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Gillies '83: Love of soccer inspires career and gift to Morris

Summary: A bequest to the soccer program reflects his passion for the beauty and the simplicity of the sport.

(April 18, 2010)-Friendships with high school and college students from other countries fueled Jeff Gillies's initial interest in soccer. Throughout his life, he has enthusiastically watched soccer advance in the United States. Today, as director of youth soccer at the YMCA of Middle Tennessee, Brentwood Center in Brentwood, Tennessee, Gillies encourages thousands each year to learn and love the sport. A gift to the University of Minnesota, Morris reflects his passion.

An introduction to soccer

A Brazilian student visiting his high school in Alexandria, Minnesota, introduced Gillies to soccer. "I took to it right from the beginning," he remembers. "We did not have a varsity program then, but we put together a league with the help of several adults who also had passion for the game."

When he arrived at Morris in 1978, it didn't take him long to notice young men playing soccer on campus green spaces, and he was quick to join them. "We had students studying at UMM from foreign countries, including Greece and several Middle Eastern countries. As I recall, they got things started, and Soccer Club grew from there."

That group of about 30 players coordinated Soccer Club practices, games, and travel to other colleges. They practiced two or three times per week on Miller Field or in the P.E. Annex during the winter."

Thrilled with intercollegiate soccer at Morris

While he holds fond Soccer Club memories, Gillies was thrilled when soccer became an intercollegiate sport at Morris, the women in 1998 and the men in 2006. "It's pretty neat to see a program finally," he says, "and for it to be doing so well."

A 1983 physical education major, Gillies notes that his Morris education "most definitely" serves him well in his YMCA position. As director of soccer programs, he witnesses the sport's growth as he coordinates leagues, coaches, and sponsors for between 1,500 to 1,700 youth each spring and fall season.

"Soccer is a great game," reflects Gillies, "a beautiful and simple game, played the world over. When it comes to professional, top-level soccer, the United States is still in the early stages compared to the rest of the world. But when it comes to youth soccer, we have more kids playing here than anywhere in the world. I'm inspired by seeing youth play the game and by seeing it continue to grow in numbers."

A gift to Morris soccer

"In thanks for his Morris experience and as a reflection of his passion for the sport of soccer, Gillies has established a fund in support of the Cougar men's and women's soccer programs through a bequest. He shares, "Morris was great. Campus life—there's nothing like it—the best five years of my life. The University of Minnesota, Morris was a perfect

choice for me, and I thought this would be a great way to help others involved in the game I love.”

Gillies retired from playing soccer at age 40 because of a bad knee, but he continues to referee high school and college soccer.

Photo above: Gillies at the 2006 World Cup in Germany

Photo below: Gillies would like to reconnect with members of the Soccer Club, shown circa 1980. Call 320-589-6066 or [e-mail](#) with your contact information.

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