I am very excited today to announce that Cleveland State mens basketball coach Gary Waters will be writing a weekly column for us here at The Cleveland Fan. And this is the first installment. Gary has led a remarkable turnaround at CSU, taking the Vikings from 20 losses two years ago to 21 wins and a NIT berth last season. The Vikings return essentially their whole team this year, and have lofty expectations. Welcome to the familgia Gary!!!

Last season, Cleveland State men's basketball coach Gary Waters led CSU to a 21-13 record that earned the Vikings a berth in the National Invitation Tournament. His 2007-2008 Vikings were just the 16th program in NCAA history to go from losing 20 games in one season to winning 20 games the next. This week, he agreed to a contract extension with a rollover clause designed to keep him at CSU for the foreseeable future.

Waters, 57, owns a 12-year head coaching record of 202-169 that includes seven post-season appearances. Prior to coming to CSU in 2006, Waters was head coach at Rutgers (79-75 in five seasons) and Kent State (92-60 in five seasons) and an assistant at Eastern Michigan (1989-96) and Ferris State (1974-89). He was named Mid-American Conference Coach of the Year in 1999 & 2000 and is the reigning Horizon League Coach of the Year.

This is his first column for TCF.

As I introduce myself to readers of TheClevelandFan.com, I think it's important to first answer the question "Who is Gary Waters?"

While we are all complex and unique individuals, I'd like to suggest that Gary Waters can be defined by three F's: faith, family and fire.

My faith is first and foremost in my life. I believe in God and that He has a plan for each of us. He brought me to this job and place in life for a purpose: to not only revive this program but to elevate both Cleveland State University and the City of Cleveland. Because of my faith, I live my life with morals, ethics and integrity.

The second defining aspect of Gary Waters is family. I am committed to family. My wife Bernadette and I have been married for 37 years. We've been blessed with two children and four grandchildren. Commitment to family requires love, sacrifice and supporting each other. I also expect my teams-everyone from the coaches to the players to the managers-to be committed to the same concept of family as I've had in my own. We must love each other, sacrifice for one another and support each other in order to reach our full potential and be successful.

Finally, I think you should know that I have fire- or passion-about everything I do. Whether it's my job as a coach and teacher of young men, or whatever cause or activity I'm involved with, I give it my full

effort, energy and emotion. Having the fire requires being assertive combined with an intense work ethic in every phase of life.

Faith, family and fire define Gary Waters. And they are what have made me successful. They have given me the ability to persevere through the hard times and the good times. They have helped me to be extremely disciplined in all phases of my life. And they are a reflection of my commitment to a Higher Being.

That's me, Gary Waters.

CSU opens the 2008-2009 season at home against Oakland on Saturday, Nov. 15. The Vikings return four starters and eight lettermen from a year ago and were picked as the favorite to win the Horizon League in a preseason poll of the coaches, sports information directors and media in the league. For tickets and more information, visit http://www.csuvikings.com/
or call (216) 687-4848.