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Georgia Southern Introduces Willie Fritz as New Football Coach

JANUARY 10, 2014

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STATESBORO, Ga. – Georgia Southern Director of Athletics Tom Kleinlein today announced the hiring of Willie Fritz as the ninth head football coach in the program’s modern history. A proven winner with more than 30 years of coaching experience, Fritz led Sam Houston State to back-to-back Southland Conference titles, NCAA FCS championship appearances in 2011 and 2012 and a third-straight playoff berth this past year. In 21 years as a head coach, Fritz owns a 72.3 winning percentage with a record of 176-67-1 and more than a few trophies for his accomplishments at the national, regional and conference levels.

The Liberty Mutual Coach of the Year at the FCS level in 2012, Fritz was recognized nationally in 2011 as the American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) Coach of the Year. Honored as the AFCA Regional Coach of the Year in 2011 and 2012, Fritz was selected by the media and his peers in the Southland Conference as the league’s Coach of the Year in 2011 after his team went a perfect 7-0 in conference play.

In 2011 and 2012, Sam Houston State posted the two highest single-season win totals in program history with marks of 14-1 (2011) and 11-4 (2012) and Bearkat players were showered with accolades. More than 50 earned All-Southland Conference honors under Fritz in the last four years, not including additional “Player of the Year,” “Offensive Player of the Year,” “Defensive Player of the Year,” and “Newcomer of the Year” awards. All-America status from national coaching and media outlets were bestowed on 11 Sam Houston State players during his tenure.

Fritz comes to Georgia Southern after four years as the head coach of the Bearkats and his most recent of three total tours in Huntsville. His resume includes a wealth of experience across the board, notably as a coach with an innate ability to connect with his players, demand accountability and build winning programs.

After a highly successful tenure at Blinn College, averaging nearly 10 wins a season during his four years there, Fritz left to revitalize a Central Missouri program and guided it to 11 winning seasons. The NCAA Division II program’s ledger included two 10-win seasons with the 2001 Mule squad earning its first postseason trip in more than 30 years. In 2002, Central Missouri made its first-ever appearance in the NCAA Division II playoffs and was the Mid-America Athletic Association (MIAA) co-champion a year later. A 97-47 mark in 13 seasons ranks Fritz as the winningest coach in the program’s 118-year history. He was the only coach to ever win seven or more games in eight consecutive seasons and his victory total ranked him 15th among active Division II coaches at the time.

In addition to his impressive 67.4 winning percentage with the Mules, Fritz coached his student-athletes to achieve their potential both on the field and in the classroom. More than 150 Mules were recognized with All-MIAA honors with 41 first-team selections and 24 All-Americans. Under Fritz, Central Missouri recorded a graduation rate of 84 percent with 144 MIAA Commissioner’s Academic Honor Roll recipients, 14 Academic All-Region and three Academic All-Americans.



Serving as a graduate assistant for the Bearkat program during the 1984 and 1985 seasons, Fritz earned a master's degree in kinesiology while Sam Houston State posted a 16-6 record and won the 1985 Gulf Star Conference championship. He returned to Huntsville in 1991 after spending two years at Coffeyville College in Kansas under legendary Coach Dick Foster, earning a promotion to defensive coordinator after one year. He stayed another two years to work for Coach Skip Foster and the Red Ravens.

"I knew immediately when I interviewed him that I wanted to hire Willie," said Coach Dick Foster, a charter member of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Football Hall of Fame. "He's a talented person and I've followed his career closely, from Central Missouri and to Blinn where he coached two national championships, to what he has done at Sam Houston State. He has all the qualities needed for the challenge in front of him – he's an excellent technician, an outstanding recruiter, very organized with his coaching and support staff and his student-athletes enjoy playing for him."

Coach Bob Randleman brought Fritz back to the state of Texas and Sam Houston State as secondary and special teams coach in 1991, instilling an attitude of excellence on special teams that would last more than a decade. The Bearkats' "block party" racked up 80 blocked punts, field goals and extra points beginning with Fritz in 1991 and lasting through 2004. In Fritz's first year as a full-time assistant coach at Sam Houston State in 1991, the Bearkats won the Southland Conference. That league title and eight-win season launched SHSU to the program's second-ever appearance in the NCAA playoffs.

"Willie was like a coach on the field for me as a four-year starter at Pittsburg State," Coach Randleman said. "I just think the world of him and am proud that he was on my coaching staff not once, but twice. He has a tremendous work ethic, he played hard, and he coaches the same way. Willie has a great rapport with his players and they respect him."

Fritz would leave Huntsville again, this time for an opportunity to be the head coach at Blinn College, where he would turn around a program that had only five wins in its previous three seasons. From 1993-96, Fritz and the Buccaneers would rack up 39 victories against only five losses with a tie and claim two national junior college championships. He was inducted into the NJCAA Football Hall of Fame for the environment of success he created at Blinn.

One of seven children, Fritz is the son of the late Harry Fritz, who coached the Central Missouri football team in 1952 before continuing his career as the Executive Director at the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) in Kansas City. The elder Fritz also served at several colleges and universities in administration as an athletics director.

Fritz played on two conference title teams and was a four-starter at defensive back for Coach Randleman at Pittsburg State and remained at his alma mater as a student assistant coach for his alma mater in 1982. Early coaching stops included a year at Shawnee Mission Northwest High School (Kansas) in 1983 and Willis High School (Texas) in 1986, with his return to Sam Houston State for graduate school in between those years.

Fritz and his wife Susan have three children, Wesley and Elaine, who are enrolled at Sam Houston State, and Brooke, a junior in high school in Huntsville.

Georgia Southern Athletics provides up-to-date information on all its sports through its official website, GSEagles.com, through social media channels [facebook.com/GSAthletics](https://www.facebook.com/GSAthletics) and twitter.com/GSAthletics, and its "Eagles GATA" mobile app.

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Taiwanese Dancers to Perform during International Cultural Exchange

JANUARY 10, 2014

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STATESBORO, Ga. – Georgia Southern University's Center for International Studies and the Statesboro Youth Ballet prepare to celebrate the international language of dance as they welcome the Tainan University of Technology Dance Company to campus.



Photo courtesy: Tainan University of Technology Dance Company

Experience the music and dances from Taiwan during three upcoming performances:

- Jan. 27, 2 p.m., Georgia Southern's Russell Union Ballroom (cultural exchange discussion and dance demonstration)
- Jan. 30, 6 p.m., Georgia Southern's Performing Arts Center (six dances to be performed)
- Feb. 2, 2 p.m., Averitt Center for the Arts, Emma Kelly Theater (performance with Statesboro Youth Ballet)

The 18-member dance troupe from Taiwan will not only share their routines, but also explain Taiwanese culture and offer dance lessons to students. Admission to all performances and classes is free. This international cultural exchange is a joint project involving Georgia Southern and the Averitt Center for the Arts.

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