COACHES

A season of change in the black college ranks

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Alcorn State's Casem: Moving on to Southern as athletic director (photo by Mark Gail).

WHEN ELIZABETH CITY State Chancellor Jimmy R. Jenkins fired Robert Vaughan as head basketball coach last month, it was a case of the former student firing the teacher.

Jenkins, an ECSU alumnus, took classes in the physical education department that was headed by Vaughan, who remains at the school as a fully tenured professor.

"I don't recall ever having him in a class," Vaughan said of Jenkins. "But somewhere along the way, there must have been something he didn't like. When he came back to the school as an administrator, maybe that's when it began. Whatever, it's clear I stood in his way of doing things."

Jenkins came back to ECSU as a biology instructor and quickly moved up to vice chancellor for academic affairs. At that time, Vaughan was athletic director, basketball coach and chairman of the physical education department.

Jenkins cited philosophical differences as the reason for firing Vaughan, although he would not discuss specifics.

"For some time it has been clear to me that our athletic program would have to undergo changes if the university is to turn the program around," Jenkins said in a prepared statement. "There were major administrative and philosophical differences. These differences were not just central to athletic administration, but also to protocol and authority."

Vaughan's basketball program actually has been improving in recent years. His last basketball team posted a 17-12 record, which came on the heels of a 17-13 mark. Before that, his teams went 8-21 (1982-83) and 11-16 (1983-84).

Meanwhile, the football program, the other revenue-maker in the athletic program, has been on a plateau since the last year of the successful Johnnie Walton regime (20-10-1 record in three seasons). Since 1982, Viking football teams have gone 5-5, 4-6, 4-5-1 and 6-4. Thurlis Little, Walton's successor, is beginning his fourth season as the Vikings' grid coach.

Vaughan's firing had been rumored for a long time and became a matter of formality after Jenkins removed him from his post as athletic director last September. Vaughan, who had held that job for 26 years, still thought he had a chance to maintain the basketball job.

"I thought I had gotten over the hump since I had gotten out of the AD's office," the 58-year-old Vaughan said. "But he told me I had reached my goals and, simply put, I was fired."

Vaughan, who coached the Vikings' basketball team for 34 years, achieved the 500-victory mark with an overtime win over CIAA champion Norfolk State in the last game of the regular season. After being eliminated by the Spartans in the semifinals of the CIAA Tournament, Vaughan's career record stood at 503-363. Before his firing, he was the fourth-winningest active coach in NCAA Division II.

"I wasn't ready to quit," Vaughan said. "I looked forward to coaching the team next season because it has the potential to be a big winner. I feel sorry for my players because they will have to undergo a transition period with a new coach."

The Vikings, led by all-CIAA forward Tim McDaniels, finished in fourth place in the strong Northern Division. The 6-foot-7 McDaniels, a junior, led the league in rebounding and was fourth in scoring.

Despite philosophical differences, Jenkins said he decided to give Vaughan the opportunity to get career win No. 500.

"When I was finalizing my decision relative to the athletic director's position," Jenkins said, "against the advice of my staff and others I decided to allow Mr. Vaughan the opportunity to achieve his 500 wins .... Throughout the basketball season we had to tolerate an almost unbearable situation."

Jenkins said that when Vaughan reached career win No. 500 the Saturday before the CIAA Tournament, the chancellor felt he had lived up to his commitment and could proceed with relieving the long-time coach of his basketball duties.

"We didn't see eye-to-eye on how the athletic program should be run," Vaughan said of his differences with Jenkins. "I've been in constant harassment all year. It was difficult in getting meals and meal money for the team. I had no money for recruiting and scouting. I did it with my own money. We also had trouble getting practice time.

"Under four previous administrators, I had never experienced problems of this nature."

Vaughan, a member of the CIAA Hall of Fame, won five CIAA regular-season division titles and two tournament championships, the last coming in 1981. He coached such stars as Mike Gale, Israel Oliver and Arthur "Boo Boo" Gaskins. He was NAIA District Coach of the Year in 1969-71 and CIAA Coach of the Year in '69 and '71. His best team was the 1968-69 squad, which went 29-4.

"Now he (Jenkins) has satisfied his appetite for revenge in the administration," Vaughan said. "But basketball coaching is coaching. There usually are four reasons for firing a coach: he's not recruiting, not communicating with his players, he's violating NCAA rules or can't discipline his players.

"If I were a poor coach, if I had a lousy season or if I had done a poor job counseling and working with my students, then I would deserve to be fired. But that's not true. The record speaks for itself – 34 years of service to the university."

Winston-Salem State's C.E. "Bighouse" Gaines, the only coach with more experience than Vaughan in the CIAA, said he thought the former ECSU mentor had had a noteworthy career.

"The guy had been there 34 years, directing the entire athletic program most of the time," said Gaines, in his

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40th year at WSSU. "He had been successful with financial limitations. It's hard to get publicity when you're that small and we all have to raise money with gate receipts.

"It tells you one thing as far as the profession is concerned: You're hired to be fired. You shouldn't turn back or bend over."

Gaines said Vaughan's teams were always competitive.

"Bobby's teams were always well-prepared," Gaines said. "It looks like a lot of valuable experience is going to waste. You have to re-invent the wheel every time you do something like this. You have to start over and rebuild everything that was already there with the old guy."

Vaughan said he would keep his options open, but would only be interested in returning to coaching in a "big-time" program.

"I'm not bitter, but at age 58 I don't expect a good offer to come along," he said. "I'm not actively looking for a job, although I've had a couple of calls. At this stage I'm not anxious to be job hunting."

A Different Scenario

For someone who never played basketball, John Bates sure had a successful career coaching the sport.

Bates, the long-time coach at Coppin State, retired at the end of the 1985-86 season. His career record was 298-134 in 16 seasons, including a Division II national championship in 1976 at the Baltimore school.

"Some people wanted me to stay around and win my 300th," said Bates, whose last team went 10-17. "But it's been a long time since I've had a good rest, so I thought this might be a good time to get out and see how much it (coaching basketball) means to me. This is like a sabbatical. To be honest, I don't know how long I'll miss it."

Before he coached at Coppin State, Bates made Maryland-Eastern Shore a black college powerhouse that could contend with the best Division I programs. He was named Mid-Eastern Athletic Coach of the Year three times with a three-season record of 58-9. That included a trip to the National Invitation Tournament in 1974. The Hawks lost to Jacksonville in the quarterfinals to complete a banner 24-1 season.

All five starters on that team were drafted by NBA teams. Two managed careers in the league. Talvin Skinner played for Seattle and Joe Pace for Washington.

Before he went to UMES, Bates had a seven-year record of 135-22 coaching high school basketball in Somerset County, Md. That included a Class B state championship.

Bates went to UMES in 1971 as a football assistant. But he was asked to coach the basketball team when Joe Robinson left for Jackson State.

This past season was Coppin State's first in Division I after joining the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference. The Eagles had gone 10-16 their last season in Division II.

"I think we had a good season," said the 46-year-old Bates, who remains at the school as a physical education professor. "It was our first year in Division I and we had 19 road games. But when you feel tired, there's no use in penalizing the players or yourself."

Incidentally, Bates won the Maryland Lottery last year, splitting a $1.2 million prize three ways with two other winners. He'll get equal portions of his share each year for the next 19 years.

Coppin State was in no big hurry to find a replacement. Athletic Director Ron DeSouza was accepting applications through April 18.

More Changes

• Fayetteville State Athletic Director John D. Marshall said that he expected a decision to be made on the Broncos' basketball coaching vacancy "as soon as possible."

Jake Ford resigned March 15 after seven seasons at the CIAA school. The 41-year-old Ford had a record of 83-98 at FSU. His 1985-86 team was predicted in the preseason to win the league's Southern Division title. But after losing two of their top three players, the Broncos finished tied for last with Shaw University and were 6-17 overall.

Samuel Nelson and Edward James became academically ineligible at the end of the fall semester. Nelson was the team's top rebounder and third-leading scorer; James was second in both rebounding and scoring.

Marshall said Ford resigned for personal reasons.

"The reasons (for Ford's resignation), I don't want to go into," Marshall said. "It was more or less a personal matter."

Ford was not available for comment.

At press time, Marshall said that four applicants had been interviewed by a search committee appointed by Chancellor Dr. Charles Lyons Jr. Between 30 and 40 applications were received by the search committee. Marshall would not reveal the names of the persons interviewed.

"We're basically at the point where we want to look at those four and make a decision," Marshall added.

The FSU athletic director said the main criterion in picking a new coach was that he be a winner.

Marshall said no decision had been made on Ford's assistant, Robert Henderson. He said it would be left up to the new coach.

Ford was a pretty fair player in his day and is said to still have an excellent jumper. He was CIAA Player of the Year in 1969 at Maryland State and was drafted by the Boston Celtics. Ford, whose brother Hank coaches at Hampton University, was released by the Celtics and played for the Seattle SuperSonics under Bill Russell ....

• Marino Casem has accepted Southern University's offer to become athletic director at the nation's largest predominantly black school.

Casem, athletic director and football coach at Alcorn State, becomes Southern's AD July 1. He replaces Richard Hill, who announced his resignation March 22. Hill leaves office June 30. Casem's three-year contract calls for him to make $55,000 a year.

Alcorn State President Dr. Walter Washington may not have to look any farther than his own athletic department to find a successor to Casem. Davey Whitney, the basketball coach, is the dean of Southwestern Athletic Conference cage coaches, with a 17-year record of 353-125. But the word out of Lorman, Miss., was that Washington was looking for a man who could handle the dual roles of athletic director and football coach. Washington gave the search committee a May 1 deadline.

Casem, nicknamed "The Godfather," used a line from a movie of the same name to describe why he moved from Alcorn to Southern.

"They made me an offer I couldn't refuse," he said, echoing the words from "The Godfather."

One thing that influenced Casem's decision was proposed budget cuts for state colleges by the Mississippi Legislature. Alcorn State may face a 21-percent cut and sister SWAC school Mississippi Valley State a 33-percent reduction.

"It (the budget cut) nagged at the back of my mind when I was considering the opportunity," Casem said.

Casem won seven SWAC championships and was named Black College Coach of the Year as many times. His 1985 squad posted a 7-3 record after going 9-1 the previous season. He had a 22-year record of 138-69-8 at Alcorn ....

• Ray Haskins replaced Warren Reynolds as basketball coach at Shaw University.

Haskins, a Shaw alumnus, built a nationally recognized prep power at Alexander Hamilton High School in Brooklyn and was a guard for the Bears in the early 1970s. He had a record of 192-32 at Hamilton High from 1977-84. He also coached one season at Hunter College in Manhattan, posting a 21-2 record.

Reynolds, whose contract was not renewed, compiled a record of 55-115 in seven seasons at the Raleigh, N.C., school. His 1985-86 team posted a 7-17 mark. Before he came to Shaw, Reynolds had been the coach at North Carolina A&T ....

• Bill Davis, former football coach at South Carolina State, has been hired by Savannah State. Davis was twice Sheridan Broadcasting Network Coach of the Year and had a 53-25-1 record in seven seasons at S.C State. But he was doomed by back-to-back losing seasons. Not even a dramatic late-season victory over Grambling State could save Davis' job.

Davis succeeds Frank Ellis, who had a 33-56-2 record at Savannah State ....

• Ray Greene, former coach at North Carolina Central and Alabama A&M, has returned to A&M under a new administration. He succeeds Ed Wyche as the Bulldogs' eighth football coach.

Greene, who prefers a pass-oriented offense, coached NCCU in 1978, posting a 3-8 record. He had a much more successful stint at A&M from 1979 until '83, going 33-17-2. He was fired after the '83 season.

The last two seasons, Greene has been an assistant coach in the SWAC. He coached at Alabama State as offensive coordinator in 1984 and as quarterback coach at Jackson State last year.

Wyche, whose teams were ground-oriented, was fired after two seasons at A&M, where his record was 8-11-3 against one of the most rigid Division II schedules in the country....

• Maryland-Eastern Shore's Howie Evans resigned after two years as basketball coach at the Princess Anne, Md., school. Evans, the former Fordham assistant, failed to reach double digits in wins during his short stay at UMES, leaving with an 8-49 record. The Hawks played a murderous non-conference schedule that included the likes of Cleveland State, Wake Forest, South Carolina, Miami and Maryland. Evans' assistant, George Carbart, was relieved of his duties after five seasons at UMES.

Athletic Director Kirk Hall declined to comment about the situation, but a statement issued by the school's sports information office said UMES was conducting a nationwide search for a successor.