

Hank Biesiot needs just six wins to pass Frosty Westering for the most wins all-time

By Jake Knabel, NAIA Sports Information Intern, jknabel@naia.org

When Hank Biesiot steps onto a football field, he feels 22 again. Never mind the fact that he has coached football for more than 40 years. That number seems completely irrelevant as he prepares for yet another season at the helm of Dickinson State (N.D.) football. The butterflies still churn within as the leaves turn and football Saturdays arrive once again.

"It's still a thrill," Biesiot said. "I still get that knot in my stomach as I get ready to go on the field. It's something that every player and coach feels. There's nothing like that walk to the field right before game-time. I get the same feeling now as I got taking that walk in 1967."

However, 2011 offers Biesiot a chance to feel something different - such as what it's like to be on top of the NAIA coaching world. Only the retired Frosty Westering, who most recently coached at Pacific Lutheran (formerly of the NAIA) in Tacoma, Wash., tops the Blue Hawks legend. Westering's 256 NAIA victories stand just five in front of Biesiot's 251 triumphs, which have all come at Dickinson State.

Biesiot, who grew up in eastern North Dakota/western Minnesota, came to Dickinson, N.D., in 1972 with no prior connection to the town or the community. Fast forward to 2011 and one finds Biesiot has established himself as one of the most exemplary citizens in North Dakota.

"He's been a foundation of the community for many years," Dickinson State assistant coach Pete Stanton said. "He's been here for 40 years. What really speaks highly of him is if you went to the coffee shop and talked to him, you wouldn't even know he was a football coach. He might talk to you about hunting or politics. He's a big part of the community. Throughout the state, he's very well-known and respected."

Biesiot's gained that respect, in part, by being a consistent winner. In 35 seasons as head coach of the Blue Hawks, he's endured just two losing seasons and led his squad to 15 NAIA postseason appearances and 17 conference championships. Soon he will perhaps hold more coaching wins than any other NAIA football coach ever. What does such a feat mean to the selfless Biesiot?

"Nothing," Biesiot said. "Other than we would be closer to .500 this year. Most coaches don't look at the total number of wins. Most of those are attributed to

past coaches and players. The win I look forward to the most is the first win of the season. That means we won't lose every game.

"I haven't thought about (the record). I didn't even realize I was up there. What it does do is give recognition to all of the coaches and players over the years."

Biesiot may deflect any notion of feeling personal gratification for what is to come in 2011, but senior linebacker Jerel Hafner isn't afraid to express his own satisfaction for his head coach. Hafner wants to return the favor for a man that Hafner says has preached toughness while also showing he truly cares about each of the players and their families. In his final season at Dickinson State, Hafner has made it a priority to take Biesiot to the top of the wins list.

"For me personally, that's definitely one of the goals of the team," Hafner said. "If I could be part of it, it would be a true honor. As far as Coach Biesiot, I'm sure it's in the back of his mind, but he sure doesn't show it. It would be pretty cool to be part of that."

Frosty Westering, the man who Biesiot is about to pass, won't lose a wink of sleep over falling into second place. Like Biesiot, Westering used football as means to teach core values like loyalty, courage and religious devotion in the process of becoming an NAIA legend in his own right. Along the way, Westering won three NAIA National Championships, has been the subject of multiple *Sports Illustrated* articles and has even written a book, *Make the Big Time Where You Are*.

"I'd like to congratulate him big-time," Westering said. "I'd want him to know how proud I am that he has coached this many years and had so much success. And I'm sure he's influenced many young men in a positive way."

Ironically, it was Westering's Pacific Lutheran Lutes that kept Biesiot's Blue Hawks out of the 1991 national title game by a 47-25 score in what remains Biesiot's deepest run in the NAIA playoffs. Yet few will remember him as the coach without a national title, nor the coach with the most wins.

Stanton, now in his eighth season as an assistant under Biesiot, will remember the lessons he's learned from Biesiot.

"He's a classy person," Stanton said. "He has taught everyone to respect the bus driver, the custodian and the other team. Another word I'd use is consistency. He's never wavered in his philosophy or his style. He's only had two losing seasons his entire career. Class and consistency are the most important things I've learned from him."

Not only does Biesiot teach on the football field, he also teaches in the classroom. Biesiot got started as a teacher at Langdon High School in Langdon, N.D., in 1967 and hasn't stopped since. He continues to instruct classes like Football Theory, Sport Psychology and even a combination fly-fishing and archery class at Dickinson State.

The 66-year old Biesiot is not sure when his career will come to an end. He does not plan to stick around into his eighties, reminiscent of Penn State's Joe Paterno, "unless I get his salary," Biesiot joked. Instead, he looks forward to the days when he has more time to be a family man. Perhaps then he'll ponder his tenure as arguably the greatest coach in NAIA football history.

For now, Biesiot is still enjoying the ride.

"It's a treat and a privilege to do what I do," Biesiot said.