Honoring Missy Foote at Middlebury
Coach Missy Foote will retire next spring after 38 years at Middlebury and 34 years leading the women’s lacrosse program. Middlebury would like to honor Missy’s remarkable career, both as a coach and as a national icon in the greater lacrosse community.

When Middlebury lacrosse coach Missy Foote was inducted into the US Lacrosse National Hall of Fame in 2012, dozens of current and former players traveled to Baltimore, Maryland, to honor her, some coming from as far away as California. Eight outstanding players and coaches were inducted that year, and Missy’s cheering section was by far the largest and the loudest.

That’s one indication of the way Missy’s players, past and present, feel about her. Once you’re part of her team, you’re part of her team forever. “She just brings everyone along with her; no one ever drops off,” explains Sue Butler Lehman ’81, who was a Middlebury freshman the year Missy started her coaching career at the College. “She does continue to be your coach, no question about it.”

Missy will retire next summer after 38 years coaching Panther teams—the longest tenure of any Middlebury coach. At the age of 61, she says, “This seems like the right time to step into another chapter of my life. I’m looking forward to spending time with my family, as well as travelling and pursuing all of the recreational activities I’ve dabbled in over the years.”

A HISTORIC CAREER
It feels like the end of an era. “Her career can only be described in historic terms,” according to Erin Quinn, the College’s athletic director. “She is one of the top coaches in the history of her sport and will retire from Middlebury as one of the most admired and beloved coaches ever to work at the College.”

When Missy came to Middlebury in 1977, she was only 24 years old. She had graduated from Springfield College in

CAREER SUMMARY
Number of students she has coached: More than 400
Number of NCAA national championships: 6 (1 in field hockey, 5 in lacrosse)
Number of NESCAC championships: 7 in lacrosse
Career record in field hockey: 180-95-12
Career record in lacrosse: 406-110-1 (with one season still to go)
Number of Coach of the Year awards: 14 (12 in lacrosse, 2 in field hockey)
Year inducted into lacrosse National Hall of Fame: 2012
Massachusetts with a degree in physical education three years earlier, and in the interim she had been coaching field hockey, lacrosse, and basketball at Green Mountain Union High School in Chester, Vermont.

In her early years at Middlebury, Missy was one of only three women’s coaches, and she was responsible for women’s basketball, swimming, and lacrosse. She also taught sailing. After a few years, she was able to drop basketball and swimming and pick up field hockey, which she coached for 21 years, from 1980 until 2001. Since 2001, she has focused entirely on her favorite sport, lacrosse.

A VOICE FOR WOMEN ATHLETES

Just a few years before Missy came to Middlebury, Congress passed Title IX of the Equal Opportunity in Education Act, which required colleges receiving federal aid to provide equal opportunities for men and women in all of their operations, including athletics. It took a while for many colleges, including Middlebury, to meet that standard.

Missy became one of the College’s strongest advocates for women’s sports, lobbying hard to get a more equitable share of funding and resources and to change a culture that didn’t take women athletes seriously.

“I felt in some ways I was representing all female athletes and had to be their voice,” she says. “Now there is nothing holding back our young women. They can achieve anything they want, which is a great transition to have witnessed.”

CREATING A LEGEND

The achievements of Missy’s teams are truly remarkable. If she had only coached field hockey, her career would be regarded as a great success. She ended her 21 years as head coach of that program in 2001 with a record of 180–95–12. The Panther field hockey team went to the NCAA tournament in 1994 and 1996 and won its first NCAA championship in 1998. It made six ECAC tournament appearances and captured a pair of ECAC crowns in 1993 and 1997. Missy was named the Division III regional and national field hockey coach of the year in 1994 and 1998.

But it is the success of the Middlebury women’s lacrosse team that has really made Missy a legend. By the end of her 34th season as head coach last year, the team had won five NCAA championships, made the final four in the NCAA tournament for 14 consecutive years (1994–2007), and played in eight NCAA title games. Between 2001 and 2003, the team had four perfect seasons and won 51 consecutive games. It has also claimed seven NESCAC championships, appearing in title games nine times, and two ECAC championships.

Right now, with her final season still ahead of her, Missy’s career record in lacrosse is 406–110–1. Only one Division III coach has ever recorded more wins, and Missy ranks third among coaches in all divisions. She has been named Division III New England and national women’s lacrosse coach of the year five times, NESCAC coach of the year five times, and regional coach of the year twice.

A COACH FOR LIFE

Winning championships is exciting and satisfying, but Missy weighs her success as a coach not in the number of titles her team achieves or her overall record, but rather in the role she plays as a mentor to her players. “As coaches, we try to make sports a metaphor for life,” she explains. “Through athletics, we grow highly functioning, committed adults. Having the opportunity to help young women reach their potential every day makes my job the best in the world, which is why 37 years have passed in the blink of an eye.”

Missy estimates that she has coached more than 400 young women during her time at Middlebury, and she is still in touch with many of them. Taryn Petrelli ’09, who was captain of both the field hockey and lacrosse teams, is one. “Missy is a constant source of strength for her players,” she observes. “I have lost count of the number of times she encouraged me to overcome some obstacle—maybe on the playing field, or maybe something entirely unrelated to lacrosse—just by reminding me that I could do anything if I really wanted to.”

Now Missy is looking forward to one more season on the sidelines as a coach—maybe even one more national championship. “I want it to be a great season for the team,” she emphasizes. “They’re focused on what they’re doing; there’s not an emphasis on me. It’s business as usual.” And she promises that the end of her 35th season won’t be the end of her connection with Middlebury lacrosse. She plans to keep attending games at home and away whenever she can.

ENSURING MISSY’S LEGACY

Middlebury aims to create an endowed fund, the Missy Foote Women’s Lacrosse Coaching Fund, to support the program and to provide discretionary funds for the head coach. Ideally, we will build the Missy Foote Women’s Lacrosse Coaching Fund over time to reach the $2.5 million threshold to name a coaching chair for Missy. In the shorter term, we seek to raise a minimum of $250,000. This endowed fund will provide the resources to help ensure the quality of the program in perpetuity.