**Brittany Jones: The soccer field as a classroom**

To Brittany Jones, coaching soccer isn’t too different from teaching in the classroom. “Coaching is teaching,” Jones said. To her, there’s little difference beyond the name.

Jones is a high school coach, ODP coach, learning specialist and former adjunct college professor. She’s guided hundreds of students and players through their education and soccer journeys.

Despite years spent talking in front of teams and classes, Jones considers herself an introvert.

“When I started coaching, I had this self-limiting belief that because I was introverted, I would never be a really good coach, because I’m not the loud one in the room,” Jones said. “But I think the power of being an introvert is your power of observation and your power of the ability to speak at impactful times, see between the lines and do better in one-on-one conversations.”

That introversion has helped Jones develop her own coaching style throughout her soccer journey.

Soccer led Jones to play collegiately at Stetson University in central Florida, where she changed her major a few times before settling on pre-med in her junior year. However, she was taking above the maximum recommended load of credits per semester to catch up, and she needed one more fall semester to finish her last class: organic chemistry.

Her coach told her to stay for a semester, complete the class, and help out the soccer team as an assistant coach, since the team’s assistant had just retired and Jones had finished her own playing career with the team.

Jones always wanted soccer to remain a part of her life after college, but she hadn’t known what that would look like. But, at Stetson, she “fell in love with coaching,” with the chance to “give back to a sport that had given me so much,” Jones said.

After coaching at Stetson, Jones would go on to spend nearly a decade coaching at Florida Southern College, then Daytona State College. There, while Jones was leading these programs to tough wins over nationally ranked teams or deep runs in conference tournaments, she was also teaching as an adjunct professor. Her courses taught students life skills like nutrition, strength and conditioning, study tactics, financial knowledge or tips for navigating college.

“At Daytona, our goal as a junior college was to bring players in for two years and then help them transition to a four year degree, and we had 100% graduation rate,” Jones said. “I think that's always been my measure of success. We had a lot of on field success. We were conference champions, we made national rankings, but it's ultimately about how we helped the players become a better version of themselves.”

Now, at XXXXX, Jones is the varsity girls high school coach and a learning specialist who works with students with learning accommodations.

Jones’ coaching reach also extends beyond the schools she’s worked at. Jones coaches with Georgia’s Olympic Development Program and leads coaching courses as a U.S. Soccer Coach Educator. While she said that 20 years ago she hadn’t even know coach educator was a title she could have, now the coach educator courses she’s taken have been her favorite of all her coaching licenses. “You really have to understand yourself, and how you relate to people,” Jones said. She’s taken what she’s learned from schools like Daytona and noticed where those same principles can be applied in modern coaching.

“It’s often a lot more holistic than the X’s and O’s,” she said. “Nobody performs on the field, if they're not feeling welcome.”

That focus on people has become a consistent goal across Jones’ variety of roles. Her own college coach, Julie Orlowski, was an influential example for Jones: listening to her as Jones figured out who she wanted to be, encouraging Jones even when she considered pursuing a path less traveled.

“I remember her always telling me, ‘You can do anything, and your challenge is you have to make a decision,’” Jones said. “She took time to get to know me and she took time to help me get through some very difficult moments in my life.”

In her own coaching, Jones has tried to do the same, leaning on her introverted strengths of one-on-one relationship building and situational awareness, able to pick up on how others are feeling.

“No matter how good the players are, from an athletic standpoint, it's still about how you treat people,” Jones said.