Edson Rico and Mate Kozu, 1989-90

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Soccer Team members in 1989 and the first NJCAA National Champions, 1990

Edson Rico and Mate Kozu were part of the original soccer recruiting class at Yavapai in 1989 and were on the field for the first of the program's NJCAA National Championships in 1990. They were recently in the news when named Co-Coaches for Soccer by Paradise Valley Community College. Ironically, their team will be our competition on October 4, 2008 as part of our alumni day activities.

Paradise Valley tabs ex-YC players as soccer coaches

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PARADISE VALLEY - Yavapai College has owned the ACCAC arriving on the men's soccer scene in 1989. Maybe the best way to level the playing field is to bring in a couple former Roughriders to go after mighty YC. That is the approach Paradise Valley Community College is taking after hiring Edson Rico and Mate Kozul as co-head coaches on Wednesday. The two were part of the original recruiting class at Yavapai in 1989 and were on the field for the first of the program's six NJCAA National Championships in 1990. They helped produce that result for YC from scratch. As coaches, Rico and Kozul step into a program entering its 10th season. They take over for Timothy Marchisotto. "I think he put descent building blocks in place so we're not starting from zero," Kozul said. "We'll just sort of take where he left off and really build the program and try to make it - we're not trying to compete right away with Yavapai but at least try to be the best JC in the Phoenix metropolitan area."

Rico, 37, ranks as the Yavapai program's all-time leading scorer with 48 goals and 112 points. He entered the NJCAA Hall of Fame in 2006. Kozul, 36, was a leading defender for the 'Riders.

Both played professionally in Belgium and various other stops. They reunited as player-coaches for the Arizona Saguaros in the USISL and later to the Tucson Fireballs in the USL.

Most recently, Rico and Kozul were directors for youth soccer in North Scottsdale. Neither hesitates to credit Yavapai coach Mike Pantalione for their success. "He set the format of how to be successful," Kozul said. "How to work as a team and how to structure a team with certain characters as a winning recipe. "We've always looked back to his formula and his formula speaks for itself. He's a guru of soccer and a scientist when it comes to putting players together and putting the winning formula together." That winning formula at Yavapai has translated to six national titles, 17 region crowns and 19 ACCAC championships.

Paradise Valley has never advanced past the region semifinals. The Pumas lost to the 'Riders in this year's playoffs 7-1. They are 1-20-0 all time against YC with a 2-1 win in Prescott in 2005.

Rico and Kozul are meeting with the team for the first time Thursday and will then get busy recruiting. So they don't expect to take down Pantalione right away but it will be fun to compete with their mentor. "It will be a good feeling because I know we're playing against somebody that we respect and we respect like no other," Rico said.
Kozul said they would have to learn the rules and regulations this year, as well as getting to know their players and their recruiting base. But next season, with their program modeled after Yavapai, they will set their sights on the big dog. "We know all Mike's tricks," Kozul joked. "...We'll have a former top defender of Yavapai and the all-time leading scorer trying to coach against him so we'll have a good chance." Yavapai travels to Paradise Valley on Sept. 3 and hosts the Pumas on Oct. 4 this fall.

Pantalione said as long as his former players don't suit up for Paradise Valley, he'd be OK. "I'm happy to have them in our league and I know in time they will be very successful when it's all said and done," he said. "...The bottom line is they'll make an impact on young people's lives."