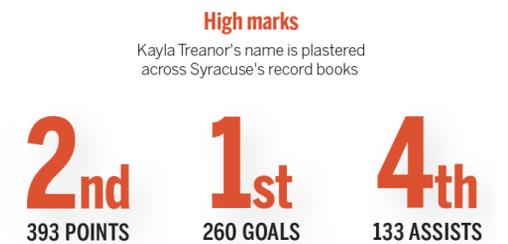
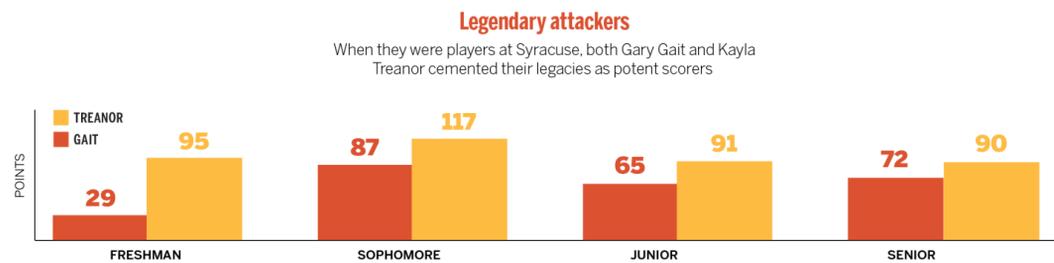
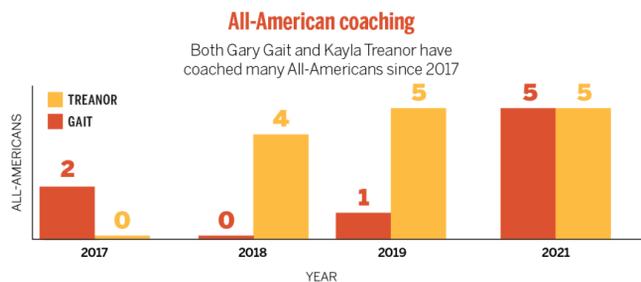


FROM PLAYERS TO COACHES

Inside the bond between Gary Gait and Kayla Treanor that led to the 2 taking over Syracuse's lacrosse programs this season



By Anish Vasudevan
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At Syracuse Crunch's matchup against the Utica Comets, SU's women's and men's lacrosse programs made the trip downtown, occupying sections 215 and 216 in the upper level. Before the game, men's lacrosse head coach Gary Gait and women's lacrosse head coach Kayla Treanor went on the ice. Gait dropped the ceremonial puck for the team captains as Treanor, who he once coached for four seasons, stood to his left. Thirteen years after Treanor and Gait first met, nine years after her arrival at Syracuse and eight months after Treanor's Boston College team defeated Gait's SU side in the national championship, the pair were recently appointed to lead the Orange's storied programs. Both coaches played for Syracuse, but now, they're one flight of stairs away from each other at the Roy Simmons Coaching Center, with Treanor occupying Gait's old office. "I've moved my office from downstairs to upstairs," Gait said. "She was very well prepared. She went out

(and) learned a lot in those four or five years she was away from Syracuse." Gait first approached Treanor when she was in ninth grade at a lacrosse tournament. Treanor had told Gait that she wanted to be lacrosse coach since working as a water girl for the Niskayuna High School (New York) basketball teams that her dad coached. But Treanor was surprised that Gait — one of the best lacrosse players ever and a prominent head coach — wanted to meet her and learn about her dreams of being a lacrosse coach. "Anything he said I was just in awe of. It's still the same thing today," Treanor said of Gait. "I just can't believe how lucky I am to have (him) in my life. To have him want me to come play for (the Orange) was awesome." In 2013, Treanor enrolled at SU. Because Syracuse's best offensive player, Michelle Tumolo, was carded in the last game of the previous season, Gait had Treanor start in Tumolo's position at the left side of the attack — a position she had never played before — in the Orange's opener, because Gait trusted Treanor. She wouldn't switch back to the right side again while at SU. Gait's coaching style created a "no pressure" environ-

ment on the team, Treanor said. Even though the Orange faced top opponents week in and week out, Gait allowed his players' creativity to flourish on the field, never punishing them for trying a new move, which Treanor did a lot. Over the next two seasons, the Orange lost to Maryland on Championship Weekend. They only dropped one Atlantic Coast Conference game in both of those seasons, but SU went 3-4 in conference play in 2015. Still, Treanor remained as a mainstay in Syracuse's attack, and the team's practices didn't change despite the lack of success. Gait still picked up his own lacrosse stick

and joined the players on the field, former SU player Halle Majorana said. "Playing with him in practice was something else," Majorana said. "I was always watching Gary — and even Kayla — trying to learn more moves." Treanor also spent time with Gait individually after practices, learning specialized moves — which she would later teach to former SU player Nicole Levy in 2016 — that could help her against the ACC's best defenders. Gait pushed Treanor to her limits, she said, the same thing she would later do coaching Tewaaron Award

winner Charlotte North in 2021 at Boston College. After her collegiate career, Treanor left Syracuse in search of an assistant coaching job. Gait had talked to then-Harvard, and former Syracuse, head coach Lisa Miller. By "luck," Treanor said, a vacancy was there for her to join the Crimson. Eventually, Treanor landed at Boston College in the summer of 2017, helping the Eagles to three straight NCAA Championship appearances. In 2021, the Eagles won their only NCAA title, beating Gait's Syracuse 16-10. A month later, Syracuse men's lacrosse head coach John Desko retired after 46 years with the program as a player, assistant coach and head coach. Gait was able to get his "dream job" in charge of his former college team, looking to use his coaching style to bring out creativity from the men's side. "I look forward to the day when we can both raise the national championship," Gait said about both Syracuse programs. "Hopefully that will be very soon." A national search began for Gait's replacement, but like the men's program, SU stayed within its familial ties by hiring Treanor.

"What we're trying to do is continue the legacy that Gait built, and we're trying to win the national championship year in and year out," Treanor said. In 2020, the pandemic halted both team's NCAA title hopes. With the time at home, Gait set up Zoom calls with alumni dating back to the beginning of his tenure as head coach in 2007. The group discussed drills and strategies about the game, each adding to Gait's presentations with their own experiences coaching programs across the country. In one of the clinics, Gait placed the camera in front of him and picked up an unstrung women's lacrosse stick. He demonstrated how to string the stick from start to finish, his former players watching on their own computers. After the call ended, Gait strung sticks for everyone who attended and shipped them all over the country. One of the packages arrived at his successor's home in Boston, one year before the change became official. "I didn't know I was sending the stick to this year's coach at Syracuse," Gait said. "I feel really good handing the team off to Kayla. No better (than) to have a coach with championship experience to take over." anish.sujeet@gmail.com
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