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Spiders will have a reunion with Cremins

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Bobby Cremins returns to the Robins Center tonight, which may bring about an oddity: a standing ovation for the visiting coach.

Cremins' College of Charleston team plays the University of Richmond in the quarterfinals of the College Basketball Invitational, and the sight of Cremins' trademark white locks should make Spiders' supporters feel they're reconnecting with a classy old buddy.

Cremins' Georgia Tech teams were common guests at the Robins Center from the mid-1980s to early-1990s. Fairly regular victories over the high-powered Yellow Jackets of the ACC elevated UR's national profile.

"It sounds like Richmond is up to its old tricks again," Cremins, 61, said of the 19-15 Spiders, shooting for their first 20-win season since 2003-04. "It's like I'm going back to the dentist's office."

Cremins left each date with UR praising the Spiders, their determination and discipline, and kept playing them even after Richmond won three straight over Georgia Tech. Fans remember that sort of thing.

Another run: In 19 seasons at Georgia Tech, Cremins made the Yellow Jackets consistent ACC winners (14 postseason bids). He left Atlanta in 2000, thinking he would return to coaching after a break of a year, maybe two.

"One year led to six years, and I thought I'd never coach again," Cremins said. He did some motivational speaking, TV analysis, charity work. Then came a coach's re-awakening. "I lost purpose," Cremins said. "I felt like I had another run in me."

This is his third season at the College of Charleston. Asked to revert to his TV-analyst's role, Cremins described this 27-8 Cougars as "very athletic. Can shoot the ball. Erratic at times."

Nearly a Spider: Cremins was almost UR's coach, three decades ago.

In 1975, he became Division I's youngest coach (27) at Appalachian State and instantly upgraded the Mountaineers. That drew the attention of UR, which sought a coach in 1978. Cremins interviewed and met E. Claiborne Robins Jr., whose family financed construction of the Robins Center.

Duke assistant Lou Goetz got the Richmond job, but the Cremins-Robins relationship continued.

Spiders-Jackets: Robins called Cremins after he was hired by Georgia Tech in 1981 and asked if Cremins could find a place on future schedules for Richmond. "That would be fine," Cremins said he told Robins.

Robins made a donation to Georgia Tech, according to Cremins, and the annual UR-GT series commenced in 1985. Half of eight games were played at the Robins Center, a remarkably rare and prestigious arrangement for a Colonial Athletic Association program, Richmond's status at that time.

"That was all done above me, but we were thrilled to have them on our schedule," said Dick Tarrant, UR's coach during 1981-93.

The Spiders beat the sixth-ranked Jackets in 1986, topped them again in 1987, eliminated Georgia Tech from the NCAA tournament in 1988 (on the way to Richmond's Sweet 16 appearance), and downed a 14th-ranked GT team in 1990.

"I have great, great respect for Dick Tarrant," Cremins said.

Blood bond? Cremins' mother's maiden name was Tarrant. Her family is from the same Irish county in which Dick Tarrant's forefathers resided. "There's a possibility we are related," Cremins said. "Probably a strong possibility."

Tarrant still lives in Richmond and said he hoped he and Cremins could get together -- a family reunion? -- before the Spiders-Cougars game.

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