

# STREET & SMITH'S SportsBusiness JOURNAL

## This Week's News

### The Cardinals' can-do man

*How Tom Jurich makes things happen at the University of Louisville*

By ROSS NETHERY

Staff writer

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On a Wednesday night just a couple of weeks ago, University of Louisville Athletic Director Tom Jurich was in a ballroom speaking to 300 Louisville doctors. After a few minutes spent outlining his department's accomplishments and plans, Jurich asked if there were any questions.

He could have scripted the response.

"The first question is always the same," Jurich said. "It's 'How'd you get Pitino?'"

Jurich's hiring of basketball coach Rick Pitino, who coached at Kentucky for eight years before a stint with the Boston Celtics, has become the stuff of legend in Louisville.

Julie Hermann, who is Louisville's senior associate athletic director and senior woman administrator, likens Jurich's popularity in the city to that of a rock star. "In the city of Louisville, going anywhere with Tom is a nightmare," she said. "He gets mobbed."

It wasn't always that way, but it has taken a relatively short time to get there. When Jurich arrived at Louisville 10 years ago, the athletic department was beset with problems. Though the school was building a new football stadium, most of its facilities were old and worn. Louisville was sorely out of compliance with Title IX regulations, and even the basketball program, which once competed regularly for national titles, had fallen into disarray.

But just look at Louisville now. Under Jurich's guidance, its football and men's basketball programs have become legitimate top 20 powerhouses; 10 of its 22 sports teams were nationally ranked this year, with several in postseason play as this story went to press and the school on its way to its best finish ever in the Directors' Cup standings; it has opened more than \$150 million in facilities in the last decade, with a \$252 million downtown basketball arena to open in 2010, just a year after a \$65 million, 21,000-seat expansion of the football stadium; it has become a leader in women's sports, adding several teams under Jurich, with lacrosse to start play in 2008; and it has seen the athletic budget grow from \$15 million when Jurich arrived to \$46 million this year.

In addition, two years ago Louisville joined the Big East Conference in a move that a decade ago would have seemed unimaginable, but that Jurich started working toward almost as soon as he arrived in Kentucky.

It's a record of accomplishment that led to Tom

### Tom Jurich

**Title:** Vice president for athletics/director of athletics, University of Louisville

**Age:** 50

**Education:** Marketing graduate, Northern Arizona University

**Family:** Wife Terrilynn, sons Mark and Brian, twin daughters Haley and Lacey

**Career highlights:** Jurich was named an assistant AD at Northern Arizona University in 1984 and was promoted to co-director in 1986, becoming the youngest NCAA Division I director of athletics at the age of 29, and was named AD in

Jurich being named Louisvillian of the Year in 2005, to the Kentucky Athletic Hall of Fame in 2006 and, this year, as the Street & Smith's SportsBusiness Journal/SportsBusiness Daily Athletic Director of the Year.

"When he got here, he was just a name and a man we had high hopes for," said Jim Patterson, a prominent Louisville businessman who is founder of the Long John Silver's chain of seafood restaurants and a major donor for the athletic department. "But the name has developed into a Goliath. The best thing that's ever happened to the University of Louisville is Tom Jurich."

### **Courting Pitino**

For all that the 2001 hiring of Pitino did to vault Louisville athletics back into prominence, Jurich once feared that the deal would be thrown off because of a bottle of red wine. It was a special bottle, bearing a red Louisville Cardinals label, that Jurich had taken to Miami when he finally wrangled an invitation to visit Pitino's home.

It wasn't that the wine was bad, it was that the bottle broke in Jurich's luggage. When Jurich told Pitino's wife, Joanne, about the mishap, she quickly took over, sending Jurich's clothes to a nearby cleaner and warning him not to tell the coach.

Joanne, who loves the state of Kentucky, was favorably disposed toward the Louisville job even as her husband kept telling Jurich that there was no way such a deal would work.

"Don't say a word to Rick," she told Jurich. "He'll be superstitious."

Jurich kept his mouth shut. Just a couple of weeks before, at a press conference announcing the retirement of Louisville coach Denny Crum, Jurich had famously announced to the nation that he was a one-man search committee with one name on his list: Rick Pitino. ("When he said, 'I just have one person in mind,' and he named my name," said Pitino, who had been told by a friend that he might want to watch that press conference, "my wife and I almost fell off our couch.") Jurich wasn't about to do anything that might ruin his chances.

While dinner went well, Jurich didn't feel like he was gaining much ground with Pitino.

"He kept saying, 'This can't work,'" Jurich said.

"I told him," Pitino said, "that the head coach of Kentucky can never become the head coach of Louisville."

About 4 a.m., after just two hours of sleep, Jurich put on some freshly cleaned clothes and went into Pitino's backyard.

"I paced back and forth for an

1988. He was Colorado State University's athletic director from 1994-97 before being named Louisville's AD in October 1997. He added the title of vice president for athletics at Louisville in 2003. He has overseen the athletic department's move to the Big East Conference and the addition of four women's sports — softball, golf, rowing and lacrosse (lacrosse begins in 2008).

**On the field:** Jurich was a kicker, punter and backup quarterback for Northern Arizona. He was named a first-team Kodak All-America kicker in 1977 — the first collegiate kicker to make the Kodak honor list — and also was named All-America by The Sporting News. The Pittsburgh Steelers drafted him in the 10th round and he later played with the Minnesota Vikings. He was an assistant football coach at the University of Minnesota.

hour," Jurich said, "and then I glanced back at the house, and there was Rick, sitting at a table, looking at me."

"What are you doing?" Pitino asked him.

"I'm trying to figure out a way to get you," Jurich said.

There was no deal made that night, but not long after that late-night session Pitino agreed to visit the Louisville campus. Amid the media and fan frenzy, he visited with Crum, whose retirement had been engineered by Jurich. Crum initially had tried to muster enough support to keep his job, but by the time of Pitino's visit he was backing the school, even posing for photos with the man who would become his successor.



Jurich went to extremes to land Rick Pitino, once walking in the coach's backyard early one morning to try to gain his attention.

Pitino accepted the job about a week later, in the process turning down the same position at Michigan.

"It has been," Pitino said, "a wonderful relationship."

### **The path to Louisville**

When Jurich was first approached about the Louisville job, he had no idea the pitch was coming. At the time, he was AD at Colorado State University, only his second stint as an athletic director after spending eight years at his alma mater, Northern Arizona University, where he had started at age 29 as the youngest athletic director in Division I. He'd had no real thoughts about moving anywhere else. He was at a summer golf tournament with Colorado State boosters when a friend said, "I've got a couple of buddies I'd like you to meet."

"Everybody there was wearing green and gold," said Jurich. "It was like a John Deere convention. "And then these two guys walk in wearing bright red sweaters. Talk about looking out of place."

Those two guys were Harry Jones, president of the university's board of trustees, and board member Sam Rechter.

"I told them I had about 20 minutes after the tournament," Jurich said. "I thought I was just saying hello, but they sat me down, handed me a Bud Light and started telling me about Louisville."

Jones knew Jurich by reputation only. Friends had told him about the job Jurich had done at Colorado State, taking a program beset with a variety of problems, including Title IX lawsuit, and changing the culture. But it was that initial meeting that sold Jones on the man that he would spend the next few months persuading to make a move across the country.

"I fell in love with him right off the bat," Jones said.

### **University of Louisville**

**Conference:** Big East

**Media and marketing rights:** Nelligan Sports Marketing

**Sponsors:** Adidas, Anheuser-Busch, Brown & Williamson, Chase, Papa John's, Pepsi, UPS

**Recent athletic success:** The Cardinals football program has made nine straight bowl game appearances since 1998, with wins in the 2001 and 2004 Liberty Bowls and 2007 FedEx

The feeling wasn't immediately mutual. Jurich and his wife, Terrilynn, a former Miss Wyoming, and their four kids were well-established and had no desire to move.

Jones wasn't one to give up, though. He kept peppering Jurich with calls, bombarding him with information and selling him on both the challenges and opportunities at Louisville. Several times, Jurich told Jones, "Just take my name off your list." A few months after their initial meeting, though, Jones persuaded Jurich to visit Louisville.

Jurich first had to convince Terrilynn. He told her, "If we go for a visit, we need to be ready to stay."

A few days later, Terrilynn Jurich was back in Colorado, packing and getting ready to move the kids, while Tom Jurich was living in a hotel and figuring out how to jump-start a downtrodden athletic department.

One of the first things Jurich did was get everyone in the department to open their door.

"A lot of people say they have an open door," said Pam Bustin, the school's field hockey coach, "but they don't mean it. Tom really wants to know what's going on and how he can help."

Jurich doesn't try to be the first person in the office, or to spend more hours working than anyone else. What he does try to do is be open and accessible, to encouragement family involvement, and to try to make the most of his time with each member of the department.

"We call it fly-by management," Hermann said. "He can be gone for a few days, and I'll be here the whole time managing his people, and then he'll be back for two hours and know everything that's going on."

But opening lines of communication can only take you so far. Jurich was looking for ways to make tangible progress fast. One of the biggest areas of need was in women's sports.

Orange Bowl; the men's basketball squad reached the 2005 Final Four; and the women's volleyball team has appeared in 15 of the last 16 consecutive NCAA tournaments. Since joining the Big East, the Cardinals have won five regular-season conference team championships and six conference tournament team championships.



Jurich worked quickly to win over donors.

"When I got here," he said, "there were only two working showerheads for women's athletics."

That physical reality was reflected by the fact that the school had a terrible record of compliance with Title IX regulations. Lamar Daniel, a consultant on Title IX issues for many of the most prominent schools in the country, was already working with the school, but had seen little progress.

"When I first started working with the University of Louisville, they had some of the worst facilities I had ever seen," Daniel said. "Now their facilities are truly outstanding, and they have added four sports since Tom has become athletic director. He told me that he would like to be known as someone who did the very best in Title IX, and in just about every area that touches, they have come up to be a model."

But the facilities were decrepit for more than just women's sports. Jurich knew that he couldn't wait for results on the playing field to build enthusiasm among the donors that the school would need if it

was going to upgrade its playing and practice facilities, so he went on the offensive.

One of his biggest accomplishments was winning over Owsley Frazier, who at the time was vice chairman of his family's company, Brown-Forman, which manufactures Jack Daniel's and a lengthy list of other libations.

It took persistence to get an initial meeting with Frazier, but once they got together, they became constant friends, in part because they both have twin daughters. Not only did Frazier donate money for an athletic complex that includes facilities for softball, field hockey and soccer, but he also assisted in other areas, such as hosting a lunch for Pitino when the coach was considering taking the Louisville job.

"Tom doesn't accept 'no' as an answer," Frazier said. "He's one of the most hard-working people I have ever come in contact with."

### Talent scout

If the first question Jurich gets at public appearances is, "How'd you get Pitino?", the second is, "How'd you keep Brian Brohm?"

Brohm is the highly touted starting quarterback for the Louisville Cardinals, and the fact that he didn't jump to the pros after his junior season is the direct result of one of Jurich's strongest attributes, his ability to recognize and hire top coaching talent.

"He has an amazing ability to assess people and to know which ones would be right for our needs," said Hermann. "We don't have a sport right now that if the coach left for any reason, we wouldn't be ready to get the next one. He's always prepared."

It's on the football field that this talent is most evident. One of the first things Jurich did at Louisville was fire Ron Cooper, who was 13-20 in three seasons, and hire John L. Smith, who took a team that had been 1-10 the year before to a 7-5 record the next season. When Smith left for Michigan State in 2001, Jurich hired Bobby Petrino, who continued to build the program but whose departure after this year's win at the Orange Bowl, Louisville's first appearance in a BCS bowl, left Jurich with another huge hole to fill.

Like all good athletic directors, Jurich keeps a list of go-to coaches for every sport. For football, the name at the top of the list was Steve Kragthorpe, whom Jurich had known for 17 years, since Kragthorpe was an assistant at Northern Arizona.

Kragthorpe, who was highly regarded for turning the University of Tulsa into a winner at football, had his own list of people he wanted to work for. "I would have gone to work for Tom Jurich," Kragthorpe said, "if he had been athletic director at the University of Siberia."

When Petrino left Louisville to coach the NFL's



Jurich persuaded star quarterback

Brian Brohm to stay following a coaching change.

### What they're saying

"Coming from nowhere to somewhere in football is the hardest thing to do in collegiate athletics. To have Louisville in the top 10 or 25 every year is an incredible accomplishment." **Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who was one of the first people Tom Jurich met when he took the job**

"You hear the story about how a coach is a player's coach. Well, Tom is a coach's AD. He gives you the support to do whatever it is that will achieve his vision

Atlanta Falcons, Jurich was on the phone with Kragthorpe within hours. The next day, when the two men shook hands in the restaurant at a Marriott hotel in Oklahoma City, there were 29 days left until the national signing day for football recruits. But before Kragthorpe could begin the work of keeping Petrino's last recruiting class intact, he had a bigger task: convincing Brian Brohm to come back for his senior year.

Brohm and Kragthorpe hit it off, in no small part because Kragthorpe was open to keeping some of the coaching staff and much of the Cardinals' playbook intact. Brohm's father, Oscar Brohm, who also played football for Louisville, said the family's trust in Jurich had a lot to do with his son's decision.

"Tom has been the Rock of Gibraltar," Oscar Brohm said. "We know that he's going to do not only what's beneficial for Brian, but what's good for the entire university."

Jurich has been involved in collegiate athletics beyond just his own campus, serving three years on the NCAA Management Council and the Division I baseball committee.

Still, it's his unwavering focus on improving Louisville athletics that many people point to as a reason for his success.

"He's very single-minded in that regard," said Rick Dickson, the athletic director at Tulane and a longtime friend of Jurich.

And the fruits of that dedication extend well beyond the 600 student athletes at Louisville.

"The success of the University of Louisville is a very important component of the quality of life in our hometown," said Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson. "Great universities help make great cities."

Louisville President James Ramsey believes that the athletic department's success — in building, on the field, and particularly in getting the school into the Big East — has had a positive effect on every aspect of the school.

"Tom brought us a belief that we could be in a better conference," said Ramsey. "One of his greatest contributions to this university and community has been to not have an inferiority complex."

That's why, in 2003, Ramsey made Jurich a vice president of the university.

"It's more than symbolism," Ramsey said. "We're one university — not athletics and academics, not undergraduate and graduate — but one university, and Tom has been great in filling a broader role."

for the program."

**Former Louisville football coach John L. Smith**

"I can't think of a single athletic department that's come as far as Louisville has in the last 10 years. I don't think it's even close."

**ESPN.com's Pat Forde, a former columnist for The (Louisville) Courier-Journal**

"He's an optimistic, high-energy, effective leader who had a vision of how to elevate the scope and profile of their program."

**Rick Dickson, AD at Tulane University**

"He brought a new mind-set to Louisville, the mind-set that there's no reason any of our teams can't excel."

**Former Louisville basketball player Junior Bridgeman, a member of the board of trustees**

"His single biggest accomplishment was getting into the Big East, but if you look at the extent to which all of the programs have grown, it's just been a phenomenal ride."

**Jim Host, chairman of the board of the Louisville Arena Authority**

"The most wonderful memory I have was winning the Orange Bowl this year. I looked at him and thought, he's been working for this forever, and to see it

Ramsey also signed Jurich, who at 50 still has the look and energy of a football player, to a 15-year contract that runs through 2017, has a four-year rollover and pays him \$500,000 a year plus retention and performance bonuses, easily making him one of the highest-paid athletic directors in the country.

happen was truly wonderful.”  
***Wife Terrilynn Jurich***

“His passion is still there, and I don’t see it fading at all,” Ramsey said. “Tom looks down the road and sees a vision of what this university can be, and I would tell you that we’ve only just begun.”

Jurich shares that sentiment. As he looks around the campus, he sees plenty of room for growth in every aspect of his program.

“I want to make sure that every sport has its own new facilities,” he said. “And I want to make sure that every sport is a legitimate contender for a championship.”

As for his future, Jurich seems happy with what he envisions down the road.

“My wife and I absolutely love it here,” he said. “I could see myself never leaving.”