

Cal State LA coach makes plans for retirement

Longtime Claremont resident Sandy Kriezel, who has been a successful college tennis coach for nearly 25 years, announced that the 2018-19 season will be her last leading the women's tennis team at Cal State Los Angeles.

Coach Kriezel, who has been the Golden Eagles' women's tennis coach for the past nine years and lifted the program to national prominence during her tenure, announced her retirement in December, effective at the end of the academic year, according to a news release from the school.

"It's an exciting time for me right now," Coach Kriezel said. "I'm looking forward to what's ahead and I can honestly say I'll be leaving with no regrets."

Ms. Kriezel, 65, moved to Claremont with her parents, Earl and Lorene Kriezel and brothers, Bill, Doug, Dave and Gary, in 1956 when she was three years old.

She attended Oakmont Elementary School, El Roble Intermediate and was a 1972 graduate of Claremont High. Ironically, she did not start playing tennis until her senior year, but took to it immediately because of her natural athleticism.

"Growing up with four brothers I was a bit of a tomboy so I learned how to throw and hit a ball while playing street games," she said.

Coach Kriezel worked at the COURIER when she was a teenager, operating the heavy labeling machine that stamped the addresses on each paper. She remembers saving her money so she could get a pair of sandals from the Village Idiot on First Street. It took a



COURIER photo/Steven Felschundneff
Claremont resident and Cal State LA women's tennis Coach Sandy Kriezel holds a photo of her parents, Earl and Lorene Kriezel, in front of the Claremont home where she was raised. Coach Kriezel was a decorated tennis player in college who went on to have a 25-year career as a coach. She will retire from Cal State LA in June and plans to move to Chico.

long while to save the \$18 for the shoes, but it was completely worth the wait, she said.

After high school Coach Kriezel played for two years at Chaffey College, where she was the team captain in 1973-74 and played number one singles and doubles. She went on to Chico State, where she was the Northern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference's number one singles player and part of the number one doubles team. She was inducted into the Chico State

Hall of Fame in 1998 and the Chaffey College Hall of Fame in 2001.

Coach Kriezel moved back to Claremont in the early 90s to care for her parents and began her career as an assistant coach at Pomona-Pitzer in 1995.

In 1996 Coach Kriezel took an assistant position at Cal Poly Pomona. Three years later she was promoted to head coach for the men's and women's programs. Her tenure ended when Cal Poly

Pomona dropped both tennis programs following the 2010 season.

Coach Kriezel had a 123-117 record in 12 seasons with the Broncos, including a 64-43 mark in conference matches. She led the Broncos to the 2003 California Collegiate Athletic Association championship and was named the ITA West Region Coach of the Year. The Broncos were ranked 18th in the nation

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in 2002 and 2003, and Coach Kriezel was named the CCAA Coach of the Year.

Coach Kriezel has an overall record of 203-196 spanning 20 seasons as a head coach, including an 80-79 record with the Golden Eagles. Cal State LA achieved national top-25 rankings for six straight seasons from 2012-17, something the program hadn't achieved since 1997. Coach Kriezel's final home match will be against local rival Azusa Pacific on April 10.

"I've had so many great experiences and been privileged to coach so many wonderful student-athletes," she said. "I have learned so much from these incredible young athletes and I want to think that I've helped them in their journey to be good citizens, kind and thoughtful and, of course, fierce competitors. My goal has always been to foster and mentor strong, independent and confident thinkers."

Her teams have always been among the top in the division in grade point average, and one of her former players, Christie Lau, is the university's only two-time

CoSIDA Academic All-American.

"I can't put into words how much she's done for me and how much she's inspired me," Cal State LA senior Isabella Lopez said. "She's taught me how to enjoy life and enjoy tennis. I was kind of burned out when I first got here, but she took a chance on me. I can speak for all the girls, we feel so lucky to have her as our mentor and as our coach."

Former number-one ranked tennis professional and Cal State LA alum Billie Jean King, visited Coach Kriezel several times over the years to mentor her young players. It was an experience she treasures as she prepares to end her career. "I am humbled to have become her friend," Coach Kriezel said.

"We are so proud of the impact Sandy has had on so many student-athletes over her storied career," Cal State LA Executive Director of Athletics Daryl Gross said. "She has developed championship teams while also ensuring academic excellence by graduating her athletes at an elite level. We wish her the very best in her retirement. She leaves us a legacy of tremendous success."

Once her retirement is official Coach Kriezel plans



Sandy Kriezel and her brothers, Gary and Dave, back row, Doug and Bill in front, pose for a picture in the back yard of their Claremont family home in 1971.

to return to the Chico area, where she has arranged to buy a friend's house. However, she said that Claremont would always be her hometown.

Her life here revolves around outdoor activities which are anchored by the necessity of walking her dogs. When her four-legged friends were younger, they would hike the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park, but now they prefer the Thompson Creek Trail. Coach Kriezel also enjoys meeting friends in the Village for coffee or meals, and recently she has started taking harmonica lessons at the Folk Music Center.

"Claremont is such a great place to live," she said. "It will definitely always be home to me."

—Steven Felschundneff
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