



HEAD COACH BEN HOWLAND

Amazingly, it was just a short three years ago that Ben Howland joined Pittsburgh as a relative unknown and facing a major rebuilding challenge.

Howland had just completed a masterful reconstruction job at Northern Arizona, where he transformed the Lumberjacks from perennial doormat into a perennial winner. In joining the Panthers on March 8, 1999, he inherited a program that had perhaps reached its lowest ebb on and off the court.

"My goal in this national search was to find the right person to build our basketball program for the long term," Athletic Director Steve Pederson said in announcing Howland's appointment. "Ben Howland is an exceptional coach and an exceptional person. He is the perfect coach for the University of Pittsburgh."

A household name? Not at the time. But how things have changed.

Steve Pederson's words seem prophetic now. Howland has taken Pittsburgh to dizzying heights this season. The pride is back for Panther basketball and Howland, who was named the Associated Press, Naismith and Big East Coach of the Year, among many others at the conclusion of the season.

Howland is also the first Pittsburgh coach since Charles "Buzz" Ridl in 1973-74 to lead the Panthers to two victories in an NCAA Tournament with wins over Central Connecticut State and California.

The Panthers completed one of their most successful seasons in the program's history in 2001-02. With a 29-6 record, Pittsburgh enjoyed its winningest campaign ever. It finished the year ranked in the top 10 of both major polls for the first time since 1987-88 and earned its first NCAA berth since the 1992-93 season.

Moreover, Howland's work put the city of Pittsburgh – widely regarded as just a football town – into a college hoops frenzy. The Panthers played before seven straight home sellouts to close the regular

season and won both NCAA Tournament games before a capacity crowd at Mellon Arena in downtown Pittsburgh. The timing could not be better with the Panthers moving into their plush new home, the Petersen Events Center, for the 2002-03 season.

It was in Madison Square Garden last season that people began to take notice of the work Howland was doing at Pittsburgh. Last year he directed the Panthers on a dramatic run through the Big East Championship. Pittsburgh upset three higher-seeded opponents – including nationally ranked Syracuse and Notre Dame as well as a surging Miami team – to earn a berth in the title game for the first time in school history. That strong finish resulted in Pittsburgh receiving a National Invitation Tournament berth, its first postseason invite in four years. Howland led the Panthers to the finals once again this year. Pittsburgh fell to Connecticut in heartbreaking fashion with a double-overtime 74-65 loss but the team's remarkable progress in just three short seasons was evident.

Howland came to Pittsburgh with a reputation for developing great shooting teams. Not surprisingly, the Panthers have dramatically improved in that regard. But Howland's real imprint on the Panthers has been the team's passionate dedication to defense. As a result, Pittsburgh has ranked among the Big East's best in scoring defense each of the last two years. The 2001-02 team thrived on it, yielding just 60.9 points per game.

"I will tell you this, winning championships is all about defense," Howland said. "The best teams in the country, if you look every year at the Final Four, always play the best defense. Holding teams to below 40 percent from the field is something that is pretty consistent among Final Four teams."

Howland's influence was evident even after his first season at Pittsburgh. In 1999-2000, the Panthers improved in nearly every offensive category, including field

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goal percentage (both overall and 3-point), assists and rebounding. Howland also helped Ricardo Greer become one of the top players in the Big East. Greer was selected by the league's coaches as the Big East Co-Most Improved Player in 1999-2000 and built on that honor last year as he finished his collegiate career as a two-time All-Big East performer.

Howland has directed the Panthers to strong finishes each of his three years. Including the two wins in the NCAA Tournament, Pittsburgh is 11-2 in its last 13 games, with its only two losses, a double overtime defeat in the Big East Championship title game, and an overtime loss to Kent State in the NCAA's Sweet 16. Last year saw the Panthers surge through the conference tournament to earn a surprising title game berth and win five of their last seven contests. During his debut season in 1999-2000, Pittsburgh closed the regular season winning three of its last four regular-season contests. Its lone loss was a six-point setback to the Big East co-champion Miami Hurricanes. Afterwards, former Hurricane head coach Leonard Hamilton said, "I am impressed with the job Coach (Howland) is doing. His team never quits and their offense is difficult to defend. It's only a matter of time until they get back to where they used to be—the glory days of Pittsburgh."

Named the 13th head basketball coach at Pittsburgh in March 1999, Howland joined the Panthers after orchestrating one of the biggest turnarounds in NCAA history while at Northern Arizona.

His highly successful five-year tenure at Northern Arizona saw him transform the Lumberjacks from one of the bottom programs in the nation into a perennial postseason contender. In his final year there, he led NAU to a 21-8 record,

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marking three straight 21-win seasons.

After joining Northern Arizona in 1994, Howland's first two teams went 9-17 and 7-19, finishing in seventh place each season. In 1996-97, however, the Lumberjacks went 21-7, setting a school record for wins and achieving the 10th biggest single-season turnaround in NCAA history. NAU captured the Big Sky regular-season championship by three games and advanced to the NIT as Howland was named the conference's coach of the year.

The following season, the Lumberjacks advanced to the NCAA Tournament for the first time ever after winning the Big Sky Tournament as well as a second straight regular-season title. Facing No. 2 seed Cincinnati in the first round, Northern Arizona led the heavily favored Bearcats for most of the game before falling, 65-62, on a last-second 3-pointer.

During Howland's tenure, Northern Arizona emerged as one of the top shooting teams in the country. In 1999, NAU became the first team in NCAA history to lead the country in both overall field goal (52.3) and 3-point field goal (44.5) percentage in the same season. Additionally, the Lumberjacks led the nation in 3-point shooting in 1997 (41.9 percent) and 1998 (43 percent), while finishing second in the NCAA for overall field goal percentage (51.6 in 1997 and 51.1 in 1998).

From 1997 to 1998, not only did Howland's teams produce back-to-back conference titles, but also consecutive Big Sky Player of the Year awardees in Charles Thomas and Andrew Mavis. NAU tied a league record for most wins over a two-year span (27) and ranked among the nation's top 30 in wins over that same period. With all the success, the city of Flagstaff, Ariz., proclaimed April 27, 1998 "Ben Howland Day."

While the success on the court is impressive, Howland also turned out top-notch students. In 1998, NAU and Utah were the only schools in the country to reach the NCAA Tournament and record a team grade-point average over a 3.0.

Prior to his Northern Arizona appointment, Howland served as an assistant coach at the University of California-Santa Barbara from 1982-94. During that time, he tutored future NBA players Brian Shaw and Conner Henry. He also oversaw the development of

UCSB's Eric McArthur, the nation's second-leading rebounder in 1990, and Gary Gray, an All-Big West selection. In Howland's last seven years at the school, the Gauchos advanced to the postseason five times.

Howland enjoyed a standout-playing career at Weber State. He was named the team's Most Valuable Defensive Player in 1979 and 1980, leading the Wildcats to two Big Sky championships and a pair of NCAA Tournament berths.

Howland's legacy of success dates back to his high school days. After beginning his prep career as a highly decorated player at Dos Pueblos High School in Santa Barbara, Calif., he finished with two Suburban League Most Valuable Player honors at Cerritos (Calif.) High School. He was also a two-time selection to the All-California Interscholastic Federation list. His collegiate career began at Santa Barbara City College (1976-78). Named team captain, he led the Vaqueros to the California finals in 1978.

Following his graduation in 1979 with a degree in physical education, Howland spent one season playing professionally in Uruguay.

In 1981 he joined Gonzaga as an assistant and coached future Utah Jazz guard John Stockton before moving to UCSB the following year.

Howland and his wife, Kim, have two children, Meredith and Adam.

HOWLAND'S YEAR-BY-YEAR RECORD

YEAR	RECORD
1994-95	9-17
1995-96	7-19
1996-97	21-7
1997-98	21-8
1998-99	21-8
1999-00	13-15
2000-01	19-14
2001-02	29-6
TOTAL:	140-94

THE HOWLAND FILE

BORN:

May 28, 1957 in Lebanon, Ore.

HIGH SCHOOL:

Cerritos High School (Cerritos, Calif.)

COLLEGE:

Weber State, 1979 (B.A. Physical Education)
Gonzaga, 1981 (Master's Degree)

FAMILY:

Wife is the former Kim Zahnow
Daughter: Meredith (16), Son: Adam (14)

PLAYING EXPERIENCE:

Santa Barbara City College (1976-78): Led the Vaqueros to California State finals in 1978.

Weber State (1978-80): Named team's Defensive MVP twice...helped the Wildcats to two Big Sky championships and a pair of NCAA Tournament berths.

Professional: Played in Uruguay in 1980.

COACHING EXPERIENCE:

Asst. Coach: **Gonzaga** (1981-82);
Asst. Coach: **UC-Santa Barbara** (1982-94);
Head Coach: **Northern Arizona** (1994-99);
Head Coach: **Pittsburgh** (1999-present).

HOWLAND'S 2001-02 COACHING HONORS

- Associated Press Coach of the Year
- Naismith Coach of the Year
- Big East Coach of the Year
- The Henry Iba Coach of the Year Award (U.S. Basketball Writers Association)
- *ESPN The Magazine* Men's College Basketball Coach of the Year
- *The Sporting News* Coach of the Year
- USBWA District 1 Coach of the Year
- Basketball America Big East Coach of the Year
- Basketball Times East Coach of the Year