

MetroStars' trainer knows how to keep busy

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Growing up in the waiting rooms of doctor's offices, you had to figure that John Gallucci Jr. was going to pick something up.

The Richmond resident spent a lot of time as a boy waiting in those offices for his father John Sr., who owned a surgical supply company in Brooklyn, and so was planted the seed for a career in medicine.

Now all the late nights spent studying for his Master's degree in Athletic Training and Sports Science in the early 1990s at Long Island University and most recently (2004) on his second Master's in Physical Therapy from Dominican College has led to Gallucci being named recently as head athletic trainer of the MetroStars of Major League Soccer.

"There's no better feeling than working with the highest level of athletes in the world," said Gallucci, who assisted former head trainer Stu Schwerner for six years. "The past six seasons have given me the experience to take on this new position of head athletic trainer."

Gallucci graduated from Monsignor Farrell HS in the mid-1980s and majored in political science at the College of Staten Island. But athletics maintained a strong attraction for him and he remained involved by coaching wrestling at Farrell in the early 1990s.

But the move from Farrell in 1990 to the MetroStars today wasn't an easy one, although there was one big break.

"Coming out of LIU (in 1993), I was very fortunate to get a position at New York University," Gallucci said. "We covered everything there, including club sports, because it was a Division III school."

After 4 1/2 years at NYU, Gallucci moved uptown to Columbia.

After leaving Columbia, Gallucci made stops as head trainer for the New Jersey Pride of Major League Lacrosse, a rehab consultant for the now-defunct New Jersey Gladiators of the Arena Football League and coordinated medical care for the AVP Pro Beach Volleyball Belmar Open, the Nike Pro City League and USA Wrestling.

Best of all, he never had to leave the metropolitan area.

"When I tell my colleagues that I've always been close to home, they can't believe it," Gallucci said. "I've been very fortunate in that aspect."

However that doesn't mean he hasn't had opportunities to move around in the past.

A few years back, he was offered a head trainer position for a professional sports team in Texas, but with a young daughter, Stephanie, who was 6 at the time and is now 10, Gallucci and his wife Dawn decided to stay put and wait for something to come along in

this fertile market for professional sports. (The Gallucci family has since grown by one member, 10-month-old Charlie.)

And while waiting for the right opportunity to come up, Gallucci went to work on his second Master's and made the very wise decision to focus on knee injuries.

"Most of the injuries that athletes encounter are knee-related," he said. "I actually did my dissertation for my Master's on knee injuries."

That area of expertise has certainly helped him along the way, as he was hand-picked for the job by MetroStars GM Alexi Lalas and was highly recommended by Schwerner.

"It's a very volatile business," he said. "The biggest thing that is happening in sports right now is that GMs and owners are looking at a trainer's rehab background.

"If a guy on our team had the same surgery as a player on another team and the opposing player comes back in three weeks and it takes our guy five weeks, the front office will want to know why. It's a balance of letting them know that people heal at different rates. There's tremendous pressure in that respect."

Nevertheless, Gallucci is certainly up for the challenge. But he does have a fallback plan.

Several years back, Gallucci decided to get involved in the private sector and founded JAG Physical Therapy, located in West Orange, N.J. and along with Richard Giordano, treats athletes of all ages. While the days are long, it's not uncommon for him to work 14-hour days, as is the season, there's typically only a month-and-a-half of down time in the offseason, Gallucci is "very happy practicing" in his field.

"I fill my days," he says.

In addition to his work with the MetroStars and JAG Physical Therapy he's also on the advisory board to the New Jersey Governor's Council for Physical Fitness and Health and is the secretary of the Monsignor Farrell Alumni Board.

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