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Gremmels to enter Hall of Fame

Summary: Jim Gremmels, who became the first men's basketball coach at UMM during the team's inaugural season in 1960 and was hired as one of UMM's original 13 faculty members, will join the Cougar Athletic Hall of Fame during the UMM Alumni Association Annual Banquet as part of UMM's Homecoming weekend.

(August 10, 2006)-A familiar figure in both Cougar athletics and in academics at the University of Minnesota, Morris is the latest person to be inducted into the University of Minnesota, Morris Cougar Athletic Hall of Fame.

Jim Gremmels, who became the first men's basketball coach at UMM during the team's inaugural season in 1960 and was hired as one of UMM's original 13 faculty members, will join the Hall during the UMM Alumni Association Annual Banquet on Friday, Sept. 22, as part of UMM's Homecoming weekend.

"The letter I wrote to then Dean Rodney Briggs, to apply for the position, was one of the most important letters I have ever written," said Gremmels, in an interview with UMM Sports Information Director Brian Curtis.

"I actually showed up a day late for the interview," Gremmels recalled. "I got a reply from Dean Briggs to come in for an interview. I went to his house and knocked on the door and his wife, Helen, answered. I said I am here for the interview for the men's basketball coaching position. Mrs. Briggs told me that was to have taken place the day before, but Dean Briggs was over in his office. So I went across campus, met with Dean Briggs and fortunately was offered the position."

Gremmels remained head coach for four seasons. Now a UMM professor emeritus of English, he still works with current men's basketball Head Coach Paul Grove on a part-time basis.

During his first season, he coached just nine players, all freshmen, so he would have to practice with the team. UMM played just 10 games and those were against freshmen and junior college teams. He coached without benefit of an assistant coach for the first three seasons. By the third season, he was able to drop all junior college teams and play all four-year schools.

"Home court advantage was huge in the old P.E. Annex in the early 60s" Gremmels added. "With the small court it allowed us to pack it in on defense, and the glare from the lights in certain spots seemed to bother players from other teams and we were able to take advantage of that."

His last game as a head coach was perhaps his most memorable game.

"We played St. Cloud State, which was coached by Red Severson," said Gremmels. They were really tough. A very meticulous team that liked to work a shuffle type offense. They scouted us six times that year.

"We played a man-to-man defense and hung close, trailing by 12-13 points at halftime. They built on that in the second

half. After awhile, Red took out his regulars and brought in the reserves. We started to make a come back and forced St. Cloud State to put their starters back in to hang on for the win. Even though we lost, the team played hard and well," Gremmels recalled.

Over the four seasons, Gremmels remembered some decent players. "I had a great many very coachable players in those first years, and everyone worked extremely hard," he said. "Many of those players became very successful."

His best season as a head coach was his third when the Cougars were 8-9. In his fourth season, the team was 24-39.

Gremmels still enjoys being around the players at UMM: "These student athletes work hard every day," he said. They are playing the game of basketball for the love of the game. That is what makes athletics at the Division III level different. None of them are getting the big scholarships. They play the game because they enjoy the lessons it teaches, and perhaps the greatest lesson is a better understanding of themselves."

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