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Before They Were WCU Coaches: Bobby Moranda

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(Editor's Note: The following is the first of a series of articles where Western Carolinian writers profile the lives and careers of coaches before they arrived at WCU.)

When I met with Coach Bobby Moranda, he was in the process of picking out new baseball cleats for his players.

"Before I lose this thought, let me email these off," he said.

When he finished his emails, he grabbed a seat on one of the black leather sofas in his office and immediately began updating me on the progress of the baseball lot renovations. A project that started out as a big dream, but during this past summer, turned into a reality.

Many outside the athletics department don't know much about Coach Moranda, except for the great job he's done with the men's baseball team. It was time to find out who he was, where he came from, what he was like before WCU, and how he became the coach he is today.

Coach Moranda began his athletic career very early. As soon as he could walk, he began playing baseball.

"My Dad was the one who encouraged me to play baseball. When he was growing up he had to quit school to help take care of his family and he never got the chance to play in any kind of organized program, or even go to college. Because of that he wanted to make sure I had the opportunity to play baseball at the highest possible level," Moranda said. "He would get home from his 9-5 job, and even if he was tired, he would take me outside to practice playing ball. I went into coaching because of my Dad."

At the age of 10-years-old, he taught himself how to snow ski in his backyard.

"I've been a snow skier for 36 years. In fact, a buddy of mine is trying to get me to come skiing in Jackson Hole, Wyoming this week," Moranda said. "Baseball and skiing were the two things I lived for when I was growing up."

Outside of skiing, at the age of thirteen, Moranda was at an arcade in Mount Prospect, Illinois when an event that changed his life occurred.

"Pop, pop, pop! Sounded like they were blowing something up in the other room," his eyes widened as he told the story. "It was something like Columbine. This guy came into the arcade and just started shooting the place up."

Moranda experienced something that he says gave him a new perspective on life. He remembered the gunman pointing the gun at him until he had to reload.

"I was 20 feet from the door, and my best friend and I decided to run for it as he reloaded. As we were running I waited until I got a bullet in my back," he said. "Luckily there never was one. But I do remember the guy who ran out before me, getting shot in the ear."

From that moment on, Moranda decided that life was meant to be enjoyed, not taken too seriously. He carried that idea around with him into high school and college, and still to this day.

When he entered Palatine High School in Illinois, he continued playing baseball. After his senior year in high school, Moranda was cut from the American Legion team.

"Many would think that when that happened, I would have just given up on my dream. But I did the opposite. I turned that negative into a positive. I kept playing baseball. I got picked up by a semi-pro team."

After high school, he attended three different colleges, Arizona Western, Harper Community College, and Eastern Kentucky University. He played baseball all throughout college, and landed a scholarship to Eastern Kentucky. Before the scholarship to ECU, Moranda got cut from the team at Arizona Western, which caused him to head back home and attend the Harper Community College.

"I made my first collegiate Division I hit here in Cullowhee," he said. "At Eastern Kentucky, we opened 4 games of every season at Western. When we came, the team and I would eat at Dodson Cafeteria, and we would stay in Scott on the first floor."

In fact, when Moranda began coaching soon after, Jack Leggett, the former WCU coach, remembered Moranda. While in the ACC together, they became good friends. Leggett would later call Moranda about the open coaching position at WCU.

Under the coaching of Jim Wade at ECU, Moranda made two consecutive NCAA Regional appearances, two consecutive Ohio Valley



Moranda before WCU



Moranda at WCU

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Conference championships, and a top-30 national ranking during the 1985-86 baseball seasons.

"Jim Wade was an amazing coach. He was like a second father to me. Between him and my dad, they were the two most prominent men in my life," Moranda said. In 1985, the ECU Colonels were two games away from making it to Omaha for the College World Series.

Like many athletes, he wanted to be a professional baseball player. However, things didn't go the way he planned.

"I felt cheated by the system. I was a crazy man with how hard I worked, and nothing worked out for me," he said.

After he graduated, he was in the real world for about a month and half, working as a TV sports anchor for ABC Lexington when his old coach called him about a job.

"My old coach called and said Bobby you need to come be the assistant coach here and get your masters. So I did," Moranda said.

He headed back to Eastern Kentucky, went to school and worked as the assistant coach of the baseball team. After a few years, Moranda moved on to a recruiting coordinator and head assistant coach position at the University of Virginia.

"Virginia had the worst facility, the worst budget, no tradition, and no players," Moranda said. "While I was there we took the team from last place to a team that was respectable. There were two first round picks and an Olympian selected from our team."

After six years at Virginia, Moranda left and headed to Wake Forest. He worked as the associate head coach and recruiting coordinator there for six years. Then he headed to Georgia Tech, where he was named Associate Head Coach.

"I have three great memories from GT. One was going to the College World Series in Omaha. It had always been a lifelong dream of mine to go as a player, but I never got there. But going with my GT players, twice, was great." Moranda said. "Another was when we won 25 straight ACC games. And the other was winning three straight games in one day to win the ACC Championship in 2003. We started at 8:30 in the morning and didn't finish until eleven at night."

When he got the call from Jack Leggett about the opening of WCU Head Coach, he said yes. Moranda went on the interview, and got the job. He has been at WCU for four years now, and has no plans of leaving.

"I've found a home here at Western. I want to continue the legacy of the program, continue building the facility, get the community more involved, create a classy place for my players, and win several championships," he said.

Corach Moranda has big plans for the future of the WCU Men's Baseball team. He even believes that they too can make it to Omaha.

"Our program has been close in the past, but we need to continue to work hard so we can finally break through," Moranda said encouragingly.

WCU's baseball season kicks off on Feb. 18 against Morehead State. On Feb. 19 at 7:30 p.m., the 1002 Club will be hosting a banquet, at the UC Grand Room to celebrate the baseball program and the completion of the renovations. The banquet will be open to all current players, alumni, sponsors of the programs, and fans.