fourth invitation to the NCAA Tournament in the past five seasons. The Wildcats wasted no time in making a statement about the kind of campaign this was to be by rolling to the championship of the Top of the World Classic in Fairbanks, Alaska in November. Senior guard John Celestand was named Tournament Most Valuable Player as the Wildcats defeated Nebraska (75-60), UA Fairbanks (66-57) and No. 19 ranked Arkansas (74-62) en route to the crown. In Big East play, the Wildcats hit their stride in late January and early February, posting thrilling victories over Georgetown, Rutgers and Syracuse. On the final day of the regular season VU defeated No. 8 ranked St. John's 66-60 before a national television audience. Celestand and classmate Howard Brown were both superb in their farewell to the Main Line while center Malik Allen emerged as a consistent low-post presence.

1997-98 (12-17 overall, 8-10 Big East): After losing four starters, including three to the NBA, the Wildcats finished the 1997-98 season with a mark of 12-17 overall and 8-10 in the Big East Conference. Juniors John Celestand (13.2 ppg) and Howard Brown (13.1 ppg) both recorded excellent seasons, coming into their own and serving as the team's leaders. The Wildcats finished strong, winning two of their last three games, including a 96-93 double-overtime victory over Pittsburgh in the Big East Tournament. Brown hit the gamewinner with no time

left on the clock, providing one of the most memorable moments of the season. Other high points of the season included a 68-57 victory over No. 16-ranked Temple and a 78-75 win over Miami in The Pavilion.

1996-97 (24-10 overall, 12-6 Big East): In 1996-97, Villanova captured its third-ever Big East Conference regular-season title, with the Wildcats recording a league mark of 12-6 to share the title with Boston College, and earning their third-consecutive trip to the NCAA Tournament. Additionally, the four-year record of 95-37 (.693) from 1993-97 rates as the best in school history for a class (Jason Lawson, Alvin Williams, Chuck Kornegay), and ranked 14th in the nation over that span. Additionally, Tim Thomas became the first Wildcat in history to earn National Freshman-of-the-Year honors, and joined Lawson and Williams as NBA draft picks. The three Villanova players taken rated as the most from any single school that year. The 1997 campaign was special at Villanova for another reason as well. On Jan. 25, 1997, in an 84-66 victory over Boston College, Steve Lappas earned his 150th career win. Then, on March 1, 1997, he achieved yet another milestone when the Wildcats defeated Rutgers, 84-74, to clinch the Big East title. That game marked Lappas' 100th victory on the Main Line, making him only the fourth coach in Villanova history to reach the century mark. He joins Alexander Severance (1936-61), Jack Kraft (1961-73), and Rolie Massimino (1973-92) in the prestigious club.

1995-96 (26-7 overall, 14-4 Big East): In 1995-96, Villanova posted 26 victories, the most wins in a single season by any Wildcat squad in school history. The Wildcats spent the entire 1996 season ranked in the Associated Press top 10, reaching a school-record No. 2 in December, and duplicated their school-best 14 Big East Conference regular-season wins from the season before. Head coach Steve Lappas was cited as one of the five finalists for the Naismith National Coach of the Year. The Wildcats earned their second-straight No. 3 seed in the NCAA Tournament, and advanced to the second round of the competition. Guard Kerry Kittles closed out his Villanova career as one of the most celebrated players in Wildcat history, becoming the school's first Associated Press All-American in 25 years and the first Villanovan to be named the Big East's Most Outstanding Player when he earned the honor as a junior. Kittles was drafted No. 8 by the New Jersey Nets, and went on to earn second-team All-Rookie honors in his initial campaign in the NBA.

1994-95 (25-8 overall, 14-4 Big East): While winning was the buzzword in 1996, remarkable was the adjective used to describe Steve Lappas' 1995 team. The Wildcats won their first-ever Big East Tournament Championship that year, rewriting the record books and recording one of the greatest wins in school history by defeating Connecticut in the title game. In addition, Villanova won 14 Big East contests and earned its highest seed (No. 2) in the tournament since 1983. The Wildcats returned to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1991 and finished the season with a No. 9 AP ranking, their highest ranking in the final poll in recent history. Lappas' efforts did not go unnoticed. He was presented with the Harry Litwack Award as Eastern Coach of the Year by the Philadelphia Sports Writers Association, earned Big Five Coach of the Year, and was a finalist for AP and Naismith College Coach-of-the-Year honors. Other landmarks along the course of Lappas' third year at Villanova included his 100th career collegiate coaching victory on Feb. 7 (73-63 victory over Miami) and his 50th career win at Villanova on Feb. 28 (92-68 victory over Boston College).

1993-94 (20-12 overall, 10-8 Big East): The success of the 1994-95 season came on the heels of Villanova's first NIT title in 1994, only Steve Lappas' second season on the Main Line. Villanova won 14 of its final 17 games, finishing a full seven victories better in the Big East over a one-year span. At that time, no other Big East club in league history had improved so dramatically in 12

months. Villanova recorded a mark of 20-12 overall, its first 20-win season since the 1987-88 campaign and improved from 10th in the league in 1993 to tied for fourth. For his incredible achievements during the 1994 season, Lappas was voted Coach of the Year in the East region by Basketball Times, Coach of the Year by Big East Briefs, and received a Special Recognition Award from the Philadelphia Big Five.

1992-93 (8-19 overall, 3-15 Big East): Steve Lappas arrived on the Main Line, named as Villanova's seventh head coach on April 14, 1992, and spent his first season rebuilding the Wildcat program. The New York native signed Jason Lawson and Alvin Williams, future NBA draft choices, a pair that would serve as the cornerstone of the program for the next four years. That season, Villanova played with spunk, coming up with big wins over No. 12-ranked Syracuse and No. 15-ranked Pittsburgh. Lance Miller led the team in scoring with an average of 13.7 points per game, and a freshman named Kerry Kittles made his debut on the Main Line.

YEAR-BY-YEAR WITH STEVE LAPPAS

Year	Overall	Conference	School/Postseason
1988-89	7-21 (.250)	3-11 (.214)	Manhattan College
1989-90	11-17 (.393)	7-9 (.438)	Manhattan College
1990-91	13-15 (.464)	8-8 (.500)	Manhattan College
1991-92	25-9 (.735)	13-3 (.813)	Manhattan College/MAAC Champs/NIT 3rd Round
1992-93	8-19 (.296)	3-15 (.158)	Villanova
1993-94	20-12 (.625)	10-8 (.556)	Villanova/NIT Champs
1994-95	25-8 (.758)	14-4 (.778)	Villanova/NCAA 1st Round
1995-96	26-7 (.788)	14-4 (.778)	Villanova/NCAA 2nd Round
1996-97	24-10 (.706)	12-6 (.667)	Villanova/NCAA 2nd Round
1997-98	12-17 (.414)	8-10 (.444)	
1998-99	21-11 (.656)	10-8 (.556)	Villanova/NCAA 1st Round
1999-00	20-13 (.606)	8-8 (.500)	Villanova/NIT 2nd Round
Totals	212-159 (.571)	111-97 (.534)	NCAA Record: 2-4 (.333) / 4
@VU	156-97 (.617)	79-70 (.530)	NIT Record: 8-2 (.800) / 3
@MC	56-62 (.475)	31-31 (.500)	Big East Tourney: 8-6 (.571) / 7

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