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A two-time A-10 Conference coach of the year, 2016 A-10 conference champion, and over 300 career wins as a head coach, University of Rhode Island's own Raphael Cerrato has made a name for himself in a multitude of ways.

For nine seasons now, Cerrato has been leading the Rams baseball team. He has never had a losing record in the A-10 conference, putting his players in a position to succeed on a year-to-year basis. He challenges his players with a tough schedule to start the season, hoping his players are high-level competitors.

Cerrato learned how to give respect in baseball as a player. As a coach, whether it be his players, assistants, or former teammates, he has made a name for himself for earning much respect by conducting himself in a manner of high integrity. It has been a true full circle scenario for the Rams' head coach.

The early stages of Cerrato's career as a player never consisted of him being a top prospect coming out of high school. He earned recognition through his hard work.

"No one really saw me," said Cerrato. "I kinda developed later on in my high school career... I wanted to play Division 1 baseball. At the time, I visited Northeastern, UConn, Hartford, and [University of Rhode Island]. I wasn't heavily recruited in the least bit, and [URI] was the one school I liked that I visited."

Originally from Enfield, CT, Cerrato chose to join Rhode Island's baseball team in 1990 over his favorite school growing up, University of Connecticut. In the years before Cerrato joined the team, they had not enjoyed much success. It had been six years since they had a winning record in both conference play and overall.

“Well the program was not very good when I was here,” said Cerrato. “There was little support and few scholarships. There just wasn’t much of a winning culture.”

Despite the team’s poor performance, Cerrato stayed humble.

“It wasn’t quite a walk-on situation, but I felt like I had to make the team when I got here,” Cerrato said. “I thought I was gonna get cut the whole fall.”

After making it through the fall, Cerrato made the team. For his first three seasons with the team, he played under former head coach Dave Morris. Initially, Cerrato did not see the field. It was not until his junior year when he became a full time player. His teammate, Tyler Slater, came onto the team as a freshman in the same year. The two have been friends for the past 30 years now, and it can be accredited to Cerrato’s personality and leadership he displayed in their time together on the team.

“He could motivate you through discussion and he had a high IQ,” said Slater. “He got along with everyone. He was quote on quote ‘professional’. He was and is a good guy. He’s very fair and understanding of people. He’s realistic and knows how to get across to people.”

In his senior year, 1993, Cerrato was named a team captain.

“He was definitely a leader,” said Slater. “Now knowing him as a coach you could see those traits as a player.”

An old teammate of Cerrato, Frank Leoni, took over as head coach for Morris the same year at the age of 24.

“He had no experience coaching at any level,” said Cerrato. “It wasn’t an ideal situation for him to take over, so it was a tough year.”

The team finished in last place, three games back on the team in front of them in the standings. Following the end of the season, many of the starters transferred schools. Cerrato

finished his college playing career with an overall record of 46 wins and 101 losses. In spite of the poor performance of his team, he was determined to continue his career in baseball.

Coming after a three-year absence from the sport, Cerrato was back at University of Rhode Island as an assistant coach. He was able to get back to the game he loved but was not making money doing so.

“I was working a bunch of different part time jobs just to be able to survive,” Cerrato said. “I was doing substitute teaching, bartending, whatever it took to be able to pay the bills.”

Although he was back at his alma mater, Cerrato struggled financially. After a year back in Kingston, he made the decision to get a job at the University of Massachusetts. There, he was able to attend graduate school while being in a part time paid position as an assistant coach. The financial struggles were still present and he was forced to commute 40 minutes every day from his parents’ house to stay afloat.

Cerrato made the job work for three years until he was finally offered a full time position as an assistant coach at Brown University. A successful five year career at Brown led him to a big opportunity at the University of New Haven.

Cerrato made the move to New Haven as an associate head coach under Frank “Porky” Vieira.

“He actually called me while I was at Brown,” said Cerrato. “I had never met him or talked to him, but obviously I knew about him. He said he was gonna retire and was asking around and my name came up as a candidate to replace him. I was with him his last year as an assistant coach, but I ran everything.”

Cerrato proved that he could be a success as the head coach and took over the reign for Vieira the next season.

“There was certainly some pressure,” said Cerrato. “[Vieira] coached for 42 years. At the time he retired, he had the second most wins and second highest win percentage in Division II history and was a complete legend.”

He did a fine job replacing Porky, finishing with a total record of 131-97 in his first five seasons. In the offseason subsequent to his fifth season, Cerrato received a phone call from University of Rhode Island’s head coach, Jim Foster.

“He called me up and asked if I wanted to be his assistant,” said Cerrato. “I knew URI was a good program, but I was a head coach and it would have been a pay cut. He said he might be looking to move on in a couple of years, so I decided to take the job. I was his top assistant coach for three years, and when he decided to leave I got the job.”

The program had changed drastically in his time away from Rhode Island. Frank Leoni turned the program around and the team was a conference contender again. Leoni went from having a 2-39 record the year after Cerrato left as a player, to finishing his tenure as URI’s head coach with back-to-back A-10 conference regular season championships.

“Becoming the head coach of URI was basically a dream job for me,” Cerrato said.

He always had aspirations to be the head coach, proven by his first tenure as an unpaid assistant coach and giving up his head coaching job at New Haven for a demotion and lesser paid role. It all paid off for him in the end, but now he had to prove that he was capable of leading the Rams.

Throughout his 18 years as an assistant, Cerrato gathered a lot of information on how to approach coaching and it turned him into the coach he strived to be. He took some of the approaches previous coaches he coached under took and did the opposite of the things that he did

not like about their approach. More than coaching his team to victory, he has goals for the players that enter his program.

“It’s about building relationships with kids,” said Cerrato. “My goal is for every kid to come into here and have a great experience, and hopefully winning is a big part of that for them. I want to put guys in a position to be successful on and off the field... The fun part about it for me is recruiting kids as 16 year olds and seeing them as 22 year olds and seeing the difference in them.”

Cerrato’s assistant coach, Sean O’Brien, attested to his style of coaching and how he is as a person.

“He’s a player’s coach,” said O’Brien. “Their best interests are his best interests. He makes sure they’re taken care of and they have the best experience possible as a student-athlete both on and off the field... Nine years is a long time for someone to be an assistant at one school, but what he offers to me, and the program in general, is a great fit. He wants me to have a great experience just like he wants the players to have a great experience. It’s full circle with everyone in the program.”

Cerrato’s approach has proven to be a success. The Rams have enjoyed a winning record in conference play every year with him at the head of the realm. His greatest season came in 2016. Coming into the season with high expectations, the year did not start out as planned.

“It was our first weekend,” said O’Brien. “You can look at the schedule. It was ugly. After that things could have fallen apart. He kept the guys together even though the results that we wanted weren’t showing on the field and he knew that they would come eventually.”

Rhode Island started 2-8. Cerrato’s leadership and the team’s belief in him got them through the early season rough patch. They finished the season with a 31-27 record overall and a

18-6 in the A-10, making a run all the way to the conference championship where they defeated Davidson two games to zero. It was the second A-10 championship in the program's history.

Since then, Cerrato has not been able to lead his team back to another A-10 championship victory, but the program remains at the top of the conference. His style of coaching and leadership has bred a rich culture of players. Earlier this year the Rams took on Davidson in Kingston. The turnout of old players was astounding.

"I couldn't tell you how many guys were here," said O'Brien. "There were people here from before I was a coach, when Ralph was an assistant. They were watching the game standing right by the dugout and hanging out after the game. That's kind of the number one tell that guys have a great experience here."

Cerrato has no plans on leaving and his aspirations remain as strong as ever.

"This is where I want to stay for the next 10-12 years and then call it a career," said Cerrato.

Sitting on 209 wins to this date, Cerrato just moved ahead of longtime URI baseball coach John Norris for the fourth most wins in program history. He trails his predecessor, Jim Foster, by 59 wins for the most ever at URI. He maintains the coaching style that has brought Rhode Island all its success, hoping to give his players a college experience they will never forget.