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English soccer legend Heighway will share experiences with students, coaches

MARCH 26, 2007

During the 1970s, Steve Heighway was a talented and popular soccer player who helped make the Liverpool Football Club one of the most successful teams in England.

Three decades later, the Liverpool legend has hung up his cleats, but he is still playing a critical role in the fortunes of his old club.

Heighway is the director of the Liverpool Academy, a state-of-the-art sports facility that trains young athletes who want to become professional soccer players.

He will bring his vast knowledge of the sport to the campus of Georgia Southern University on Wednesday, March 28. Heighway will speak to two groups of students who are enrolled in the University's coaching education program, and he will also conduct a couple of free clinics for area coaches.

'The quality of Steve's credentials and his popularity in England and Europe are phenomenal,' said Drew Zwald, the director of the coaching education program at Georgia Southern. 'We are very fortunate to have someone of his caliber come and share his experiences with us.'

A native of Dublin, Ireland, Heighway played in 473 first-team games and scored 76 first-team goals during his distinguished career with Liverpool. He helped the club win five First Division Championships, and also competed in the FA Cup, the European Cup, the UEFA Cup and the European Super Cup.

Since his retirement as an active player, Heighway has devoted much of his time to coaching. At the Liverpool Academy, which is owned and operated by the Liverpool Football Club, he oversees a world-class operation that includes an array of artificial turf and natural-grass practice fields, a weight room, a sports medicine facility and a cafeteria.

Although its primary purpose is to identify talented young players and develop them for the Liverpool Football Club, the academy also has a strict academic program for its athletes, who range in age from 8 to 21.

'They really do place a lot of emphasis on education,' Zwald said. 'A student-athlete can be dismissed from the academy because of poor academic performance and/or poor behavior.'

Heighway's visit to Georgia Southern is a product of the University's relationships with the International Learning Community (ILC) and the International Network for Educational Networking (iNET).

The ILC is a partnership between Georgia Southern, five universities in the United Kingdom and their partner schools. The members seek to make schools better through a variety of means, including improving the effectiveness of teacher training and increasing the involvement of the home and local communities in the educational process.

Meanwhile, iNET is a partnership of schools and other organizations that seek to transform education through the sharing of best practices and innovations. Over 3,000 schools in more than 20 countries on six continents are members of iNET.

Through its relationships with the ILC and iNET, Georgia Southern and its partner schools in the region have been exchanging faculty, students, staff and administrators with their partner schools in England.

At the same time, the Liverpool Football Club and a non-profit organization called the Global Events Group have been providing programs in the English schools, and they were approached by the ILC and iNET about providing similar programs in Georgia.

The Liverpool Football Club has been looking to establish an additional presence in the U.S. in general, and in the Southeast in particular. In fact, the club and the Global Events Group have opened an office in Atlanta.

During this past December and January, representatives of the Liverpool Football Club and the Global Events Group met with Georgia Southern faculty and staff to plan a number of collaborative efforts. The people in the University's coaching education program jumped at the opportunity to bring an instructor of Heighway's caliber to campus.

The coaching education program is part of the Department of Health and Kinesiology, which is housed in the College of Health and Human Sciences. The College of Education and the Department of Athletics also played significant roles in arranging Heighway's visit.

"A lot of people worked together to make this thing happen," Zwald said.

On Wednesday morning, Heighway will deliver a special guest lecture to a class of undergraduate students who are enrolled in the coaching education program. After taking a tour of the campus and eating lunch, he will speak to a class of graduate students who are pursuing a master's degree in kinesiology with an emphasis in coaching or sport psychology.

Heighway will give his first coaching clinic from 3 p.m. until 5 p.m. at the University soccer stadium. He will work with Georgia Southern's varsity players, spending an hour with the men's team and an hour with the women's team as he focuses on coaching at the collegiate and elite levels.

The second clinic will run from 7:30 p.m. until 8:45 p.m. at Paulson Stadium. During this clinic, Heighway will be working with a group of young players from throughout the area as he focuses on coaching at the high school and select team levels.

Heighway will be wearing a microphone at both clinics so that his comments can be heard by everyone in attendance. The general public is invited to watch either clinic from the bleachers.

Coaches who are interested in attending either clinic must register in advance.

They can sign up by contacting Andrew Hansen at ahansen@georgiasouthern.edu or (912) 681-0261.

During his visit to Statesboro, Heighway will be accompanied by Tim Devine, the education and welfare officer for the Liverpool Academy; Gareth Evans, the youth recruiter for the academy; and Peter Miller, the vice president of sports and education development for the Global Events Group.

According to Zwald, plans are underway for the Liverpool Academy to send one of its teams to Georgia Southern later this spring to play an exhibition match.

'We hope the visit by Steve is the beginning of a long and productive relationship between the University and Liverpool,' Zwald said.