

Basketball coach has the game in his blood

Coaching, a Life

GROWING UP ON Long Island, Joe Jones spent summer days in the jungle-like heat of a dry cleaner's, watching his father press clothes. It wasn't his choice. Each morning his father roused him and his brothers, James and John, and insisted they join him on the job. Amid the hot steam and the hissing of the press, their father would preach the virtues of hard work and of being a stand-up person. The memory still makes Jones roll his eyes.

"I hated it," he says.

Now the 46-year-old Jones, head coach of the BU men's basketball team, looks back on those days as formative. His dad taught him a near-blistering work ethic and the importance of giving all you have to whatever you do, even pressing shirts, lessons he says shaped him as a coach and as a person.

That foundation has served Jones well. His coaching career includes a stint as head coach at Columbia University and an assistant coach position at Boston College before being hired by BU in June 2011, roughly four months later than the ideal time to take the reins. The fact that he was replacing the popular Pat Chambers and inheriting a title-winning team just added to the pressure. Undeterred, Jones did what he always does: worked hard.

The regular season was a roller-coaster ride, with highs that included a vic-

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tory over BC for the first time in 37 years and lows that included a seven-game losing streak. Although the team was 16 and 16 overall, with a tough nonconference schedule, it was 12 and 4 in America East conference games. BU lost 53-49 in the conference tournament quarterfinals to Hartford.

Jones played guard on his high school basketball team with his brother James, who is a year older. He was a good shooter and an analytical player, says James, who admits that the brothers were competitive, to the point that they once got into a fight on the court. It was only later, after both became coaches, that they decided they liked each other. Now they talk on the phone most days, about family and basketball.

Each played college basketball, James at SUNY Albany and Joe at SUNY Oswego. James then took a job coaching at his alma mater, and Joe became assistant coach at Hofstra University, where he quickly earned a reputation as a top-notch recruiter. He moved on to Villanova University, working under head coach Jay Wright, the man he credits with teaching him 90 percent of what he knows about coaching.

In 2003, Jones landed the head coach job at Columbia,



taking over a team with a miserable 2 and 25 record. He found himself having to compete with his brother, who by then was at Yale. The brothers had once enjoyed besting each other, but that time had long since passed. "There was no winner," says James, now Yale's men's basketball head coach.

By 2010 Jones was looking for a change. He and his wife wanted to raise their two young children in the suburbs, not in Manhattan, where they lived near Columbia. He made an unconventional move, signing on as an assistant coach at BC under head coach Steve Donahue. It was a sabbatical of sorts, a rare chance to step out of the limelight and reconsider the game he loved.

"Once I was able to put my ego aside, it was wonderful," Jones says. He learned not to take losses so hard, how to be a better recruiter, and to have a little more balance in his life.

In a college basketball coach's life, however, balance is a relative term. At BU, Jones starts most mornings during the season by dropping his kids off at school and going for a run. The rest of the day is taken up by meetings, practice, and game videotapes. Jones then heads home at 7 or 8 in the evening so he can say good night to his kids. Then he watches more videotapes late into the night. When at last he goes to bed, he dreams about basketball. AS

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