

Former Women's Soccer Star Slated for Hall of Fame

Shannon Higgins-Cirovski to Be Enshrined

By KELLIE DIXON
Assistant Sports Editor

It was Aug. 31, 1986, and the North Carolina women's soccer team had just tied Central Florida 1-1 in UNC's second match of the year. But not everyone was satisfied with the Tar Heel's performance.

UNC forward Shannon Higgins-Cirovski considered it a personal let-down. The freshman was so disappointed with her performance in the Aug. 31, 1986 match that she contemplated quitting the nationally renowned soccer team.

"I remember after my first college game I thought, 'Oh my gosh I made a mistake. I'm not that good,'" she said.

It's a good thing the 1990 UNC graduate didn't follow her gut. All it took was a little adjusting for the Kent, Wash. native to start making a name for herself.

With four NCAA Championship titles as a player, multiple tournament berths as a coach and numerous individual accolades in both categories, Higgins-Cirovski is set to receive the highest honor possible.

Higgins-Cirovski, currently the women's soccer coach for the Maryland Terrapins, will be inducted into the National Soccer Hall of Fame on Oct. 14 in Oneonta, N. Y. At 34 years old, she will be the youngest person ever elected for induction.

"I knew for Shannon it was just a matter of time," said North Carolina women's soccer coach Anson Dorrance.

Higgins-Cirovski played for Dorrance for four years at UNC and on the 1991 FIFA World Cup Champion U.S. national team. After the U.S.' 2-1 win over Norway in the championship game, she retired as a player, notching four goals in 51 international appearances.

"She's proven herself not only at the collegiate level but also at the game's highest level," Dorrance said. "It wasn't a question of if, it was a question of when."

According to its Web site, the Hall recognizes both players and builders for their impacts on soccer. Higgins-Cirovski will be inducted as a player, but her most recent contributions to soccer have come from the sidelines.

From 1991 to 1997, she coached George Washington's women's soccer team, and in 1996 she led the Colonials to their only NCAA appearance in school history.

Her decision to coach came about 10 years ago when the real world beckoned. She was determined to stick with soccer.

"I retired from playing because I wanted to coach," she said. "I found that I wasn't doing both well and I wanted to focus on my career. At the time I couldn't make a living playing so I thought perhaps I might be able to make a living coaching."

Dorrance said he thought Higgins-Cirovski successfully melded her player and coaching abilities as a player at UNC.

"She was basically a coach's dream," he said. "She was tremendously coachable and the other quality that she would have is when she was out there it was like having yourself out there."

This was definitely a plus for Dorrance because Higgins-Cirovski is hearing-

impaired in her left ear, something she attributes to multiple hearing infections as a child. This made communication across the field nearly impossible.

But Higgins-Cirovski compensated. "One of my best qualities was my vision, and that was, I think, attributed a little bit to my lack of hearing," she said. "You can't talk to me over long distances - I'm completely clueless."

So the telephone game of transferring information from player to player became important, on occasion. And when it was used, Higgins-Cirovski said her teammates sometimes would tease her while relaying the material.

"They used to make fun of me," she said. "So they used to sign language at me and stuff for fun. And I took it lightly because I'm not deaf."

Dorrance said communication was never a real hassle because Higgins-Cirovski was talented at translating directions onto the field.

"She was so good that after her sophomore year, we stopped coaching her and she became a consultant," Dorrance said. "She elevated herself to a level that doesn't happen much in a collegiate sport. She was basically a coach that happened to be playing. We

had so much respect for her we didn't tell her what to do, we asked her what we should be doing."

But Higgins-Cirovski says she learned a thing or two from her college coach.

"If there's any one person who has had the biggest impact on my playing career it would be Anson," she said.

For this reason, she has asked him to introduce her at the Hall of Fame inductions.

She laughed as she recalled the same Central Florida match from 1986. The Tar Heels tied in regulation, but lost after a round of penalty kicks.

"I remember walking into Anson's office - we lost in (penalty kicks) and they called it a tie - and basically asking him, 'What are we going to do?'" she said. "I hate losing, and I was upset that other people on the team weren't as upset as I was."

Higgins-Cirovski said that as a coach her mannerisms have changed in regards to losing a game. She still has the same take-charge attitude, just with different emotions. "In the playing sense, I probably worked harder or attempted to work harder and tried to control the situation in doing what I could to try and win the game," she said. "Now as a coach I get pensive and upset."

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SHANNON HIGGINS-CIROVSKI
2002 Hall of Fame Inductee



UNC coach Anson Dorrance plans to present Higgins-Cirovski at the Oct. 14 inductions.

Hall of Fame
Shannon Higgins
Head Coach Women's Soccer
University of Maryland

Graduated: 1990 from UNC

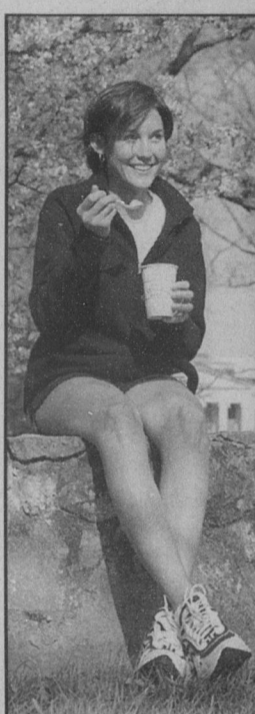
Position: Head women's soccer coach at the University of Maryland for the past four years

Hometown: Kent, Washington

Induction: Oct. 14 at the National Soccer Hall of Fame in Oneonta, N.Y. (Higgins is the youngest Hall of Fame inductee at 34.)

SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.SOCERHALL.ORG/INDEX.HTML](http://www.soccerhall.org/index.html)
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