

# Colorado College Men's soccer

## Coach still getting his kicks

### 700 games later, Richardson remains a CC institution

By BOB SCHALLER THE GAZETTE

One of his student-athletes is walking in the door of the student union on the Colorado College campus as soccer coach Horst Richardson looks at his watch.

"Aren't you supposed to be in a class?" Richardson asks. The student explains they are on a break, and Richardson nods. The young man grabs a cup of coffee and heads back out before Richardson can look over his shoulder again.

Richardson, 62, has been teaching and coaching soccer at Colorado College since 1965, taking over as head coach in 1966. He coached his 700th game Aug. 31. The son of a non-commissioned officer in Hitler's army — his father was killed in the war — Richardson moved to California at 14 when the war ended, and his mother remarried, this time to an American soldier.

"Going from war-torn Germany to the coast," Richardson says, a grin creasing his face, "now that was quite a change."

It was among the last geo- graphic changes Richardson would have in his life. After getting his master's degree from California-Riverside, he heard about a prestigious private school in Colorado that needed a German instructor for a year.

One of his first stops when he came to Colorado College's campus was to the soccer field, where then-coach Bill Boddington asked Richardson if he'd coach the varsity because Boddington had a son on the team and one on the way.

Richardson explored the town, which "ended basically at Circle at that time, there were maybe 65,000 people and Academy Boulevard wasn't paved or anything," and decided he could get by here. So, except to get his doctorate from the University of Connecticut, Richardson has lived in the same house he and his wife bought for \$24,000 on Mesa Road right behind the college in the late 1960s.

He's taken the same route to campus almost every day. He's taught German to thousands of students. He enjoys the theater, and has his students put on plays in German to learn the language better.

In 2001, the National Soccer Coaches Association of America honored Richardson with the Bill Jeffrey Award, for longtime achievement at any level of college soccer. He's won more than 400 games.

"And," he says, smiling widely, "that's kind of important, to have won 400 when you've coached 700."

It means at Division III CC, he's been successful, even though the program, especially when he took over, played scores of Division I schools.

“It’s almost unheard of for coaches to remain at one school their entire careers,” said CC athletic director Joel Nielsen. “But this is a man whose love for CC and Colorado Springs is exceeded by no one. He is the backbone of what this institution is about.”

Few people have had the impact on the CC program that Horst Richardson has. Except Helen Richardson, Horst’s wife. They operate under a partnership.

“She’s more relaxed than Horst — wait, should I say that?” player Noah Drever said. “It’s a good-cop-bad-cop thing. They’re so great together.”

“I think it is literally impossible to imagine Horst without Helen,” team captain Tim Campbell said. “You would not believe what she means to the program, you really wouldn’t. She has the whole team over for breakfast on Sundays. She makes us cookies on our birthday. A lot of us aren’t from around here, and that’s the best part about coach’s program: When you come here, you join a family.”

The sentiment touches Helen Richardson’s heart.

“It’s pretty wonderful to hear that stuff,” Helen said. “It means that much to us, too. We don’t have a lot of family around here anyway and since our kids (Erik, who played for Horst, and Stacia) have moved away, we really get a lot out of these kids. I have to thank their parents for sharing their children with us.”

Helen was the reason Horst stayed at CC during those first few critical years in an untenured professor’s career. She was teaching at Steele Elementary, just north of the college, when he heard from one of his players about an attractive and likeable woman who was a residence hall advisor on campus. Helen came out to a game, and they quickly became an inseparable couple. The wedding featured Horst’s team and Helen’s fifth-grade class, plus the two women who introduced them.

His wife is his biggest supporter and vice versa.

“It would be ridiculous to speculate that I could’ve even accomplished half of what I’ve done as a teacher and soccer coach if it weren’t for Helen,” he says, his stare piercing.

She hauled the kids to Vermont and Connecticut as Horst worked to get his doctorate in the summers, something he did in 1974.

“Horst and Helen work hand-in-hand to make this program work,” said Nielsen, who has no qualms about calling on Horst for anything from the history of the school to local driving directions.

There have been the highest of highs — making it to the Division III Final Four in 1992, having players turn professional, seeing student-athletes go to graduate programs, medical and law schools. But there has been heartbreak.

Last year, CC announced that Brigham Olson, 1983 team captain, would be added to the school’s Hall of Fame. Olson had recovered from a bout with cancer, so the trip to Colorado Springs from California was more than a soccer celebration, it would be a celebration of life.

But the cancer came back with a vengeance — brain cancer on the second round, and Olson was battling like a trooper in August. The doctor said he probably wouldn’t make it until the ceremony in May of this year, and even if he were alive, he wouldn’t be well enough to travel.

“Forget it,” Richardson said. “We’ll take it to him.”

So 11 of Olson's teammates and their coach headed to California on a day when Olson had some friends throwing a party for him in a local park. Olson, walking with a cane, his head scarred from recent surgery, sat under an awning. In their uniforms no less, the CC players ran toward the awning, with their coach leading the way.

"A good man," is all Richardson can choke out as his Adam's apple races up his throat, "a really good man."

Olson died May 10, 2003 — the day of the ceremony in Colorado Springs.

Another good man is Sean Fitzgerald, who, while living in CC's McGregor Hall, locked himself out of his room when he went down the hall to shower. Frustrated, he tried to get in through his roommate's window. It was raining that day, and Fitzgerald fell four stories, very nearly to his death.

After several days in a coma, Fitzgerald recovered. He now works in workman's compensation. He visited in late August, showing up at his coach's house for dinner, as former players do about every other week. The soccer alums are so active that almost 200 showed up for the program's 50th anniversary in 2000.

"His commitment to his student-athletes is so true and such a part of who he is — that's why so many alums come back to the program," said Jay Engeln, captain of the 1973 team, and former Doherty High School soccer coach and Palmer principal. "It's his caring attitude toward his players not just on the field, but in the classroom and in life, that his players recognize."

The current players were amazed to see so many former players attend the 50th celebration.

"That is another amazing part of this program," Campbell says, looking at his watch and noting he's due in class in four minutes. "The alums seem to all stay in touch with coach, and they always come to our games. How cool is that?"

When they do show up for games, they invariably end up at the Richardson house, where they can pet Steiny, the family cat. The cat loves attention and is a performer, not unlike its namesake, Noah Epstein. Epstein, an All-American at CC in 1992, was a key player on that Final Four team. The only problem was that during the season, when he was injured, with his coach's blessing he found something to "pass the time in a more quality way" while he healed. To Epstein, that meant going out for the drama department's play, "Romeo and Juliet."

"Wouldn't you know it? He landed the role of Romeo," Richardson said, shaking his head. He missed a playoff game for one of the productions, but flew to California the next morning to play in the regional finals. CC won the game 2-1 over Cal Lutheran — Romeo/Epstein scored a goal — and then flew home to make the final production.

"That, to me, is what this school is all about," said Richardson of Epstein, who went to Stanford medical school. "Every part of the educational process is important — academics, plays, sports — it all has to work together because you can learn from all of it."

One of his players sits down and joins speculation about how far his coach will go: 1,000 games? 1,400? Richardson ponders the question. He explains that milestones are nice, but admitted he didn't know he was near the 700 mark until Jody Derington in the athletic department pointed it out.

"As long as I get nervous before every game," he says, "as long as I care about every student-athlete, I will keep doing it. The day either of those feelings leaves me, I retire."