



**The Baptista/Bean Era**

As a boy, DeClute attended almost every Wheaton soccer game, coached by Joe Bean. Little did he know, he would eventually play for and coach the same team.



**At the Gordon helm**

In 2007, DeClute was named as head coach of Gordon College. He led the team to a 46-36-13 overall record and a 35-15-9 conference record.

**Coaching Navy**

DeClute helped the Midshipmen to a overall 55 percent win percentage.



**Going Pro in Canada**

As part of the Whitecaps coaching staff, DeClute was in charge of opposition analysis and the college draft from 2012-2014.



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**Back to the beginning**

The journey of Wheaton's new soccer coach and the lasting impact of coach Baptista

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**By Anders Rotto**  
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Imagine growing up only four blocks away from your favorite sports team's home stadium. Then imagine being able to attend every home game possible in order to cheer on that team. Next, imagine that one day you grow up and become one of the players you idolized as a child and bring that team a national championship. Finally, imagine becoming a coach after your playing days are over and being able to return to your beloved team and attempt to bring them a championship, yet again.

Welcome to a snapshot of men's soccer head coach Jake DeClute's life. As a child, DeClute grew up in every soccer fan's dream. His house was so close to the Wheaton College soccer field that he spent almost all of his free time there and attended every home game. As many alumni remember, the field did not yet have lights, so men's games were often played in the afternoon in order to avoid the dark night. DeClute's mother, however, would pick him up from school early on those days just so he could attend the games. At the age of five, DeClute met then-head coach Joe Bean, whom the Thunder's current soccer stadium is named after, and this fueled an intense love for the school and, especially, for soccer.

"I went to the national championship game when I was eight and that was the moment when everything became a big deal to me," DeClute explained. "After that, I went to every single Wheaton game and never missed a game."

DeClute's passion for the sport was fueled by a few Wheaton alumni who poured into him on

a daily basis, too. Because DeClute's father coached teams and conducted soccer camps in the area, players would often stop by DeClute's house and kick the ball around with him. DeClute identified '86 All-American Dave Wolf and his brother, '92 All-American Phil Wolf, as the two players who made the biggest impact on him growing up.

When it came time for DeClute to make his college decision, it was almost a no-brainer. He played for the Wheaton men's soccer team and explained that from the moment he stepped on campus, Bob Baptista was around.

"Dr. Baptista would regularly come to practice and give devotions," DeClute said. "Everybody knew that he was the guy who got Wheaton soccer going. There was obviously other people, but he was a real big part of it and really legitimized the program."

During his time playing under Coach Bean, DeClute became co-captain of the team and led them to a 1997 NCAA DIII National Championship. Following graduation, DeClute began working towards his coaching license by working abroad in Liverpool with players from Liverpool, Manchester City and Sunderland, as well as many others. Once he returned stateside, he decided to accept an offer as an assistant coach under his former coach, Joe Bean, for six seasons. In his final season of being an assistant, the team again returned to the national championship game, but lost. Following this defeat, a coaching change occurred as Michael Giuliano was designated as the Thunder's new coach.

At this time, DeClute went to Cleveland and spent time coaching the professional team, the Cleve-

land City Stars, before accepting the head coaching position at Gordon College. In the summers, he worked for the professional soccer team, the Carolina RailHawks, which earned him even more experience and exposure.

After an extremely successful five-year stint at Gordon, DeClute traveled to Vancouver and was named an assistant coach for the White Caps, Vancouver's MLS team. His role with the team, besides daily training, was opposition analysis and the college draft. He set up a team of workers to travel to college games in order to effectively recruit players whom the team wanted to select in the MLS draft.

"Coaching is coaching and, in some ways, you still have to act like you're coaching a team from Gordon or Wheaton," DeClute explained when asked about the challenge of coaching professional players versus collegiate players. "I find a lot more similarities than differences, really."

After his time in Vancouver, DeClute saw that the Wheaton men's soccer coaching position would be opening in a year after Giuliano announced that the 2014 campaign would be his last. DeClute decided that he wanted to pursue the position when it opened up, so he went to Annapolis, Maryland to study under ex-Messiah College coaching legend Dave Brandt. While at Messiah, Brandt won six men's national championships within a span of 12 years and his coaching prowess was well known within the soccer community.

"Not that I really want to be Messiah, but I think that there are a lot of aspects to what he does that are excellent," DeClute

explained. "I wanted to be prepared to try to get the job at Wheaton, so I thought that this was going to be the best way to do that."

In a true full circle swing, DeClute then returned "home" in 2015 to Wheaton College, the birthplace of his soccer love and the place where he already won a national championship as a player. Shortly after arriving on campus in the spring, DeClute visited his two mentors and most influential members of the Wheaton men's soccer community — Baptista and Bean. Despite Baptista's failing health at that time, DeClute visited both Baptista and his wife, Martha, at their home. Through it all, the Baptista's have remained incredibly supportive of Wheaton College soccer through the years and DeClute essentially received a seal of approval from both Bean and Baptista since his appointment as head coach.

DeClute explained why he holds both men in such high regard, saying, "With those two guys around, Coach Bean and Coach Baptista, it always gave you a sense of the 'higher purpose' of Wheaton soccer."

Even despite his numerous levels of coaching, DeClute's desire to learn is something that has never dissipated. Not long ago, he made the trip to Denmark to visit Ståle Solbakken, the coach of Danish Superliga team, F.C. Copenhagen. Solbakken was the 2004 Norwegian Manager of the Year and DeClute studied his coaching style for two weeks.

"For me, my coaching education has been better when I'm on the field with real coaches asking them, 'Why?' 'Why are you doing this?' or 'What's your purpose behind that?'" DeClute said. "I think if you can understand the 'why,' then you can do a lot of different things."

As he mused over his childhood and his journey to this point, De-

Clute became nostalgic, especially when thinking about the coaches that came before him. Only a few days ago, DeClute and the rest of the Thunder community learned of the passing of Baptista. When asked about his favorite stories about Baptista, DeClute thought back to a game when Baptista was coaching. The other team scored a legitimate goal, but the ball went through a hole in the net and out the other side. The referee signaled for a goal kick, but Baptista told him to count it as a goal against Wheaton.

"You just knew that when push came to shove, Dr. Baptista was always going to do the right thing," DeClute remembered. "He was almost heroic in that way. That's something that's left a big imprint on the program."

DeClute, too, is striving for a similar style of leadership as he attempts to lead the Thunder to another national championship — this time as a coach. However, saying he has big shoes to fill is quite the understatement as the student has now become the master.

"I hear from his alumni all the time and no one talks about their record or playing time or one win over another. They always just talk about the impact that Wheaton soccer had on their lives and the types of friendships that they were able to build," DeClute said. "It really goes back to much bigger things and that's something where you look at Dr. Baptista as the one who laid the foundation for the entire program."

Although the Wheaton College men's soccer community lost a coaching legend over the weekend in Baptista, they may be gaining an eventual one in DeClute. To be honest, it's pretty easy to imagine.