

## Katie Sutrina-Haney

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**From:** Communications and Marketing  
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**Subject:** Legendary head coach John McNichols passes away at age 66



### Legendary head coach John McNichols passes away at age 66

TERRE HAUTE, Ind. — John McNichols, the longest tenured coach of any sport in Indiana State University history with 34 years at the helm of the track & field and cross-country programs, passed away Wednesday morning due to complications from a stroke. He was 66.

McNichols had been attending the USTFCCCA Convention with the Indiana State coaching staff in Orlando last week, where he suffered the stroke on Saturday just before his return trip home to Terre Haute. McNichols was listed in critical condition as of that night and up until his death Wednesday morning.

“Following complications related to the stroke suffered last Saturday in Orlando, we're sad to share that our beloved father, husband, brother, grandfather, coach and mentor has passed away,” the McNichols family

said in a statement. “He left this earth peacefully, surrounded by his family. We are so grateful for all of the love and support we’ve received. He could not have been in better hands. The entire medical team and staff at Orlando Regional Medical Center have been absolutely phenomenal.”

McNichols came to Indiana State in the fall of 1983 as a 33-year-old head coach and immediately sparked a revolution in cross-country and track & field not only for the Sycamores, but also for the Terre Haute community and the nation at large.

“Our hearts are broken today,” said Director of Athletics Sherard Clinkscales. “It’s hard to put into words how much Coach McNichols meant to this University and this community, not to mention on a personal level as a friend of all of us here and as a devoted mentor to our student-athletes. Coach McNichols was a truly great man, and we are all going to miss him terribly. Our thoughts are with Linda and the McNichols family.”

In his time as the men’s head coach and in his 28 years as the program coordinator of the combined men’s and women’s program since 1989-90, McNichols helped guide the Sycamores to 38 total Missouri Valley Conference team championships with 11 in cross-country (nine men, two women), 10 in indoor track (six women, four men) and 17 outdoor titles (10 men, seven women).

“I’m incredibly saddened both personally and professionally,” said Angie Lansing, senior associate AD and former ISU track star. “Coach McNichols meant so much to me and so many others at Indiana State, the Terre Haute community and to the sports of cross country and track and field. He was highly respected around the nation, and this news hits us all very hard. We have lost a great man who has been a friend and a mentor to many. We will do our best to pick things up where he left them. We are here for his immediate family, as well as his cross country and track and field family.”

McNichols’ reputation around the nation can be attributed to multiple superb accomplishments during his career, such as the mentoring of seven-time NCAA champion Holli Hyche, or the installation of a hurdle dynasty at State with the likes of NCAA champion Chris Lancaster and All-Americans Aubrey Herring, Greggmar Swift and Adarius Washington (a dynasty referred to by David Woods of the Indianapolis Star as “Hurdle U”), or the mentoring of the greatest cross-country runner in the history of both the Missouri Valley Conference and the state of Indiana in All-American John Mascari.

“We are certainly sad that the coaching community lost Coach McNichols,” said Sam Seemes, CEO of the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association. “Our thoughts are with his family and to all of those his life touched. He fulfilled all the roles embodied in a coach — he was a teacher, mentor, and a person who served his institution and community well. Along with giving back to his athletes and the community, he gave

back to the sports of track & field and cross-country immensely. We will always be mindful of his lifelong dedication.”

His reputation extends even further with his community outreach and national positions in the track world. In Terre Haute alone, McNichols oversaw the construction and development of what ended up as the nicest cross country course in the nation with the LaVern Gibson Championship Cross Country Course, host of 12 NCAA championships and numerous other large meets that have hosted some of the world’s finest athletes. Most recently McNichols helped in the development of a brand new outdoor track facility for Indiana State, the Gibson Track & Field Complex right on the banks of the Wabash on the western edge of campus.

“I, along with Indiana State, Terre Haute and the world of track & field and cross country are devastated and deeply shaken with the news of Coach McNichols’ passing,” said Kyle Walsh, head women’s cross-country coach and former distance runner under McNichols. “Coach McNichols was my second father and one of the largest mentors to me and hundreds of other men and women throughout his lifetime. His passion, dedication and loyalty are unmatched, and it’s been an honor to compete for him and work beside him. I’m very grateful to have known Coach so closely.”

In addition, McNichols was generous with his time and community service in regards to both Heritage Trail and Wabashiki Trail.

“John McNichols truly epitomized the spirit and values of Indiana State University,” said Dan Bradley, president of Indiana State University. “He strived for excellence and worked hard to help his student-athletes succeed in all aspects of their lives. He was a man who treated his responsibility to family and community as critically important parts of his being. Without him the community would not have a developed set of trails in the Wabashiki and ISU would not have the Gibson Track and Field Complex. I will miss him as a friend and colleague. I would like to send heartfelt condolences from Cheri and myself to Linda, his family and his friends.”

Abroad, McNichols was known as one of the preeminent minds in the world of Olympic-level hurdling, serving as Hurdles Broad Event Chair from 2000-09 for USA Track & Field’s Men’s Development Committee. McNichols also had years of service as a meet official, working as an official at the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles, the 1987 Pan-American Games in Indianapolis and the 1988 U.S. Olympic Trials also in Indianapolis before earning the great honor of being the head meet official for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta.

“Indiana State has been so fortunate to have had Coach McNichols for all these years,” said Angie Martin, head women’s track & field coach. “He was so proud of keeping ISU known throughout the nation. He was a great coach to me and an even greater mentor. He and Coach (John) Gartland took a chance on me more than once, and I am so grateful for that. He accepted me as an athlete, a coach and as part of his family. I know so many of his athletes look at him as a second father like I do. He will be missed more than anyone can imagine, and I hope that we can make him proud and continue his tradition of successful track and cross country teams.”

McNichols also served as a coach on the national stage many times throughout his storied career. Three separate times McNichols served as the head coach of the U.S. Men’s Junior Pan-Am team, most recently this past summer in 2016 in Poland. McNichols was also an assistant coach in charge of hurdles and sprints for the 2007 U.S. team for the Pan-American Games.

“I am at a complete loss and this is extremely hard to process,” said assistant coach Jeff Martin, former McNichols disciple as a hurdler for the Sycamores. “Coach McNichols was one of those men who you always wanted and expected to see. He recruited me into the ISU track family when I was 18 years old and I am so grateful that he believed in me. I am a better person because he touched my life along with so many others. His belief in everyone is what really sets him apart. Moving forward I will do my best to continue to build upon the values that he set forth for all his athletes and friends. He will be missed but not forgotten.”

In addition, McNichols was prominent in trying to improve and efficiently regulate the sports of track and cross-country with his positions on national committees throughout his career. He was most recently the chair of the NCAA Rules Committee, but he also served time on the NCAA Division I Track & Field Subcommittee. McNichols belongs to both the Indiana Track & Cross Country Hall of Fame (2007) and the Drake Relays Coaching Hall of Fame (2008).

“John and I started working together at Indiana State in 1988,” said longtime women’s head cross-country coach and close friend John Gartland. “He had been the head men’s coach since 1983. Our goal was to combine the programs to use our coaching resources and strengths in a more efficient way. When we started working together, I realized right away what a good coach he was, but what I didn’t realize right away was what a good human being he was. He was tough but always fair to the athletes. He was totally dedicated to his family, even with the stress and time constraints of coaching. He took great pride in attending his children’s activities — and later his grandchildren’s events. He logged a lot of soccer spectating time.

“His list of elite athletes coached and developed is phenomenal,” Gartland added. “He coached All-American athletes in four different decades. He was always an elite coach, even into the latter part of his career. His former athletes took great satisfaction in staying in touch with him, and they took great pride in a program they had been part of.”

“But I won’t remember him for his coaching accolades as much as I will for his friendship. We coached together at Indiana State for 28-and-a-half years. We always joked that this had to be some kind of world record. Our original agreement to always be loyal to each other kept us together for a long time. When I needed back up at meets in contentious situations, he was there. When I became ill several years ago, it was John and Linda who took care of me. When relationships ended or I lost close people, it was John McNichols who was there to help me. When John passed this morning, we lost one of the greatest collegiate coaches in history, but I lost my best friend who was always there for me. He will be missed by so many people.”

McNichols was born Aug. 28, 1950, in St. Charles, Iowa. He enrolled at Indiana University in the fall of 1968 on a track scholarship as a hurdler before graduating in 1972 with his bachelor’s and again in 1977 with his master’s. McNichols and his wife, Linda, were married on Dec. 20, 1970, during his junior year at IU.

John and Linda went on to have three children: Matthew John, 42, Rachael, 37, and Mary Jane “Janie” Szabo, 36. McNichols was also a grandfather to eight grandchildren: John Gabriel, 16, Emilee, 11, Maya, 11, Macy, 9, Blake, 8, Lydia, 5, Drew, 4 and Landon John, 2.

A local visitation will be held, with more information available in the coming days.