January 13, 2009

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Holtz says he’s staying

The Daily Reflector

Monday, January 12, 2009

Skip Holtz has personally shot down any rumors linking him with the Boston College football head coaching vacancy.

A statement from Holtz, East Carolina’s head coach, was posted on ECU’s Web site Monday night detailing his desire to stay in Greenville and debunking any reports to the contrary.

“The continuing speculation and various media reports regarding my candidacy for positions other than the one I currently have and enjoy at East Carolina are inaccurate,” the statement read. “As I have previously stated, I am not seeking another position and am not involved in any discussions that would promote or verify such conjecture.”

The Boston Globe reported Saturday that Holtz, 29-22 in four seasons at ECU, was a candidate to replace fired BC coach Jeff Jagodzinski. The report came in the middle of a busy recruiting weekend for the Pirates’ skipper, who could not be reached for comment Saturday or Sunday.

ECU director of athletics Terry Holland issued a statement Sunday night saying that he had not been contacted by any schools to speak with any of East Carolina’s head coaches.

Holtz said he hoped his statement “will offer closure to this situation.

“While some aspects of this added visibility might be considered flattering, my primary focus remains solely on continuing to build our program,” Holtz said. “In the short term, that centers around recruiting.”

— ECU Media Relations
Gizmo guys bring their act to ECU

By Kim Grizzard
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

After a few decades, it looks like people would catch on. But juggling duo Allan Jacobs and Barrett Felker still have to field the same question: What's your real job?

The answer is a jaw-dropper. Performing as The Gizmo Guys is their real job. Jacobs and Felker actually make a living juggling.

Their response to people who envision them performing on the street corner with a tin cup and a monkey? They laugh. They are, after all, comedy jugglers.

"We've both been full time for 30 years now," Felker said, "if we had day jobs we'd probably lose them for lack of attendance."

Based in New York, Felker and Jacobs spend about 100 days a year on the road, performing everywhere from corporate events to cruise ships. The Gizmo Guys will perform at Jan. 30 as part of the Family Fare series at East Carolina University.

Jacobs and Felker, who have received international recognition for their work, started juggling in the 1970s. Felker learned from his cousin in North Carolina. Jacobs was 21 when his college roommate taught him.

"It was a birthday gift," Jacobs recalled. "He took me outside and taught me how to juggle and that was it. I was hooked from there."

Within a year, he was working as a street performer in Boston and Newport, Rhode Island. He performed with Slap Happy, a Boston-based comedy troupe, for three years before teaming with Felker in 1987.

Together, they formed The Gizmo Guys. How'd they come up with the name?

"We threw around a few different things," Felker quipped. "A lot of the things we juggle are called thingamajigs or whozamuwachits or gizmos. We thought of the Gizmologists, and we're really happy that we never chose that one because it would have been a disaster."

Audience occasionally still botch the name, calling them Jacobs and Felker "The Gizmo Brothers." The two are not related (Jacobs' brother, Ed, teaches in ECU's School of Music.)

"We thought (Gizmo Guys) had a nice ring to it," Felker said. We also thought if we worked overseas, it would be something people wouldn't stumble over too much."

It was a good call. The two have performed from British Columbia to Berlin and California to China, making numerous television appearances and even teaching at circus schools.

But The Gizmo Guys are more than fun and games. When they take their show on the road to perform for school-age kids, they talk about patterns, inertia, symmetry and the center of gravity.

"They're little inserts that are meant to be fun and educational at the same time," Felker said. "We don't drone on. The kids are all excited to be out of class, so we don't want them to feel like they're right back in class again. We tie it into things that we juggle and make the connections quick and light-hearted and fun. We're not putting on lab coats or anything like that."

Still, their performance skills must have scientific precision. To achieve this, when they are not performing, Felker and Jacobs spend a few hours a day practicing in a gym, trying out new props or perfecting a routine.
"If we go through a week or two when we're not working a lot, then we work a lot on technique," Felker said. 
"We take the technique seriously. We want the juggling to be clean."

Any misses the audience witnesses are most likely choreographed into the routine to make it not only 
fascinating but funny to watch.

"We actually have a few spots in our show where we do make mistakes on purpose," Felker said. "We 
wanted to come up with a show where people weren't nervous for us. When we make mistakes, we look at it 
as a possibility for connecting with the audience."

The Gizmo Guys believe their performance is easy for everyone from schoolchildren to senior adults to 
grasp — even those who don't understand how juggling can be a bona fide occupation.

"They don't believe that it can be done," Jacobs said. "It's kind of funny to me. I remember one instance 
where somebody came up to me and said, 'So what do you do for a real living?' And I said, 'No, actually this 
is what we do.'"

"They would not believe it," he said. "It just could not get through."

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Rushing resigns post with ECU volleyball

The Daily Reflector

Chris Rushing, East Carolina University’s head volleyball coach for the past four seasons, has resigned from his position effective June 30, ECU athletics director Terry Holland announced Monday.

Rushing, 41, accepted the job in 2005 and quickly turned around a program that had recorded four consecutive losing seasons by guiding ECU to consecutive winning campaigns for the first time since 1977-78. In all, he completed his tenure with a record of 68-59 (.535), owning the highest overall winning percentage in school history.

“Coach Rushing has built a solid foundation for the future success of ECU volleyball,” Holland said. “More than that, he has been a terrific advocate for volleyball in eastern North Carolina and has built a strong local club program. We will begin the search process immediately and appreciate coach Rushing’s willingness to continue coaching our team until a new coach is on board.”

After leading the Pirates to 20-11 and 19-12 marks during his first two seasons in charge, Rushing followed with 16-17 and 13-19 records in 2007 and 2008, respectively. East Carolina claimed the program’s first-ever Conference USA tournament victory under Rushing’s guidance in 2005 before following with another postseason triumph in 2007.

Keller honored

Madison Keller, a senior defender for the East Carolina women’s soccer team, has been named a second-team National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA) All-America Scholar.

Keller, from Clarksburg, Md., is the second honoree in program history. Kristin Hoyle was a Verizon/CoSIDA Second-Team Academic All-America selection in 2002.

Keller holds a 3.75 cumulative grade point average as a biology major and has earned East Carolina Dean’s List or Chancellor’s List accolades every semester during her time in Greenville. Additionally, she has garnered three Conference USA Commissioner’s Honor Roll nods as well as two C-USA academic medals.

The award is the latest in a long line of postseason honors for Keller, who also collected All-C-USA first-team, C-USA All-Tournament team, C-USA All-Academic first team and NSCAA All-Southeast Region second-team accolades.

“It is no mistake that Madison is a team captain for us,” Pirate coach Rob Donnenwirth said. “Everyone saw what a talented player she is as she was recognized with All-Conference and All-Region honors. What people didn’t see is what a great leader she is day in and day out. She sets a high standard for herself with everything she does.”

— ECU Media Relations
Former grappler Sherman tackles fiction writing

By John Swartz
The Daily Reflector

Sunday, January 11, 2009

Milt Sherman took the only approach he knew in writing his first book. Sherman, who coached wrestling for 30 years, wrote about just that.

"I played with the idea a little after I retired," said Sherman, who coached wrestling at D.H. Conley. "You write a first book about what you know about."

In his novel, "Wrestling Spoken Here," Sherman follows Robbie and Matt during a season of high school wrestling. The season is Robbie's first as an athlete, and he must lean on the more experienced Matt to help him through setbacks as a rookie wrestler.

In talking about his book, Sherman wanted to produce a story that, "dealt with high school athletics in a positive way," he said.

It's quite fair to call Sherman a wrestling expert. He wrestled as a youth, and continued that career at East Carolina University where he earned a spot in the ECU Athletics Hall of Fame.

He's in the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in Stillwater, Okla., and holds a career mark of 470-112.

After college, Sherman began his storied coaching career. A coach for 30 years, Sherman taught in Pitt County for 34 years.

One thing he was not an expert in, Sherman admits, was fiction writing. After being published numerous times writing technical articles for wrestling magazines, Sherman said there were aspects of novel writing he struggled with.

"It's my first work of fiction, so it was challenging," he said. "Dialogue was the most challenging. From the first word until there was a book, it was three years. There were gaps where it was sitting on a shelf. There were just times when I couldn't work on it."

Sherman also had his own method for writing, one which he figures has been used by writers for centuries.

"I'd write it out freehand on white notebooks," Sherman said. "Once I finished a chapter, I'd sit down and read it. I'd find things to change."

As the notebooks eventually filled, Sherman allowed technology to do its thing.

"On the third run, I'd type the chapter into the computer," he said. "Each time I went through, I found things I needed to change."

Sherman calls "Wrestling Spoken Here" his first book, and didn't dismiss the idea that there may be a second one day.

"I think it would definitely be easier a second time," Sherman said. "I've got ideas for two more books, but I'm also a practical person."

Contact John Swartz at jswartz@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9592.

To purchase a copy of Sherman's book, visit www.lulu.com/wrestlingspokenhere/ or send an e-mail to miltsherman@hotmail.com.
Getting the most bang for your college buck

By Sharon Jayson, USA TODAY

As college admission deadlines wind down and families submit financial aid applications for next fall, freshmen in 2009 will be the first to start college clarity in the throes of the recession.

What this will mean for students and colleges is just beginning to be understood. But one thing is clear — now, more than ever, students and parents need to make every education dollar count.

TOP 100: Best Value Colleges for 2009

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS: Financial doors are open to applicants who plan ahead

The Princeton Review's list of 100 “Best Value” Colleges for 2009, released today by The Princeton Review and USA TODAY, aims to help them do just that.

The education services and test-prep company's annual list ranks the top 10 public and private colleges and universities; the rest are listed alphabetically. Deemed No. 1 Best Value for a public university is the University of Virginia in Charlottesville; No. 1 among private campuses is Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, Pa.

Value is about more than just cost, says Robert Franek, Princeton Review's vice president for publishing. "We didn't want to put schools in the project that just had low sticker prices because that didn't necessarily mean value."

And questions of value take on added significance in this economic downturn.

"In the past, when recessions have been reasonably mild and short, people planning to send kids to four-year colleges continued to send them to four-year colleges and worked it out. But in the past, we haven't had college-educated parents laid off from jobs," says Tom Mortenson of Oskaloosa, Iowa, who publishes a higher-education public-policy newsletter. "This recession looks to be different."

From 2004 to 2007, The Princeton Review's results were published in a book, America's Best Value Colleges, and data appeared on the company's website. This year, through a partnership with USA TODAY, the full list and analysis are in an interactive database on USATODAY.com. The Princeton Review, based in New York, is not affiliated with Princeton University.

College costs have skyrocketed in the past 10 years. At public campuses, for example, in-state costs are up 37%, according to data from the College Board, a non-profit group that tracks annual tuition increases. This year, it says, average total charges for tuition, fees, room and board are $14,333 for in-state students, $25,200 out of state. The average total at private campuses is $34,132. Institutions themselves provide the largest source of grant aid — representing 42% of all grant aid, the College Board says.

Out of the USA's 643 public four-year institutions and 1,533 private four-year campuses, The Princeton Review regularly analyzes data from approximately 650 campuses that it considers the best, although Franek says the
schools in the mix do change from year to year. Of the 650, about 100 didn't provide enough information to be considered as Best Values, says Ben Zelevansky, who directs Princeton Review's data analysis.

The selection criteria looked at academics, costs and financial aid, using the most recently reported data from each institution for its 2008-09 academic year. Additionally, 160,000 to 175,000 student surveys provided input for the academic ratings.

The Princeton Review's aim was to determine the average annual cost that a freshman paid for the 2008-09 school year, Zelevansky says; for public institutions, the determinations were based on calculations using a combination of in-state and out-of-state tuition.

At the University of Virginia, the No. 1 Best Value for public schools, this year's tuition, fees, room and board totaled $18,499 for in-state students and $37,749 out of state. The average grant UVA offered (including scholarships) totaled $9,531. The average 2008 graduate's debt was $16,847.

UVA president John Casteen says AccessUVA, a financial aid program, is an effort to meet student need and has been funded since 2004. The current undergraduate enrollment is 13,726.

But today's economic climate means cutbacks are expected, Casteen says. "We are in the middle of squeezing a great deal money out of the university's administrative processes."

At top-rated private college Swarthmore, with 1,480 undergraduates for the 2008-09 year, the total cost is $47,804, with the bulk — $36,154 — for tuition. But the average grant is $30,073. The school did not report the amount of student debt.

Alfred Bloom, Swarthmore’s president, says he expects increased financial aid will be needed. “We've had a long tradition of assuring that students can accept Swarthmore offers without regard to financial circumstances.”

At each of the top two campuses, about 70% of students graduated debt-free in 2008. But aid is not the only criterion for inclusion, says Zelevansky.

“This is not a list of America’s Best Financial Aid Packages,” he says. “This is a list of schools that provide the best balance of a strong education and a reasonable cost of attendance. The bottom-line cost for families is our concern here.”

Not listed are public schools including University of Wisconsin-Madison or University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; missing among private schools are New York University and George Washington University, the USA's most expensive four-year campus.

“You can still get a solid education at a good value from a school that didn't make our list, but the schools on our list really go above and beyond,” Zelevansky says.

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A generation adjusts as teens confront a harsh economy

By Marco R. della Cava, USA TODAY

SAN ANSELMO, Calif. — The late-afternoon sun flicks finger-like shadows into the steel-and-glass study hall at Drake High School. A dozen students fiddle with pencils and hair clips. One teen breaks the silence.

"I had no idea until I walked into this room today that everyone felt this was such a big issue for them," says Lindsay Rogers, 15.

MORE: Parents advised to be straight about finances

A few seats away, Dani Curtin, 16, nods. "On the surface, your friends make you feel they're doing well. But I guess you see very quickly it's affecting everyone."

The elephant in this room is another big E, the economy, which for today's teens threatens to upend everything from social habits to college plans.

Perhaps never before has a generation that has wanted for so little — these offspring of acquisitive Baby Boomer parents have amassed cellphones, iPods, laptops and a perceived sense of entitlement — been forced to give up so much.

But far from paralyzing teens, the new fiscal order finds them embracing these leaner times. Instead of tuning out, teens are eager for parents to share the sober details of family finances. Instead of whining, they're clamoring to help by cutting back on outings and getting odd jobs. And instead of moping, they're shifting expectations for the present and banking lessons for the future.

"The only time there are arguments in the house is when it's about money," says Caitlin Morgan, 17. "So at least now we're all talking about what we spend on which expenses, and what needs to be done to make it through this year."

That the economic meltdown is having such a vivid effect on teens in Marin County, among the nation's wealthiest, shows the breadth of the financial crisis. In previous downturns, upper-income families seldom felt the need to cut back. But today a record 51% of consumers making more than $75,000 a year say they'll spend less on discretionary entertainment, according to a recent Discover U.S. Spending Monitor survey.

For the kids from Drake High, 2009 already is filled with dashed expectations.

Morgan had planned to travel to Scotland with her family to visit a sister. They're assembling a care package instead. And although the senior has just been accepted to Stanford University, the hit her college fund took last fall may jeopardize that dream.

Similarly, senior Jenny Marshall, 17, also has to change her college expectations from private to public, while a sister in a private university may be forced to reconsider.

College may bring bigger changes for others: "I know a lot of parents who are saying, 'The minute you go off to college, we're moving' " in order to downsize, says Marika Lee, 17.

For seniors, pricey prom season looms larger than ever. "I've gone since freshman year, but tickets are expensive, and then there's the limo, the shoes, the dress," says Maddi Wachs, 17. "I can see things being much lower-key this year."
With snow falling in the Sierra Nevada, Laura Hunerberg, 15, had visions of hitting the slopes with her family of six during February's winter break. But that Lake Tahoe trip is nixed. "We'll just stay home," she says. "It could be nice."

Staying home is the issue for Stephanie Blazek, whose relatives live in the Czech Republic. "We used to visit them every year, but now we don't know when we can go," says Blazek, 17. "It kind of stinks, because my grandparents are old."

But finding a rainbow in this fiscal storm is proving a teen strong suit, says Madeline Levine, author of The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids. She says parents may be surprised by the therapeutic effects of tough times.

"Kids will rise to the occasion," she says. "Teens not only want to pitch in, but also prove they can take care of themselves."

Teens can't revive a dying investment account, but they can help take the sting out of day-to-day living. That's what drives Morgan Shahan, 17, to eschew malls in favor of thrift shops. Or Blazek to pass on movies with her friends and invite them over to play board games instead.

Packed lunches, part-time jobs and walking are in. Restaurants, allowances and driving are out.

"Things are a lot cozier now," Ben Green, 17, says with a laugh. "The standard for what makes a great weekend is a lot lower. Video games with a friend are it for me. But it's OK."

Scaling back has its psychic rewards. "This is a wake-up call to how much we had," Marshall says. "I've stopped shopping, and it feels good."

So does talking about their shared predicament. "Except for boy-girl relationships, the economy is the No. 1 topic with kids right now," says Jim Taylor, vice chairman of The Harrison Group, which canvasses young gamers for its market research surveys on behalf of interactive entertainment companies. "What we're seeing most is the rise of Mom. She's drawing the line on the frivolous spending. But many kids seem to welcome that."

Frugal is cool, says Mary Ann Romans, a Pennsylvania mother who writes the Frugal Living blog for Families.com. "Some kids actually compete to see how cheap they got their jeans, or who managed to find an iPod on eBay," she says. "I realize that some parents would prefer to shield their kids from what's happening and not worry them. But teens can tell how it's affecting their parents, and they feel uncomfortable not helping in some way."

After sex, "money is the least favorite topic among families," says Judith Sachs of website Parenting Teens Online. "But it's important to realize this is not likely to be a momentary crisis. It's an everyday sense of doom and instability, and it's best to deal with it head-on."

Sachs suggests empowering teens by including them in belt-tightening plans, whether that's arranging carpools or walking neighborhood dogs for money. "America is rooted in the notion of sacrifice. People will get through this, and it's important to involve the kids."

Donna Richards pays her five sons a quarter whenever they find a light on in their Gaylesville, Ala., farmhouse. "And there's no more Coke, it's Kool-Aid now," says her son Michael, 13.

The Richards home has a few other new rules. Instead of buying books at the big-box stores, Mom hops in the family Prius for a trip to the library. Those frequent treks to McDonald's have been eliminated. School snacks take a smaller bite out of the family budget now that the Richards kids bring food from home.

"You hear 'recession' and 'depression' so much now, so I guess it wasn't a surprise when my 9-year-old asked me, 'Are we going to be OK?" says Richards, who along with her husband runs a mobile home dealership and transportation company. "You want young kids to stay young. But this is being forced upon them. So the best you can do is be open and honest."

Heidi Kahme says her family is "comfortable," and her husband's job as a bankruptcy attorney is, fittingly, thriving. But nevertheless, the Kahmes' new habits — checking food prices, cutting back on trips to the nail salon — have become a part of their daughters' lives. One, at least.

"My youngest, Samantha (14), is a total saver, and we joke she'll need to hide her money because we'll have to dip into it," says Kahme of Hopewell, N.J., who works for a community non-profit focusing on drug and alcohol prevention. "My eldest? She's a typical girl. She loves to shop."

Becca Kahme, 17, admits as much. "I wish I could spend on stupid things," she says. But she's doing her share, forgoing trips to trendy Abercrombie & Fitch and hitting Forever 21 instead. "I rent DVDs now, and come home from school for lunch when I can. I guess we're growing up early."

The students at Drake High School would agree. That can't-always-get-what-you-want slap in the face can sting, as it recently did for Morgan, who sees Stanford slipping away.

"I guess you could say I was naive; I thought that between my parents' savings and loans, things would work out," Morgan says. Her college cash shriveled by 40% in the market crash.

Classmate Cassidy Kakin, 17, had hopes of attending the University of California-Berkeley. "Now a community college is more like it," he says, shrugging. "I have a job at a restaurant, so I hope to save some money for college. But the other weekend there wasn't anyone in the restaurant eating."
For students such as Curtin, who shuttles between her divorced mother and father, family dinners have a new, distant feel.

"My mom sells jewelry at Macy's on commission, but no one's buying, so she had to take a second job," says Curtin. "My dad runs a trucking company, but he's had to lay people off and now works late. We don't talk as much. It's like we're all separate from each other."

Hunenberg shares a similar saga. Her father designs packaging and has had to put in more hours of late. "There aren't as many family dinners," she says softly. "I feel I should do more to help."

Rogers says her parents are "closed off" when it comes to discussing financial matters. "They want to protect me, and I appreciate that," she says. "But if it affects my life, and this financial crisis does, then I want to know."

It's getting late now. Classes are over. Some kids head off to sports practices. The sun continues its westward journey toward the Pacific. As she packs her backpack, Hunenberg offers a thought that belies her 15 years.

"We as a generation will come out of this wiser and smarter about our own financial strategies," she says. "I'm sure of it."

Green smiles, adding, "It's always darkest before the dawn."

Descartes? Jefferson?

"Um, no," he says. "I think it's Batman."

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About book costs

Regarding the Jan. 6 letter "Keeping N.C. colleges affordable" from UNC system President Erskine Bowles, there is one area that needs more change and that is the high cost of books.

I have two daughters in college, and their books were over $600 apiece last semester. I think $1,200 for books for one semester for two students is outrageous. I know N.C. State has a buy-back guarantee, but that is only on certain books and did not include any books we bought. One book was over $200, and the buy-back offer was $18 at the end of the semester. The book was changing for the class so they were not using that edition anymore. My daughter bought a used paperback book, and it was $99. The buy-back offer was $8.

Two colleges in North Carolina offer a book-rental program. They charge a flat fee and the students get their books for the semester and return them at the end.

I think it's crazy that the books at Wake Technical Community-College cost more than the tuition for a full-time student. I would like to ask Bowles to come up with a plan that helps all families with the cost of books.

Suzanne Rios, Cary