**Volleyball feature – Carl Harwood**

**(Dan Lewis)**

When Carl Harwood took up the opportunity to coach the university’s volleyball sides, it was a case of getting Glamorgan in a position where they could compete with the best – seven years on and that mission looks to have been surpassed.

With the men’s 1st team winning the BUCS Cup last month to go alongside their second place finish in the league, combined with the women’s 1st team reaching their first Cup Final, it is clear to see that Harwood has had a huge impact on volleyball at Glamorgan.

Despite this, the veteran player and coach has taken the decision to stand down at the end of the season after seeing a huge transformation in the sport, believing the university’s four sides need to be taken to the next level.

“I’ve been coaching here now for the last seven years, and I will be taking next year off,” he told *GlamSport*.

“I’ve nominated some replacement coaches who are stricter than I am. I believe this is what the teams need now – a more heavy-handed approach and some more discipline on the court.

“I will be in the background watching the teams, being there on an advisory capacity. I’ve never classed myself as a great coach – I’ve classed myself as a good manager and a good organiser – hopefully I’ve proved that over my seven years here.

“It now needs to be passed onto someone who is a good coach who has discipline, and the coaches I have nominated can now help push the volleyball teams on further next year.

“It is just temporary at the moment, but after seven years of coaching at Glamorgan two or three nights a week, plus matches on the weekend, I know it’s time for me to take a break. Whether that is a one year break or long-term break as far as Glamorgan is concerned I don’t know.

“During my time here volleyball has improved amazingly; in terms of support we have had from the Students Union and the support we’ve had from the Sports Development Officers it has been great.”

It’s clear to see the joy that Harwood takes from volleyball – a sport he has been associated with for nearly 30 years now - something he aims to pass on to potential stars of the future.

His university coaching journey has seen him take Cardiff University into the top division, before focusing solely on Glamorgan – a move that has certainly paid off.

“I started off coaching Glamorgan and Cardiff University at the same time which was hard work, but volleyball is a sport I love, so I got a lot of enjoyment out of it.

“Cardiff University went up to the First Division, so I thought it was safe for me to leave them at that point and concentrate on Glamorgan who had only just introduced volleyball. Glamorgan needed that three-year-plan to bring them to the point that they are at now.

“My policy is not so much for results, but for people to enjoy playing volleyball. A lot of these players are foreign students – and also a lot of British students – so this gives them the opportunity to try a sport that they have perhaps not tried before and go away with the knowledge of playing the sport.

It is this attitude to the sport that has allowed Harwood to build up a great team spirit that led to Glamorgan men’s 1st team lifting the Western Conference Cup in Bristol in March – an honour which certainly went some way to cover the disappointment of missing out on top spot in the league on points difference.

“Winning the cup was a great success for the university,” Harwood continued.

“We finished joint top in the league but missed out on ‘point’s difference’ as they call it. It was disappointing because the same thing has happened to us before, where we should have won the league but didn’t.

“BUCS arrange it so that if we play the team that are in joint first place, if they win by however many points, they automatically go up. So rather than doing it by points on home goals and away goals scored, it comes down to this other system.

“Winning the cup does help to soften the blow. This year has been a good year because we’ve had two men’s teams and two women’s teams.

Though the success didn’t stop there, as Harwood also oversaw the women’s 1st side reach the Cup Final, where they fell 3-0 to rivals Swansea. This, along with the semi-finals appearance for the men’s 2nd team, shows that the decision to bring in two additional sides certainly paid off.

Talking to *GlamSport* after another gruelling season, Harwood said: “In the seven years that I’ve been here we’ve had the one team for both the men and women - so it has been a lot harder work with the additional sides coming in, but a better outcome as far as I can see.

“The players have had more play and training time, helping to build them into the teams that they are now.

“Both the men and women’s 1st teams reached the Cup Finals and finished towards the top of the league. So it has proved its worth having the two sets of teams, especially for the men whose second side also reached the cup semi-finals.”

The lasting impact Harwood has had on the Glamorgan volleyball sides is highlighted when looking at the women’s 1st team, whose Cup Final appearance this season was the first time they had ever reached that stage of the competition.

Though delighted to see the women’s side reach the final – as well as finishing third in the domestic league - Harwood believes that more could have been done in terms of the set-up of the sport.

“The women’s side reaching the cup final is a good achievement in a sense that in the seven years that I have been coaching at Glamorgan, it is the first time that we have reached that stage of the competition.

“It is a disappointment in terms of the organisation of the volleyball competition which tied in with a lot of student exams, so we lost a couple of top players for some of our major matches.

“I think that cost us in a few games because we were unable to field our strongest team - we had to sacrifice some points, otherwise I believe the women would have been top of the league, as well as in the cup semi-finals.”

With a successful season complete, attention can now turn towards next season, where Harwood believes that all four Glamorgan sides can truly push on to the next level: Promotion to the top tier.

“There is no reason why the men and women’s sides shouldn’t push on to the higher division next season,” an optimistic Harwood said.

“I think that the men should definitely press on into the First Division next year.

“The women’s sides have some great players, so I see no reason why they can’t also now move up a league. They perhaps need to fight a bit harder, but there is no reason why they can’t push on now just like the men next season.”

These positive views also extend to the women’s 2nd team, who finished bottom of their league. Harwood puts this down to the fact that there is a large turnover of students in such a short amount of time, though this looks to now be changing, which is all down to the recruitment system in place at Glamorgan.

“A lot of students in the 2nd team are on a three or four year course, so there is potential there now to build a good 2nd team and a brilliant 1st team.

“It can be difficult because a lot of students are only there for a year or so, so we put in a lot of work and it’s not so much wasted, but it means that we can now build on that ahead of next year with two full teams who are around for another few years.

“The reason there are so many volleyball players in Glamorgan is to do with our extensive campaign at the start of the year at the Fresher Fayre where we look to recruit players. At these initial sessions we can have at least 80 people come along, though that then gets whittled down, but it is an extensive push for volleyball players during these Fayre’s which can prove successful – too successful in many ways because we then have to cut these numbers down!”

Despite the love and passion that Penarth resident Harwood shows towards indoor volleyball, it’s actually another version of the sport which first got him interested in a career which has now spanned for close to three decades – beach volleyball.

In fact, his passion for the beach-based sport was enough to persuade him to set-up Barry Island Beach Volleyball Club – the biggest of its kind in Britain.

“My love of volleyball is actually beach volleyball, which I have played for nearly 30 years. But I’m of course getting older now so I don’t play as much, though I am the founding member of Barry Island Beach Volleyball Club.

“I founded that 17 years ago and it’s now the biggest beach volleyball club in the UK where we now have over 175 members. I still play on weekends and even coach now-and-then, but when it came to winter months I got a little bored, so that’s why I moved more towards indoor volleyball.

“Indoor volleyball has six people, whereas beach volleyball has only two people – so there is a big difference. With beach volleyball, all the players need to know all the different skills, with indoor volleyball, the six players each have their own specific skills – so the two types of volleyball require a completely different mindset and the tactics can of course vary where with beach volleyball there are just two of you on virtually the same size court as indoor.”

On the back of the biggest summer of sport Britain has ever witnessed – including additional coverage of sports such as volleyball – Harwood believes that more still needs to be done with regards to getting youngsters interested in the sport.

Volleyball doesn’t receive the same coverage in Britain as it does in other European countries, and this looks set to continue with the Olympic committee recently announcing that it is set to cut funding for the sport.

“Volleyball doesn’t get half as much coverage as it should do, because it really is a great sport to watch. We’ve lost a lot of funding through the Olympic committee, so there is no funding there, but I would certainly love to see it covered more.

“Volleyball is the second most popular sport in the world after football, so judging by that it doesn’t get the coverage in Britain that it needs. I don’t think anybody in Britain has latched onto the enthusiasm of the sport, whereas in other countries across Europe there is good television coverage and massive crowds attending matches which is lacking in this country.

“The main reason for that is the fact that volleyball is not on the curriculum in schools in Britain outside of Scotland – that is why there is a higher attendance in volleyball in Scotland than in Wales or Northern Ireland, for example.

“This is where our problems lie, if it was to be brought into the curriculum then there would be more interest generated. It is a non-contact, non-sexist sport – played by men or women - and there are not many of those sports around. The government says these are the types of sports would need to encourage youngsters to play, but that opportunity has never been taken up.”

The sport in general may not have moved on in terms of coverage, but Carl Harwood can be happy knowing that he has played his part in helping to revolutionise volleyball at the University of Glamorgan. Now it’s over to the new management team to take Glamorgan to the next level.