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## PEOPLE



### STEVE JENNINGS:

Bethesda native returns to the Olympics as a field hockey coach

In 1996, Bethesda native Steve Jennings was on the playing field at the Olympics in Atlanta, a star on the USA Men's Olympic field hockey team. Twelve years later, the Walter Johnson High School (WJ) graduate returned to the Olympics this summer in Beijing, China, as an assistant coach for the USA women's field hockey team.

Jennings, 39, and head coach of women's field hockey at American University (AU), shuttled back and forth to California in 2008 to help train the Olympic team, an experience he called a "major thrill."

Jennings first began playing field hockey when he was placed in a ninth-grade field hockey gym class. "I didn't get my first choice of soccer and ended up being exposed to the sport that has become my life," he says. Jennings says his interest grew from "hobby to obsession" mainly because he liked the complexity of the sport and the opportunities for men within field hockey. Jennings started his career playing with the Greenwich Field Hockey Club in New York and was selected to play for the U.S. Junior National Team in 1987.

According to Jennings, his family and friends were very supportive. "One of the best benefits of playing was getting to see the world and travel, but it was a big commitment," he says. Jennings retired from playing field hockey professionally in 1999 after helping the U.S. place fifth in the Pan American Games. While he was playing, he served as a field hockey coach at Ohio State University from 1996 to 1998. Following his professional career, Jennings began coaching at American in 1999.

Amy Wood, girls field hockey coach at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School and a longtime friend of Jennings', says that "it's great to see a home grown player coach on a national level."

Kristen Collins, 24, of Gaithersburg, a former AU field hockey player, was recruited by Jennings in the fall of 2001 when she was a senior at Quince Orchard High School. "Steve was more than just a coach; he transformed the field hockey program at AU. Our team was once a top-500 team in the country and my senior year we were in the top 10," she says. "He is very well respected in the field hockey community." Last season AU's field hockey team was ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the country.

AARON CLAMAGE

— Kara Manos