

Simon Harris Joins Ohio State Women's Basketball Coaching Staff Ready To Make Impact



On July 17, Ohio State announced that Simon Harris will be filling the assistant coaching position that was vacated by Carrie Banks after she took the head coaching job at Nebraska Omaha. Harris has been coaching in women's basketball since 2014, but his ties to the profession start long before that, with the origin coming during his childhood.

Harris is the son of Larry Harris, a 2012 inductee into the Ohio Basketball Hall of Fame who was born in Cleveland, played at Lorain Clearview and spent 27 seasons as an assistant coach, 16 of which were at North Carolina State.

Seeing Larry Harris in practices and on the sidelines of games instilled a passion in a younger Simon Harris that ultimately turned into a career, but at the time, Simon Harris said he was by no means pushed into following in his father's footsteps.

"I've always been very passionate about basketball, and my parents were really good at allowing me to make that own decision for myself, but it was definitely aided in being able to be around Division I basketball literally from day one," Harris told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "It definitely helped guide that decision, but I was very fortunate that my parents never forced anything upon me and let me choose my own path."

Even though Harris said he may have known early on that coaching was a strong passion, his path after playing college basketball at N.C. State was not a move directly from on the court to on the sidelines.

After playing the 2009-10 season for An Cearnog Nua Moycullen in Ireland, Harris returned to the States, and he returned with a plan. Despite not playing football at the high school or college level, Harris joined the Dallas Cowboys' practice roster in an attempt to make it into the NFL.

Harris said the attempt came to life because he thought he was physically capable of competing in the NFL, and when he was given a nudge by his best friend Jay Sonnhalter, who played tight end at East Carolina and was also working out with Dallas, he gave it a shot.

"I always kind of told myself that I could do it," Harris said. "I mean the football coaches here at N.C. State would always mention it. We lived with the football team in our residence while I was in school, and we would always have the conversation. When I got back (from Ireland), my dad literally asked me what I wanted to do next, and I said, 'Oh, let's try the football thing.' I'd heard I was physically capable of doing it and he was like, 'Oh that's great, because I just spoke to two agents about it the other day.' "

Ultimately, Harris got hurt and did not make the Cowboys' roster, but the experience did not come without a few highlights. Most notably, Harris remembers a meeting with Cowboys owner Jerry Jones.

"It was always on my bucket list to meet Jerry Jones, so that was pretty amazing, the phone call and then getting in that room and having that conversation with him," Harris said. "He just knows everything about everybody. It was awesome. Even going in on a free-agent contract into rookie camp, that man treated you like you belonged, and it was amazing."

After a brief stint at two jobs in marketing, Harris finally followed in his father's footsteps and became a college basketball coach, much thanks to a friend from his childhood, former Dayton men's basketball head coach Archie Miller.

Miller, who is now the head coach at Indiana, held a 139-63 record in six seasons with the Flyers and helped get Harris on the staff in 2011.

"It was more just kind of trying to get my footing at a young age, 23, wanted to see what I did," Harris said on testing out jobs in marketing. "I was very fortunate that Archie Miller gave me a call, and he was going to be the head coach at the University of Dayton and offered me that position. I was very, very lucky to get into it with someone I was very familiar with.

"I mean he played for my dad, I played for his dad. My dad and his brother both played at Pitt. So it was just at the time just seeing if I wanted to do something other than coaching, and it proved to me very quickly that I didn't."

Harris spent seven seasons with Dayton basketball, but only four with the men's team. In June of 2014, Harris made the shift over to women's basketball under head coach Jim Jabir, and the decision was an easy one for him to make.

"I was actually one of the rare people who actually wanted to coach women's basketball young," Harris said. "I was very fortunate to be around Coach (Kay) Yow here at N.C. State growing up from the age of 9 really into my college career, and unfortunately she passed. When I was about 12 years old, she said something about me coaching, and that always resonated with me.

"When the job opened with Coach Jabir at the time, he kind of went like, 'Hey, would you ever consider coaching women's basketball?' I said, 'Absolutely. I will go grab my stuff and be right back.' "

In his three seasons as an assistant on the Dayton women's team, Harris helped lead the Flyers to three NCAA tournament appearances, a run to the Elite Eight in 2015 and an 87-39 record.

His success led him back to his alma mater, N.C. State, the same college that his father coached at for the majority of his career. There, Harris was a part of two Wolfpack teams that finished with a combined 56-10 record, and both of which finished in the top 10 in the country.

Harris' final games as an assistant coach for N.C. State were three victories in the ACC tournament to win the conference title.

"It's really special just because you grew up around it," Harris said. "Again I mention Coach Yow because she's one of the greatest human beings I've ever been around, but you saw the level that she had it at and it was always the talk of that's where we wanted to get back to. And it was really cool being a part of that."

The success that Harris had at both of his previous destinations caught the attention of Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff, who brought in Harris as Banks' replacement because of his work both within a team and in building a team.

"I've known him just through the profession over the years," McGuff said. "He's got a great reputation, a high character person, great work ethic, and I just really think he'll really be great with our players and also just recruiting kind of the next wave of kids we're going to need to get to continue to compete at the highest levels. I love to hire people that come from winning programs. I think there's something to that, and he certainly fits that bill. I'm just really excited to welcome him to the program."

Harris also said his previous relationship with McGuff played a factor in his decision to leave the Wolfpack and join the Buckeye coaching staff, but he added that his desire to be more of an essential member of a program was a big piece in his eventual decision.

"I've always kept in pretty good contact with Coach McGuff," Harris said. "He's become a really, really good ally for me. And now being familiar with a lot of the roster, having recruited a lot of those young women while I was at Dayton, you can really see the way that it's trending. It's more so an opportunity to, again, help a program get back to where they want to be.

"I'm really big on going somewhere that, in your mind, you feel that you're needed more than wanted, and Coach McGuff and I just have always had really good conversations about his vision of what he wants to do. I really, really firmly believe that he's taking those strides to get to that step, and I really just wanted to be a part of it."

Among those Harris is familiar with on the roster are freshman forward Gabby Hutcherson, freshman guard Anyssa Jones, sophomore guards Madison Greene and Jacy Sheldon, senior guard Braxtin Miller and graduate transfer forward Tanaya Beacham from Toledo.

When McGuff looked for a replacement for Banks, there were specific traits he said he was looking for, all of which fit the bill with Harris.

"Just someone who could really impact our players on and off the court and help carry out the mission that we're trying to help our kids develop in a wholistic manner," McGuff said of what he was looking for. "Simon's got great energy. He's got excellent experience at Dayton and at North Carolina State. He's a winner. He's also an accomplished recruiter, and I think he'll help us continue to draw the right kids into the program."

Harris had those characteristics, brings experience with multiple winning teams, has prior experience with a large portion of the roster and has a little bit of NFL experience to bring to the table.

Now, after a wildly successful stint at his alma mater, Harris is back coaching in the state where his

father is inducted into the Hall of Fame, and he is hoping to once again follow in his footsteps, now at a new destination.

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