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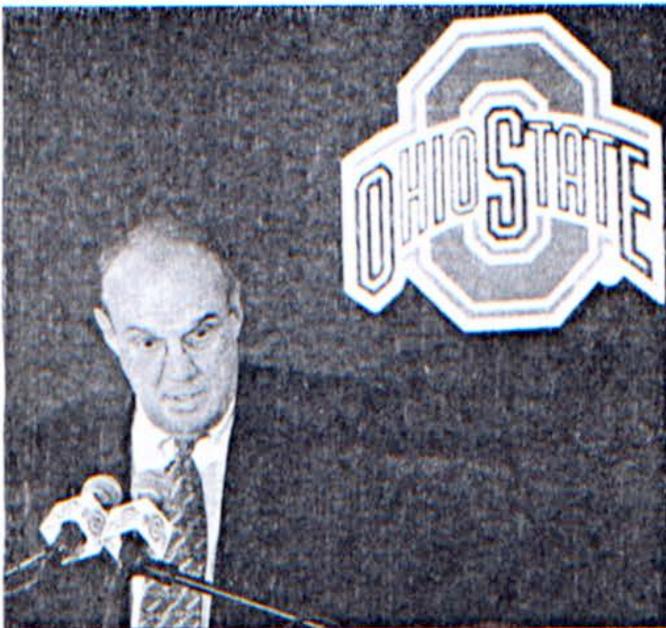
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Vol. 23, No. 29

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

July 2004

Searching For A Coach ...



TERRY GILLIAM

DARK DAY — Ohio State director of athletics Andy Geiger meets with the media to announce the firing of men's basketball coach Jim O'Brien June 8. Geiger called it one of the hardest things he ever had to do but felt he was left with no choice after O'Brien admitted giving money to recruit Aleksandar Radojevic.

Geiger & Co. Taking Their Time Finding Successor To O'Brien

By **MARK REA**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger fired men's basketball coach Jim O'Brien on June 8 and elevated assistant coach Rick Boyages to interim head coach that same day.

Since that time, plenty of names have surfaced as possible successors to O'Brien, but Geiger has been pretty tight-lipped on his search.

In fact, as BSB went to press, names seemed to come and go like patrons in a downtown department store revolving door.

With the arrival of the three-day Fourth of July holiday, the search appeared to have settled on four men: Vanderbilt head coach Kevin Stallings, Rice head coach Willis Wilson, Penn head coach Fran Dunphy and former Los Angeles Lakers assistant Jim Cleamons.

Contacted July 5, Geiger declined to get into specifics about the search.

"Right now, I'm not reading the papers," he told BSB. "I'm not listening to the radio talk shows and I'm not watching the TV sports shows, so I really don't know who the candidates are that all of

you are talking about.

"I will say that we are moving along well with the search and moving toward a conclusion by mid-July."

Before focusing on Stallings, Wilson, Dunphy and Cleamons, the search appeared to be a scattershot attempt to lure some of the bigger names in the coaching community.

Earlier in the process, Texas Tech head coach Bob Knight and former NBA head coach George Karl actively pursued the job through several media outlets.

Fast-rising stars such as Thad Matta of Xavier and Tom Crean of Marquette were also mentioned, but Matta rejected a chance to be interviewed, telling The (Cincinnati) Enquirer, "I'm not a candidate. It's that plain and it's that simple." Meanwhile, Geiger reportedly never contacted Marquette for permission to talk with Crean. Even so, Crean released a statement that said, "I have not made myself a candidate for another opportunity and am happy at Marquette."

Geiger did reportedly ask permission to talk with Rutgers head coach Gary Waters but was denied by RU athletic director Bob Mulcahy. One day later,

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...And Answers *Plenty To Sort Out After Coach's Dismissal*

By **JEFF RAPP**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In the weeks subsequent to a losing men's basketball season at Ohio State, followers of the Buckeyes fretted over names such as Tony Stockman and J.J. Sullinger — transfers who would need to improve their performances in 2004-05 — and Malik Hairston, the top-10 recruit who considered OSU for months before opting for Oregon.

On June 8, 2004, a dark day to be sure in the annals of the program, director of athletics Andy Geiger dropped a bombshell with the firing of head coach Jim O'Brien, bringing a flood of new names to the lips of fans.

The principals in question who eventually caused the ouster of OSU's once seemingly irreplaceable seven-year coach include the following:

- Former OSU signee Aleksandar Radojevic,



Boban Savovic



Aleksandar Radojevic

who accepted more than \$6,000 from O'Brien in November 1998 and never played for the Buckeyes.

- Slobodan "Boban" Savovic, a four-year starter

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In This Issue Of BSB

Whoever said summer was a downtime in the field of collegiate athletics obviously never set foot in Columbus.

This past month, as you might have guessed, we have been very busy covering men's basketball coach Jim O'Brien's dismissal and the ensuing search for his replacement.

In addition to the two cover stories, we have much more on the firing inside. There, we have a timeline of events of O'Brien's tenure at OSU (Page 9); a story on the deposition given by Kathleen Salyers as part of her lawsuit against Dan and Kim Roslovic (Pages 10-11); and reaction on O'Brien's firing from his former players (Page 12).

And we haven't even touched on recruiting yet. On Pages 14-21, we have the latest news on the recent OSU football camp, a new verbal commitment and much, much more.

COVER STORY: SEARCHING FOR A COACH

Clemons Has Ohio Ties Going For Him

Continued From Page 1

Waters told The (Newark, N.J.) Star-Ledger, "I'm very content at Rutgers. I haven't given any consideration to any other job."

Ironically, Boyages was named interim coach but did not appear to be under consideration to replace O'Brien even though he made it clear he wanted the job.

When asked if Boyages would receive an interview, Geiger told BSB, "I don't know. I don't comment on specific candidates or specific interviews."

There seemed to be no consensus pick among Ohio State fans. A poll offered by BSB's website, BuckeyeSports.com, gave Clemons a slight percentage edge over Stallings.

The fact that Clemons is the only one of the four with any kind of ties to Ohio is a major factor.

"I've had a chance to talk to some of my ex-teammates, and their big thing is they would love to have somebody who has some ties to Ohio State," former OSU star and current radio analyst Ronnie Stokes said. "With that said, you think of Jim Clemons, you think of Bob Knight — but which one is the best candidate?"

"I'm not on the search committee, I'm not part of that, so I'm going to be like you guys. I'm going to sit back and contemplate who's the best guy. I think based on what my teammates are saying I would love to have someone that has an Ohio State tie."

Just before BSB went to press the morning of July 6, another name was being discussed — Duke assistant coach Johnny Dawkins, who reportedly told several sources that he had interest in the Ohio State job.

But at the same time, Duke head coach Mike Krzyzewski was mulling over a multimillion-dollar offer to coach the NBA's Los Angeles Lakers, and Dawkins would have been considered one of his possible successors. Krzyzewski said July 5 that he would remain with Duke, and it was a popular assumption — at least at Duke — that Dawkins would stay on staff.

Still, published reports had Dawkins possibly being interviewed by Geiger, leaving the option open that he was a viable candidate.

Nevertheless, the search appeared centered around the aforementioned four candidates. Clemons and Wilson

reportedly interviewed with Geiger on June 29 with Stallings and Dunphy reportedly meeting with the OSU AD the following day.

Here are thumbnail sketches of the four candidates widely reported to have interviewed for the position.

• The timing could be right for Stallings, who — as many had forgotten until the search began — was the other finalist for the OSU job when O'Brien was hired. Seven years later, he has left Illinois State and has done a good job at Vanderbilt, a school not exactly associated with the elite powers in college basketball.

In fact, Stallings' team was one of the nation's most pleasant surprises in 2003-04 when it made it all the way to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament.

Stallings, 44, has been at Vanderbilt since 1999, but rumblings out of Nashville have indicated he may be ready for a change of scenery, especially after the school's athletic department was disbanded last year and folded into the Office of Students, Recreation and Wellness.

Nevertheless, university officials — including former Ohio State and current Vanderbilt president E. Gordon Gee — are beginning to feel the sting of criticism about a perceived fading of the Commodores' athletic programs.

As a result, Vanderbilt appears to be making a conscious effort to retain its coaching talent. Shortly after the end of the College World Series, Auburn made a serious pitch for Vandy baseball coach Tim Corbin, offering him the luster of the Tigers' program along with facilities and a recruiting base above and beyond what the Commodores could offer. But after university officials offered a contract extension and several promises to upgrade baseball facilities, Corbin stayed with Vanderbilt.

Those close to the situation expect Vanderbilt may do the same with Stallings. One source told BSB, "If they offered Corbin the moon to stay, they'll offer Stallings the sun and the moon."



Kevin Stallings



Willis Wilson

Indeed, shortly after Stallings' name surfaced in the OSU coaching search, David Williams, the vice chancellor for student life and university affairs at Vanderbilt and a former administrator at Ohio State, told a Nashville reporter for The Tennessean: "I told Andy he could interview Stallings but that we're going to keep him."

A graduate of Purdue, Stallings began his coaching career with the Boilermakers as a member of Gene Keady's staff from 1983-88. He also spent five seasons as an assistant for Roy Williams at Kansas before taking over the program at Illinois State in 1993. In six seasons with the Cardinals, he was 123-63.

Since taking over the Commodores, Stallings has compiled a record of 85-69, which included a 23-10 mark last season.

• Wilson, 44, is perhaps the most unsung of the possibilities. He has been coaching at his alma mater of Rice for 12 seasons, long enough to become the winningest coach in school history with 169 victories.

Still, his 12-year record with the Owls is below .500 at 169-175, but Wilson has guided his team to a 41-21 mark over the past two seasons. That includes last year's 21-11 record and a berth in the NIT.

Wilson, who was once named college basketball's "best dressed coach," worked as an assistant on Mike Montgomery's staff at Stanford in 1991 and '92. Of course, during the time that Geiger was athletic director at Stanford from 1979-90, he hired the little-known Montgomery away from Montana in 1986.

Stanford was 38-24 during Wilson's two seasons in Palo Alto.

Prior to becoming head coach at Rice, Wilson spent a pair of seasons as an assistant coach at the university and was also the head basketball coach at Strake Jesuit College Prep High School in Houston.

• Dunphy, 56, has spent the last 14 seasons at Penn, compiling a record of 270-145. He has more wins than any other coach at the school, is the second winningest coach in Ivy League history, and has guided the Quakers to four league championships in the past six seasons.

A graduate of La Salle University, Dunphy began his coaching career as a member of Dan Dougherty's staff at West Point. After three seasons, he became head coach at his high school alma mater, Malvern Preparatory School near Philadelphia, and remained there for four seasons before becoming an assistant at his college alma mater of La Salle.

In 1981, Dunphy joined former OSU head coach Gary Williams' staff at American University. Four years later,

he went back to La Salle and was an assistant on Speedy Morris' staff. He took over the Penn program in 1988 after serving one year with the Red and Blue as an assistant coach under Tom Schneider.

In addition to holding a marketing degree from La Salle, Dunphy also has a master's degree in counseling and human relations from Villanova and has completed course work toward his doctorate in counseling and student development at American.

• Clemons, 54, has been an NBA coach since 1989, serving mostly as an assistant on Phil Jackson's staffs that have won multiple NBA championships in Chicago and Los Angeles.

He does have head coaching experience, both at the pro and college levels, although neither of his two stints produced much in the way of success.

Clemons got his first taste of head coaching experience at Youngstown State in 1987 and 1988. His two-year record with the Penguins was just 12-44.

Nearly a decade later, Clemons got his first shot in the NBA as head coach when the Dallas Mavericks hired him in 1997. He compiled a record of 24-58 and was fired just 16 games into the 1997-98 season after the Mavs got off to a 4-12 start.

He had one other brief stint as head coach, piloting the Chicago Condors of the women's American Basketball League, going 4-8 before the league folded early in the 1998-99 season. Clemons also worked as an assistant coach for Furman and Ohio State before he got his own program at YSU.

Most of Clemons' work on Jackson's staffs with the Bulls and Lakers has been coaching the guards, and one could argue that he has coached two of the best guards in the history of the league in Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant.

Nicknamed "The Cougar" for his catlike quickness, Clemons graduated from Ohio State in 1971. During his career with the Buckeyes, he averaged 18.5 points and 7.3 rebounds per game. He was the first-round draft choice of the Lakers in 1971 — the 13th pick overall — and got his first championship ring as a member of the 1972 Lakers.

His best professional season was 1975-76 with the Cleveland Cavaliers when he averaged 12.2 points, 5.2 assists and 4.3 rebounds and was named to the NBA All-Defense Second Team. During his nine-year pro career, Clemons averaged 8.3 points and 3.8 assists.

Clemons was born in North Carolina, but his family moved to Columbus when he was a child and he graduated from Linden McKinley High School.

Stumping For Support

For two weeks after O'Brien's dismissal, the search centered around the 63-year-old Knight returning to his alma mater and the Big Ten.

However, after several sources indicated that OSU was close to signing



Jim Clemons



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COVER STORY: SEARCHING FOR A COACH

Knight, Geiger let it be known through intermediaries that the university was "not interested in hiring Knight."

BSB learned from two separate sources that Geiger was reportedly initially receptive to the idea of Knight returning to his alma mater to coach but was told "to find additional candidates." The sources did not say who told Geiger to find additional candidates, but speculation centered upon OSU president Karen Holbrook.

Holbrook reportedly was not rejecting Knight out of hand but wanted the search for a new coach to involve several interviews of different candidates.

Knight reportedly agreed to be interviewed but did not want to keep Texas Tech waiting throughout a lengthy hiring process. Knight, whose career was rescued by Tech after he was fired at Indiana, had a three-year contract extension on his desk in Lubbock waiting to be signed.

In addition, he had several big-name OSU donors and ex-athletes campaigning for him. Those making phone calls and attempting to twist influential arms reportedly included Columbus Blue Jackets majority owner John McConnell and ex-Buckeyes Jerry Lucas, John Havlicek and Jack Nicklaus.

Neither Geiger nor Holbrook ever commented directly on the Knight situation, although published reports later had Geiger saying he would never have considered Knight because of the coach's past behavioral problems. He also was later quoted as saying Holbrook had nothing to do with the search process.

In 38 seasons at Army, Indiana and Texas Tech, Knight has 832 victories. Former North Carolina head coach Dean Smith holds the NCAA record for most wins with 879.

Karl, 53, was an intriguing possibility because he has no ties to Ohio State and has spent his entire coaching career in the NBA. He does, however, have experience as the head coach of USA Basketball's 2002 World Championship Team that competed in the FIBA World Basketball Championships in Indianapolis that year.

Karl is one of only a handful of NBA coaches to win at least 700 games in his career and he has done so with Cleveland, Golden State, Seattle and Milwaukee. He also has coached in the CBA and overseas in Spain. Most of his teams have earned the reputation of being overachievers.

He has 16 seasons in the NBA as a head coach and a 708-499 record to show for them. Karl was replaced at Milwaukee following the 2002-03 season after his Bucks compiled a 42-40 record and lost in the first round of the playoffs. He spent the 2003-04 season out of coaching and as an analyst for ESPN.

Karl's candidacy was apparently derailed because of his lack of experience on the college level. In fact, he reportedly never received an interview. He was seen in Columbus in mid-June but was reportedly in town to meet with his agent.

Boyages, 42, was reportedly seen by the search committee only as a fallback candidate.

He has head coaching experience at William & Mary and the support of the team, and he would be considered a safe candidate since it appears he had no knowledge of the program infrac-

tions which have been alleged to have occurred under O'Brien.

In three seasons at W&M, Boyages compiled a record of 35-52 with a 21-31 mark in the Colonial Conference. He won 11 games in his first season, the most by a first-year coach at the school since 1983.

Boyages began his Division I coaching career at Boston College with O'Brien in 1991. He went to the Eagles' staff from Bates College, where he had been head coach for four years. When named head coach at Bates in 1987, the then 24-year-old Boyages was the youngest collegiate head coach in the country.

Other names that surfaced during the monthlong search included North Carolina State head coach Herb Sendek, former coach at Miami (Ohio), and Alabama head coach Mark Gottfried, who is an Ohio native.

St. Joseph's head coach Phil Martelli also was mentioned, but he denied having any interest in the position. In fact, he was in Germany conducting a basketball clinic during the time most of the candidates were being interviewed.

Who's Doing The Searching?

The identities of search committee members also has been a source of debate among those following the search.

Geiger has declined to mention anyone on the committee, although conjecture has mentioned such names as OSU board of trustees chair Tami Longaberger and former Ohio State basketball stars Bill Hosket and Clark Kellogg. Current team captain Terence Dials confirmed to BSB that he was on the committee, which met with Geiger periodically during the quest for a new coach.

"I have had open discussions with the committee," Geiger said, "and will continue to do so throughout the process."

The last time Geiger faced a similar situation was in January 2001 when he fired John Cooper as head football coach. Sixteen days later, he announced Youngstown State head coach Jim Tressel as Cooper's successor.

At that time, the search committee was largely known. It consisted of three faculty members, then associate athletic director Archie Griffin, the then chair of the university's board of trustees, one former player and two active ones.

It is not known if any faculty members or other athletic department officials are involved in the search committee this time.

Whoever ultimately receives the job could be in line for a financial windfall. According to university records, when he was dismissed, O'Brien was the highest paid coach at Ohio State with an annual salary of more than \$1.15 million.

Tressel is close behind at \$1.11 million, but it is a precipitous drop to women's basketball coach Jim Foster at \$547,940.

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COVER STORY: SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

Repercussions Won't Be Known For Some Time

Continued From Page 1

for the Buckeyes until 2002, when he was named most outstanding player of the Big Ten tournament.

• Former OSU assistant coach Paul Biancardi, now the head coach at Wright State. As O'Brien's chief recruiter in six seasons at OSU, Biancardi was responsible for opening the pipeline to Serbian players Savovic, Radojevic and Cobe Ockoljic.

• Former Gahanna, Ohio, resident Kathleen Salyers, who claims to have provided housing, care, meals, phone calls and wads of spending money for Savovic. As a plaintiff in a lawsuit, Salyers also alleges she was owed more than \$510,000 by a Columbus couple for taking in Savovic and makes allegations of illegal payments, academic fraud and knowledge of the arrangement by Biancardi and O'Brien.

• Dan and Kim Roslovic, who housed Savovic for a few weeks before asking Salyers to take him in and who now are being sued by Salyers, their former housekeeper. They claim she has falsified the facts and cannot produce any evidence of her claims. Kim Roslovic allegedly had an affair with Savovic and is now divorced from Dan Roslovic.

• A multitude of current and former head coaches who have since been linked to Ohio State's coaching search, including names such as Bob Knight, Jim Clemons, Thad Matta, George Karl, Tom Crean and Kevin Stallings.

• OSU associate head coach Rick Boyages, the former head coach at William & Mary and current interim coach.

Geiger put the program in the national spotlight the afternoon of June 8 at the Schottenstein Center interview room when he began a hastily called press conference with the statement, "Jim O'Brien, head coach of men's basketball at Ohio State since 1997-98, has been terminated for cause, effective immediately."

He immediately named Boyages interim head coach "until a search for a new coach is completed" and added that the current assistants would remain in their positions in the interim. Each of them was free to pursue the head coaching job.

Boyages, who assured Geiger he knew nothing of the allegations involving Savovic and Radojevic, more or less did that at the same lectern the following day. He professed a love of Ohio State and great interest in the job while admitting that the dismissal of his good friend was difficult.

Ohio State president Karen Holbrook approved O'Brien's firing and released a public statement instead of attending the press conference.

"A serious violation of NCAA bylaws by someone in whom the university has placed great trust and responsibility simply cannot be tolerated," Holbrook said. "Since being presented with the pertinent facts, the director of athletics, Andy Geiger, has acted appropriately and expeditiously."

"It is of paramount importance that Ohio State maintain its core values of academic excellence and ethical conduct."

Dealing With Disaster

Geiger met with O'Brien the morning of the announcement and gave him the opportunity to resign. The coach declined.

When asked to describe O'Brien's reaction, Geiger said, "He was upset."

Geiger said O'Brien informed him of the lawsuit in August 2003 soon after it was filed in Franklin County Common Pleas Court. The AD said at the announce-

ment that O'Brien first told him about the Radojevic incident on April 24 at a pregame luncheon for the football team's spring game.

OSU assistant LaMonta Stone told BSB that O'Brien informed his staff of the case and its possible repercussions on the following day. He said O'Brien offered to step down at the time, but Geiger did not accept the head coach's resignation.

OSU reported the payment to the NCAA on May 18, which triggered a major investigation.

"Since that self-report, we have been working jointly with the NCAA and legal counsel on a complete and thorough investigation into the issues raised by the lawsuit and any other issues with respect to our men's basketball program that may arise in the course of that investigation," Geiger said.

O'Brien also offered to resign at the time of the report. When asked what changed from the university's standpoint between then and June 8, Geiger said, "I can't explain why. You'd have to ask Jim."

When asked July 5 about the NCAA investigation, Geiger told BSB, "It is ongoing. It appears that it's going to be a very lengthy and difficult process. I couldn't begin to give you any timetable."

Attorney Jeffrey K. Lucas, who is representing Salyers, held a controlled press conference at his northern Columbus office June 15, a week after the firing. Salyers did not attend, but Lucas said his client filed the suit only as a last resort and after repeated attempts to approach the Roslovics privately about the money owed.

Lucas and Salyers met with university officials and NCAA investigators at Ohio State on June 22. Afterward, Lucas told BSB, "We have only mentioned Coach O'Brien in good terms. We have respect for Coach O'Brien and feel badly for him."

Lucas confirmed that the trial in his client's case against the Roslovics is set to begin Aug. 26. A recent report, however, claims that he is trying to delay the trial several months.

Geiger indicated to BSB that he believes the NCAA investigation cannot proceed expeditiously while the trial is ongoing.

O'Brien, who has claimed through his lawyer, Pittsburgh-based C. James Zeszutek, that he never met Salyers, reportedly has not yet met with NCAA investigators even though original reports claimed he also would do so June 22.

O'Brien, however, did not dispute that he helped Radojevic, saying in a statement, "I am advised that my firing is because I was asked to and tried to give assistance to a young man's family who was in dire financial straits. The assistance in no way influenced the young man in his decision to attend OSU and, indeed, the young man did not enroll at OSU."

"My lawyers have asked to meet with OSU administrators and their counsel to explain the details of what occurred, but OSU unfortunately refused to do so."

Zeszutek said he and O'Brien have not ruled out taking legal action against the school and that they do not believe O'Brien has committed an NCAA violation.

O'Brien was contacted by BSB but would not comment on his firing, the lawsuit or his next move.

Geiger was vague about whether the money was O'Brien's or came from another source.

"My understanding is it was not the school's (money)," Geiger said.

Zeszutek said O'Brien wrote a check from his personal account and sent it to

aid Radojevic's family. He added that the coach considered the payment to be a loan, although it was not repaid.

Radojevic was unable to return to his war-torn homeland after his father died in September 1998. His mother was reportedly unable to work because of a disability and was caring for Radojevic's three younger siblings.

Radojevic was declared ineligible for Division I play, causing him to declare for the NBA draft in May 1999. He was the 12th pick by Toronto but played very sparingly for the Raptors, Denver Nuggets and Milwaukee Bucks before being cut in 2001.

Savovic is back in Ohio and engaged to be married after playing for a professional team in France this past season. He has refused comment.

Violations Stun Geiger

During the news conference to announce O'Brien's dismissal, Geiger repeatedly made mention of Salyers' suit against the Roslovics but also made it clear the reason he felt compelled to fire O'Brien was because of the money that was paid to Radojevic. He said last season's 14-16 mark, which kept OSU out of the postseason for the first time since O'Brien's initial campaign of 1997-98, was not a factor.

"I am troubled that a rule was admittedly violated and it took us five years to find out about it," said Geiger, who claimed at times the last two seasons that he talked a distraught O'Brien out of resignation when he endured health problems or the Buckeyes struggled.

Ever an admirer of O'Brien's coaching ability and professionalism, Geiger said he was stunned when he found out about what he called serious violations in the basketball program. He declined to delve into his personal feelings at the press conference, saying it would be too emotional for him.

Also now sullied by the fiasco is Radojevic, which once was a name that induced excitement for the followers of the Buckeyes. A Serbian silo at 7-3, Radojevic gave a verbal commitment at a juncture when the Buckeyes were turning their fortunes around behind Scoonie Penn, Michael Redd and O'Brien.

When reports swirled that Radojevic wouldn't sign with Ohio State as promised in November 1998, O'Brien blasted Radojevic's Barton County (Kan.) JUCO coach, Ryan Cross, and accused him of trying to sabotage the deal. When Cross was quoted as saying, "This was probably the most unprofessional recruiting job I've ever been a part of," O'Brien spent the first several minutes of a press conference following the 1998-99 opener that inaugurated Value City Arena showing his displeasure with those comments.

"I've been doing this for almost 25 years," O'Brien said with assistants Boyages, Biancardi and Dave Spiller aligned in the back of the interview room as a show of solidarity. "And in those 25 years that I've been doing this, that is the first time that anybody has ever accused me or anybody on my staff as being unprofessional. ... I take major exception to the reference."

In another of fate's ironic twists, O'Brien ostensibly now operates with a marked-for-life record.

After leaving his alma mater, Boston College, in 1997, O'Brien produced a 133-88 record at OSU. He took over a team decimated with off-the-court difficulty, injuries and turnover at the end of Randy Ayers' reign but turned the downtrodden

Buckeyes into a scrappy, competitive lot in 1997-98. Still, Ohio State endured an 8-22 record that included a 1-15 mark in Big Ten play.

What followed, after a change of venue from St. John Arena to Value City Arena and an infusion of gritty new players such as Penn and Savovic, was one of the most amazing turnarounds in college basketball history.

The Buckeyes tied the school record for wins and advanced to the Final Four in 1999 before losing to eventual NCAA champion Connecticut. OSU also won league titles in 2000 and 2002 under O'Brien, who twice was named Big Ten coach of the year.

Now it is hard to imagine the Buckeyes becoming a winner with the same core group and the cloud of possible NCAA sanctions looming.

"We're just trying to find our own identity right now," team captain Terence Dials said. "Which coach comes in really doesn't make a difference."

A majority of the players, however, have endorsed Boyages. So have the OSU assistants.

"Selfishly, that's probably what we're rooting for," Stone admitted, "but that's more in the back of our minds. We want what's best for the kids. We're adults and we'll make the best of the situation no matter how it turns out. You just don't want to see 18-, 19- and 20-year-old kids suffer."

Even without Hairston, O'Brien and staff were receiving praise for a four-man recruiting class headlined by Ohio "Mr. Basketball" award winner Jamar Butler and in-state star Matt Terwilliger. Butler and Terwilliger were on campus with their parents to enroll for summer classes the morning of O'Brien's dismissal.

Butler got the shocking news on his way back to Lima from assistant coach Monte Mathis and put out a statement later that day saying, "At this point in time I have not made any decision with regard to my college basketball future." After playing in an all-star game with his buddy Terwilliger, however, Butler told BSB his commitment was firm, as did Terwilliger and Jeremy Jackson-Wilson of Milwaukee.

JUCO star guard Je'Kel Foster was unavailable for comment and back in his home state of Mississippi working to shore up his academic transfer, but Stone and a university official both said Foster gave assurances he would enroll at OSU in late July.

The only veteran member of the team who admitted looking into a possible transfer out of the program was forward Ivan Harris, who was sometimes maligned as a freshman last season after being hailed as O'Brien's only McDonald's All-American at OSU.

When contacted days after his departure by BSB, O'Brien issued praise to his players for their diligence since the end of the season, including grueling 6 a.m. workouts. He added that he wanted them to remain Buckeyes.

"They all should stay," he told BSB. "That's the place for them to be."

But what about O'Brien, who has a 22-year record of 363-305 at St. Bonaventure, Boston College and OSU? Will he find a new place in coaching and could he return to the world of college basketball?

"I think right now it's time for him to do a lot of thinking, and that's what he's doing," OSU women's basketball coach Jim Foster, a good friend of O'Brien, told BSB. "I think he still considers himself a coach."

THE FIRING OF JIM O'BRIEN: THE DEPOSITION

Chips Started Falling With Salyers' Lawsuit

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

Former Ohio State men's basketball coach Jim O'Brien was fired ostensibly because he gave nearly \$7,000 to recruit Aleksandar Radojevic in 1999.

But that exchange — a clear violation of NCAA regulations — might never have come to light had it not been for a civil suit filed by Kathleen Salyers, who says she housed and provided financial assistance to former OSU guard Slobodan "Boban" Savovic during his playing career with the Buckeyes.

Salyers said she sheltered, fed and clothed Savovic, paid for him to register for classes at OSU, incurred the player's medical and dental expenses and paid for his car insurance as well as long-distance telephone bills.

Salyers' 800-plus-page deposition was filed May 27 as part of her civil suit that was filed in August 2003 in Franklin County (Ohio) Common Pleas Court against Columbus residents Dan and Kim Roslovic.

Apparently, O'Brien admitted that he gave money to Radojevic only after he realized the payment might become public because of the deposition.

Salyers, who now lives in Cincinnati, alleges the Roslovics — now divorced — failed to deliver on a promise to pay her \$1,000 per month plus expenses to allow Savovic to live with her.

The Roslovics have denied there was any financial arrangement with Salyers for the care of Savovic.

However, Salyers' deposition describes the arrangement in great detail as well as dealings with other OSU basketball players and former assistant coach Paul Biancardi, now head coach at Wright State.

Some of the details of Salyers' sworn deposition include the following:

- Savovic used the telephone calling card of sports agent Marc Cornstein's father, and O'Brien was aware of it. Savovic reportedly made long-distance calls totaling more than \$10,000. Cornstein is a representative for New York City-based Pinnacle Management Corp.
- Sports agents were routinely present inside the Ohio State locker room at home games during the 2002 season.
- Agents had contact with Savovic in Salyers' home during the time he was a Buckeye from 1999-2002.
- Salyers claims that she wrote papers for Savovic throughout his time as an Ohio State student.
- Salyers gave more than \$30,000 to Savovic throughout his collegiate career.
- Biancardi knew of the arrangement between Salyers and the Roslovics and the agreement to pay Salyers \$1,000 a month.
- Biancardi telephoned Salyers to get her to call OSU professors to change grades for Savovic in order to keep him eligible.

Biancardi quickly denied the accusations in a prepared statement, which read, "I am disappointed and frustrated over the situation that has evolved from a lawsuit in which I am not a party and have had no involvement.

"Statements, having no basis in truth, have been used to make decisions affecting

the lives of dedicated individuals. These statements are not supported by facts and are uncorroborated."

Kris Dawley, attorney for Dan Roslovic, also issued a similar statement.

"The allegations contained in the spurious lawsuit filed by Dan Roslovic's former babysitter (Kathy Salyers) will be shown to be false and completely fabricated," the statement read. "Dan never had any agreement with her to pay her any money and he looks forward to demonstrating those facts as the court case progresses."

In her lawsuit, Salyers said that Savovic came to stay with her in July 1998 after Roslovic called and told her the player couldn't stay with him because he was a booster who had donated money to the basketball program.

However, Salyers also swore in her deposition that Savovic was forced to leave the Roslovic home after Roslovic caught his wife and Savovic having sex.

In the deposition, Salyers is quoted as saying, "Dan told Boban and Kim if they were going to have an affair, they had to keep it in the house, not let anyone else know. And then Dan added that he wanted to videotape them having sex. Boban left that night never to return."

The Radojevic tie-in came when Salyers said she learned about the money O'Brien is alleged to have given Radojevic from the recruit himself.

"Alex gave me money (estimated at between \$6,700 and \$6,800) to return to the coach," Salyers said in the deposition. "Alex explained to me that Jim O'Brien asked him how much money did he need. And he sent it to his parents."

Salyers also testified that "after Alex made it to the NBA, Paul Biancardi called Alex and said, 'Hey, since you're doing OK, Jim O'Brien wants his money back.'"

That small passage in the voluminous deposition is the part that triggered the chain of events that led to O'Brien's June 8 dismissal.

More From The Accuser

Exactly one week after OSU athletic director Andy Geiger fired O'Brien, Salyers' Columbus-based attorney held a news conference to further tell his client's side of the story.

Standing in front of a small group of reporters, attorney Jeffrey K. Lucas reiterated portions of Salyers' testimony that she gave during her deposition in the civil case she brought against the Roslovics.

"The lawsuit was filed only after repeated attempts to settle the dispute between the Roslovics did not bear any fruit," Lucas said, adding that his client did not wish to air anyone's dirty laundry via the lawsuit but had no choice.

"Throughout this controversy, it has been the intent of Kathleen Salyers to keep the voyeuristic eyes of the public out of this employment dispute," he said. "We have expressed our intentions to (Ohio State University) to keep this issue private and we have been cooperating with OSU on issues important to the university.

"We have a great deal of respect for Coach O'Brien and the Ohio State University, and we are disappointed that the university decided to dismiss him last week prior to the close of any NCAA investigation."



ASSOCIATED PRESS/RIVALS.COM

NUTS AND BOLTS — Attorney Jeffrey K. Lucas goes over some of the points in the lawsuit filed by Kathleen Salyers. That suit alleges rule-breaking by the Ohio State men's basketball program and led to the firing of Jim O'Brien.

Lucas added, "I also question the timing of (O'Brien's) dismissal during a time that I informed OSU that I would not be available. I see no reason to rush to judgment and the timing of the dismissal during a time that I was not reachable caused additional stress and anguish for my client.

"We believe that Coach O'Brien is an important leader in our community and like everyone in our community ... is entitled to due process.

"I would like to stress that Kathleen Salyers has no claim filed against Coach O'Brien, no claim filed against OSU, and the issues involving Coach O'Brien and Coach Biancardi are as a result of the Roslovics' attorneys asking questions during depositions and then filing those depositions with the court."

Lucas intimated that Salyers had been victimized by harsh criticism from Ohio State basketball fans and O'Brien supporters, blaming her for the coach's demise.

"OSU fans should not be taking their anguish out on (Salyers) but on those individuals who created this situation," he said.

Lucas stood by all of the contentions Salyers made in her deposition.

"The facts of the case are that Boban (Savovic) came to live with the Roslovics (a fellow Serbian), there was an affair between Boban and Kim Roslovic, and the Roslovics had Boban move out of the their home to (Salyers') home," he said. "(Salyers) had no contact with Boban, or any interest in Boban except through the Roslovics.

"The Roslovics promised to pay (Salyers) to keep Boban. (Salyers) could not afford to keep an extra mouth in her household, except for the support from the Roslovics."

Lucas also reiterated accusations Salyers made about sports agents having proximity to several OSU athletes during the time Savovic was on the team.

"There was involvement by Marc Cornstein (at Pinnacle Management Corp.)," he said. "Reporters should check their website at www.pinnaclehoops.com to see all of the Serbian players that they have under contract."

More than 90 percent of the players listed on the website are of Serbian descent. Pinnacle clients also include such former Buckeyes as Savovic, Scoonie Penn and Velimir Radinovic.

On June 22, Salyers met with NCAA investigators looking into the matter. The meeting took place at Ohio State and included university officials.

In the days subsequent to that meeting, Salyers began talking to members of the media for the first time and repeated her claims against O'Brien and Biancardi.

"Paul called me and told me that he was made aware through the academic office that Boban had a failing grade and he would lose his scholarship and he would be sent home," Salyers told The Associated Press on June 25. "I knew the situation with war, conflict, whatever you want to call it at the time."

Salyers said Biancardi told her that Savovic would go to prison and he would be beaten if he was sent back home to war-torn Yugoslavia.

"He said, 'Kathleen, imagine — Boban playing basketball in the United States and he's considered a draft dodger in his country.' It was just very frightening," Salyers said.

C. James Zeszutek, a Pittsburgh attorney representing O'Brien and Biancardi, later disputed Salyers' allegations.

"Neither Coach O'Brien nor Coach Biancardi instructed, recommended, suggested or even made any implication she should talk to any professors on behalf of Boban or any student-athlete," he told the AP.

Zeszutek said Biancardi was not permitted to respond to charges made against him by Salyers because of the ongoing NCAA investigation. He also said O'Brien had not yet been asked to meet with NCAA investigators.

In her deposition in the civil case, Salyers said Savovic came to Ohio State unable to speak or read English. She alleges, as does Kim Roslovic in a separate deposition, that they did classwork for Savovic.

Biancardi has denied he oversaw payments, grade changes or other NCAA and university violations while a coach at Ohio

THE FIRING OF JIM O'BRIEN: THE DEPOSITION

State under O'Brien. He is currently set to begin his second season as head coach at Wright State after winning Horizon League coach of the year honors in his first year with the Raiders.

Grade Change Allegations

The Columbus Dispatch was the first to report details on the grade changes, publishing that information in a June 25 story.

Asked if Biancardi gave her a line of talking points with the professor, Salyers said that he did.

"I was doing all the talking," she said of the meeting with the professor, whom she declined to identify. "I don't think I gave them much of a chance to say anything. And Boban was very quiet. It was very difficult actually because I believed everything I was telling (the professor) to be the truth. He just ultimately said that to check and the grade would be changed."

An F that Savovic originally received was reportedly changed to a D the next day.

Salyers also said she called another professor, whom she did not identify, and asked for another grade change.

"He was a little reluctant but ultimately did it," she said.

Again, the grade was changed from an F to a D, and Savovic maintained his eligibility to play for the Buckeyes.

Salyers said she did not believe the professors changed the grades because Savovic was a basketball player, but because of the conditions in Yugoslavia and his status as a student that allowed him to remain in this country.

Salyers said she was convinced O'Brien knew of most of her actions on behalf of

Former OSU Assistant Denies All Allegations

Wright State head coach Paul Biancardi, caught in the middle of allegations against the Ohio State men's basketball program, has denied any wrongdoing while he was a member of Jim O'Brien's staff at OSU.

In a deposition in her civil lawsuit against two Columbus residents, Kathleen Salyers alleges several NCAA violations committed by the Buckeyes during O'Brien's tenure, some of which were initiated by Biancardi. (See accompanying story.)

"These allegations are not true and are not supported by fact," Biancardi said in a 30-second statement he made June 20 from the Ervin J. Nutter Center, Wright State's home arena.

"Because of the ongoing investigation, I cannot discuss the specific allegations that are made against me or the Ohio State men's basketball program.

"I look forward and I'm excited and anxious to answer all the questions and all the allegations that are made about me."

Biancardi did not take any questions during the brief news conference. He was accompanied by his attorney, C. James

Zeszutek of Pittsburgh, who also is representing O'Brien.

Just three days after issuing that statement, however, another Columbus resident came forward to say that he helped former Ohio State basketball player Siobodan "Boban" Savovic with living expenses and that Biancardi knew about it.

In a story published June 23, The Columbus Dispatch reported that Michael Sierawski said Biancardi "knew that Boban was being supported by somebody at all times."

Biancardi's name is contained within the deposition made in a civil suit Salyers filed in August 2003 seeking \$510,000 in expenses and damages from two Ohio State boosters, Dan and Kim Roslovic. Salyers alleges the Roslovics failed to live up to an agreement to pay her \$1,000 a month plus expenses in exchange for caring for Savovic while he played for the Buckeyes.

Sierawski, 51, said he was speaking about the lawsuit because his name has been mentioned in court filings. He said that he met Savovic at Port Columbus

International Airport when the player arrived for a recruiting visit on May 3, 1998. Sierawski said he wanted to help Savovic because of their shared Serbian heritage.

Sierawski said he took Savovic to a dinner at St. Stevan Serbian Orthodox Church, a function also attended by Biancardi.

"I told Paul if there is anything I can do, let me know," Sierawski said. He added that the assistant coach took him up on the offer.

Sierawski said he arranged for Savovic to live with the Roslovics that summer and wrote a \$500 check to Dan Roslovic.

When Ohio State's compliance office learned of the check, they made Savovic pay the money back, Sierawski said.

Sierawski believes that with Salyers' frequent visits to campus, O'Brien would have known Savovic was receiving outside support.

"Kathy would take Boban to practice in curlers. I think everybody on the team would see her drop him off at practices," Sierawski said.

NCAA investigators looking into the case have already interviewed several Ohio State officials as well as Salyers. When contacted by BSB for an update on where the investigation stands, an association spokesman — who refused to give his name — said it was the NCAA's policy not to comment on ongoing investigations.

— Mark Rea

Savovic, who lived with her from June 1998 to July 2000.

Asked if she knew O'Brien was aware of everything Biancardi and she had discussed, she said, "Firsthand knowledge, I don't know. I just know that Paul ... would refer to Jim O'Brien as his boss."

She did indicate, however, that Biancardi made it clear he was discussing Savovic's living arrangements and other matters with O'Brien.

Should the NCAA find the allegations made by Salyers to be true, Ohio State could be stripped of every victory during

Savovic's career from 1998-2002 — the length of Savovic's career.

That would include Big Ten championships in 1999 and 2000 and the 2000 Big Ten tournament title, and the Buckeyes would also likely have their appearance in the 1999 Final Four voided.

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THE FIRING OF JIM O'BRIEN: THE REACTION

Dismissal Catches Ex-Players Off-Guard

By JEFF RAPP
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Jim O'Brien has barely spoken publicly since, and at last check, there weren't any sit-in protests on campus either.

Nevertheless there has been a bevy of reaction in just about all other forms to O'Brien's dismissal June 5 as Ohio State head men's basketball coach.

Much of the repercussion was predictable, with some fans in O'Brien's corner and others labeling him a hypocritical rule-breaker. Most, whether they had admiration for O'Brien as a coach or not, believed his misstep was too severe and that the punishment fit the action. Seventy-one percent of those who responded to a poll on BSB's website, BuckeyeSports.com, said he deserved to be fired.

Even less surprising but still stirring were the rampant testimonials by players past and present for O'Brien.

• **Scoonie Penn** — "Our season (in a professional league in Croatia) went on longer because we were still in the playoffs. We had just won the championship on the road and guys were celebrating on the bus when I got the call. (A friend) said, 'O'Brien got fired today because he gave Aleksandar Radojevic \$6,000 a few years back. He's out.'"

"My heart just stopped. I said, 'C'mon. Be serious.' I just couldn't believe it. No way.

"I was just so stunned. It's completely out of character. I haven't seen anything like this."

• **Brent Darby** — "I found out on TV just like everybody else. I was shocked.

"I talked to all of the coaches. I gave it a couple of days to weather down a little bit, but I made sure to talk to all of them. Without even talking to them I felt that there had to be something that was not told and there was some truth that was missing. After talking to them I heard pretty much what I thought I would hear."

Like Penn and a majority of the former players, Darby called O'Brien to check on him.

"He's hurt," Darby said. "I think this is a place that he's put all his heart into. I think Obie was really planning on finishing his coaching career here. He's hurt — that's all I can really say — and

I feel his pain."

• **OSU assistant coach LaMonta Stone** — "The day after Coach O'Brien talked to (OSU athletic director Andy Geiger on April 24), he told us the same thing. He said he had given \$6,000 to a recruit five years ago and wanted to let us know before it got out. He told us he had offered to resign and Andy said that's not what he wanted to do right now.

"It's been tough, no doubt about it. But you just go on and try to do the things you are supposed to do."

• **Michael Redd** — "I got back from vacation (in Mexico) and I had like 40 voice mails. A lot of people wanted to know what was going on and I had no clue. It's just a sad situation right now and I'm sure the university and Coach O'Brien will bounce back from this."

Redd said he planned to call when things died down and added he was pleased that most people were not shooting venom at his former coach.

"I'm not hearing that. I'm hearing positive things. The people that are firing out negative labels really don't know Coach O'Brien personally. They have a right to their opinion, but I know he's a good man and a good-hearted man. I'm sure he has admitted that it was a mistake, but if he had it to do over he would do it again. That's the type of guy he is.

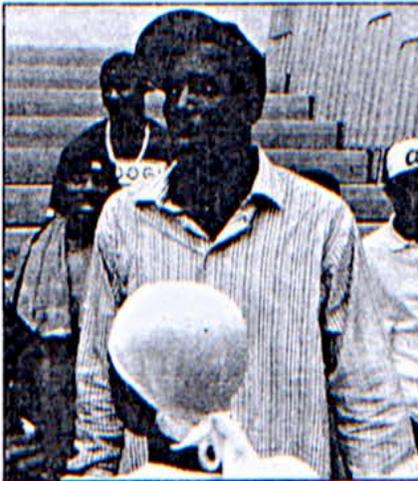
"He had a great tenure here — we won, we did it by the book, and that's all you can ask for."

• **Terence Dials** — "I talked to him one time (since the firing). He's doing pretty good. It's not easy right now, though. He wasn't just my coach, he's one of my friends. He's a great guy, and I'm going to continue to have a relationship with him."

• **Carlos Davis** — "I wish I could have played all four years for him because he brought out the best in me. He let me play and he knew I was going to play hard. He let me play a lot of minutes because I had to play a lot of minutes. The one year I played for him I enjoyed a lot.

"My reaction was shock, sadness. I still don't believe it, to tell you the truth. I just wish there was something that could have gotten worked out where he could have stayed because I think he helped this program."

• **Brandon Fuss-Cheatham** — "It's a shock. I remember I was doing some



CHRIS NIDA

SHOCK AND AWE — Few would have thought Jim O'Brien would be fired for breaking NCAA rules, but that's exactly what happened in early June. Former Buckeye Michael Redd, seen here at the McDonald's Summer League with former teammate Scoonie Penn in the background, was among the many who expressed his feelings about the firing.

homework and one of my friends called and said he had seen it on the ticker on ESPN that Coach O'Brien was going to have a press conference. I was wondering what was going on, and then we got some calls from the coaches and stuff about what was going to happen. To me, it was a total shock. It came out of nowhere. I didn't know anything about it. I don't think anybody on the team knew anything about it.

"Coach O'Brien was a great guy and all of us love him. He's definitely one of the best guys I've ever known. He always has my back and I know he has everybody else on the team's back. I knew he cared for every player that he came in contact with. He's a good guy and I'm sad to see him go."

• **Matt Marinchick** — "He's a great guy. He's a good guy to be around. Everybody's going to miss him.

"I've been around him for four years. I know what's gone on. Everything that I've seen and that I've been around has been up-front, upright, honest and good."

• **Ricardo Billings on O'Brien and his assistants** — "They always want to do what is in people's best interests. They just want to help all the time. They love the players. They're willing to do anything for us. I'll always be their player. Anything I can ever do for any one of those coaches I'll do it, regardless of whatever I'm doing anytime."

• **J.J. Sullinger** — "It's going to be tough. It's going to be an adjustment, but I've made it before. This will be my eighth coach in 10 years, going way back to seventh grade. It's going to be tough, but we just have to deal with it, we just have to bounce back and show how tough we are."

• **Tony Stockman** — "It was a big surprise. We thought everything was in order. We thought the upcoming season would go a certain way and now we have no idea what's going on. We don't know what the new system is going to be with a new coach. It's a big surprise."

• **Incoming freshman Matt Terwilliger** — "It's been confusing. I'm trying to figure out who my coach was and who my coach is going to be. I'm just trying to leave that up to the people in the front office. I'm just getting myself ready for the year.

"I love Coach O'Brien. He was like a second dad to me. But that was one of the things when I chose Ohio State, when I was looking at my last three schools. I made sure that I chose the school for

more than just one thing because you never know when something like this is going to happen. I had to prepare for it."

• **Incoming freshman Jamar Butler** — "It's kind of crazy. You get the phone call at your house that the coach is fired and you don't know what kind of situation you're going to come into as a freshman, so it's been kind of crazy.

"I'm still going to come to Ohio State. I just have to play the way that Coach wants me to play. O'Brien had a set for me, what he wanted me to do, so I just have to make another adjustment.

"As long as he's a good coach, it really doesn't matter to me."

• **Matt Sylvester** — "It's been confusing more than anything, just not knowing who your coach is going to be. Dealing with the disappointment of not only losing a good coach in Obie but a good friend to me, it's been a pretty tough situation.

"I just approach this with a really open mind. Whoever comes in is not going to be a bad coach because Ohio State is a big-time program and Andy Geiger's a great athletic director and they're not going to bring anyone in here that's not first-class and a top-notch guy and a great coach.

"I'm going to look at it with open eyes, and whoever comes in here, I'm going to look at as if they can help me and I can help them and try to work together."

Chris Nida contributed to this report.

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OPINION

Former Players Remain Loyal To O'Brien

There was a funeral in Worthington, Ohio, on June 22, only the attendants didn't realize it.

Jim O'Brien was fired as Ohio State basketball coach June 8 and his former players spent the next several days dealing with the loss. There was anger, hurt, shock and despair to deal with, but also there was therapeutic basketball to play at the McDonald's Summer League.

Two weeks after director of athletics Andy Geiger dropped the ax, the summer league showcased a match-up that featured such former OSU standouts as Scoonie Penn, Brent Darby, Ken Johnson and Velimir Radinovic as well as key returnees Terence Dials, Tony Stockman, J.J. Stullinger and Ricardo Billings and top newcomers Jamar Butler and Matt Terwilliger.

Also poking around were several reporters and one Michael Redd, who ambled in to see his old gang.

In between games the OSU fraternity was evident. Penn and Redd, old running mates who led the Buckeyes to an improbable Final Four appearance, embraced. Brown shot a big smile and high-five toward Johnson, the 6-11 center he used to dump the ball into or rub off of effectively on the pick-and-roll. The veterans greeted Jamar and "Twig" in what amounted to a welcoming ritual.

O'Brien, of course, would have smiled proudly at the sight, but the ball coach is not with us anymore. He darted off the day Geiger had to swallow hard and announce he was relieving his friend of duty. The reason: O'Brien gave more than \$6,000 to signee Aleksandar Radojevic.

He did so knowing the 7-3 Radojevic likely never would play for Ohio State, that he would be a high NBA draft pick in the near future and that his widowed mother and family in war-torn Montenegro were in a very desperate way. It's clear O'Brien felt a mantle of responsibility for his Serbian players — which turned out to be his downfall — especially because few others seemed to be concerned with their best interests.

The NCAA didn't show any concern for Radojevic's plight when it declared him ineligible for Division I play because he netted about \$13,000 as a teenager for playing on a club team in Yugoslavia and gave the money to his ailing father. That incensed O'Brien — who cited similar instances that resulted only in suspension — and conceivably cost OSU the 2000 national championship.

Also, O'Brien showed more contempt for Ryan Cross, Radojevic's Barton County (Kan.) Community College coach, than any other person I've ever seen. He was livid to find out Cross was trying to railroad his player's verbal to OSU, going so far as to put out a statement he wrote saying Radojevic instead was going to wait until the spring to decide his future. After the season opener in 1998, O'Brien blasted Cross for having his own agenda and questioning OSU's recruitment of Radojevic.

Call me a bad coach or go ahead and question my record, but don't ever label me as unprofessional or a cheater, O'Brien more or less said.

Ironically, the stigma of "\$6,000 to a recruit" remains in all references to O'Brien's ouster even though he gained no advantage and only lost money because of the gesture.

To great believers like me in O'Brien the man, his character is not tarnished at all by this even though his judgment is. It doesn't change the fact that he is a master

RAPP AROUND

Jeff Rapp

bench coach, a fierce competitor, a first-rate communicator with his players and the media, and easily one of the most honest and caring coaches in the increasingly seedy world of major college basketball.

From the reaction of the fans, however, it would seem O'Brien took the memories of the 1999 Final Four, two Big Ten titles and a league tournament championship with him. While the public may label him an underachiever, a bad recruiter and a rules-breaker, his players — the OSU family he created — don't have that view at all.

To a man they have been adamant about their love and support for "Coach Obie," and most of all of them have called him to tell him so. As you flip to page 12 of this issue, you see their very consistent sentiments.

One Buckeye who precedes the O'Brien era but shares the others' pain is Ronnie Stokes, the OSU basketball radio analyst who coaches DSW in the summer league. He may have summed up the departure best of all.

"When you get to know someone over 7 1/2 years, you feel for them because they're hurting," Stokes. "You want to hope that it's not true but obviously it is true, so you feel bad for the coach and you also feel bad for your university."

"There's rules, obviously, but sometimes the human emotion takes over. Based on his comments he said that he gave (the money) because it was a tremendous need and I think that decision to do that, from his statements, that outweighed the consequences."

"I feel bad on both sides because, heck, I became a Buckeye back in 1981 and I love this university. I want the very best coach that's going to represent the program and bring out great wins and great players. But by the same token, I feel bad for a friend in Jim O'Brien because I know that he's saddened by this and it's an unfortunate circumstance. Everybody's feeling real bad right now."

On June 22 all the gloom was masked with hugs, handshakes and back slaps as a group of Buckeyes hung around the gym a little longer than normal and told a few more stories about the good old days than usual.

No amount of public scorn can take their experiences and loyalties away.

Five-Star General?

It's a good thing the players themselves have taken the time to eulogize their former coach since the OSU fans, many of them admittedly fair-weathered when it comes to basketball, didn't seem to bother. The two lackluster seasons Ohio State just put in no doubt had something to do with that.

But what really allowed the public to dismiss O'Brien's plight before his body was even cold were the various Bobby Knight reports that surfaced almost immediately. The frenzy to bring back Bobby proved that fans wanted to renew some level of excitement in the program and also that while controversial, the hiring of the General would have the overall blessing of the Buckeye Nation.

Count me as being in the minority on

this one also and among the relieved to hear Geiger would not pursue him.

I admit Knight is a larger-than-life figure. You simply can't take your eyes off the guy when he enters or exits a room. I've been in his presence at numerous games, postgame press conferences, Big Ten media sessions and even special events such as the dedication of Fred Taylor Drive, and I've always found myself rapt with attention to him.

However, when the game is going on I actually prefer watching the basketball — you know, the competition on the floor. The Texas Tech-Ohio State affair on Jan. 4, for example, was a very entertaining, well-played game, and I don't remember looking over at the Sweatered Swearer more than a couple of times.

Yes, the crowd was amped and packed in to the rafters. Yes, the game was exciting. But who's to say that kind of fever pitch would magically exist in Value City Arena every night for several years if Knight were the OSU coach?

In Knight's three years at Tech, he compiled a very good 63-30 record but was just 25-23 in the Big 12 (a very comparable conference to the Big Ten) and won just one NCAA Tournament game. In O'Brien's last three seasons, two of which were considered dreadful by all accounts, OSU was 55-39, 24-24 in league play and won one NCAA Tournament game.

In O'Brien's first three seasons in Columbus taking over a program more decimated than Texas Tech's, OSU went 58-38 overall, 26-22 in the league, went to the Final Four and tied national champion Michigan State for the Big Ten regular-season title. That includes O'Brien's very rough first year of 8-22, 1-15.

Knight has not coached a team to a

league championship since 1993 and has not advanced to the Sweet 16 since 1994, when he and the Hoosiers were dumped by Boston College and a guy named Jim O'Brien. He has won exactly three NCAA tourney games since.

Knight's all-time record and list of achievements is incredible, to be sure, but in the last 10 years, O'Brien simply has been a more successful coach — and that doesn't even take into consideration Knight's deplorable behavior.

Before the Radojevic scandal, the only knock anyone had on O'Brien was that his recruiting was lackluster and he was only interested in bringing in "good kids." The day after he was gone everyone was giddy about bringing a coach with the same exact recruiting philosophies. Why do you think Knight admires O'Brien and O'Brien has great respect for Knight?

"Bobby Knight's a big name in the coaching business and Ohio State could use that name to bring people to the arena," Redd said. "But would kids want to come here and play for him? I don't know."

Undoubtedly Sports Illustrated would slap a scarlet-clad Knight on its cover, Dick Vitale would sleep in the press room and ESPN would show up for preconference games if the General were in town. He'd also break the all-time victory record, truly a historical achievement.

But I'm not quite sure how winning at the same pace takes OSU's program up several levels. And "creating excitement" means what? Throwing chairs? Strangling people? Having expletive-laden tirades in the interview room?

Hiring Knight may have looked sensible on some levels, but it certainly isn't worth the price of an entire university's soul.

From The Pages Of BSB

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO — 1989

After what athletics director Jim Jones termed a "thorough national search" to replace departed men's basketball coach Gary Williams, Ohio State settled on assistant Randy Ayers, who accepted a five-year contract with a base salary reported to be \$75,000 for the first year.

Though OSU officials insisted that Ayers was the only candidate ever offered the job, it was widely reported that a number of candidates across the nation had rebuffed OSU's advances.

"I'm surprised that so many coaches turned it down," Buckeye coaching legend Fred Taylor said. "It would seem to me there couldn't be 10 better jobs in the country than Ohio State. There has got to be something wrong somewhere."

Coach John Cooper made an addition to his staff as well, hiring 28-year-old David Kennedy to be OSU's new strength and conditioning coach.

TEN YEARS AGO — 1994

An 18-month investigation into the men's basketball program finally concluded, with the NCAA handing out penalties that included placing the athletic program on one-year probation and the loss of a single scholarship for the men's basketball team for the 1994-95 season.

The investigation and subsequent penalties resulted from a meeting with Cincinnati Woodward prospect Damon Flint and his coach at a Damon's restaurant near the OSU campus.

"I think Randy (Ayers) has admitted a mistake, but I think it's all right to move on from there," athletic director Andy Geiger said. "We all learn and grow from our mistakes and I have confidence in that aspect of Randy Ayers and

every aspect that I have heard about in terms of his reputation or that I have experienced personally in my six weeks here."

FIVE YEARS AGO — 1999

The men's basketball program added two players to its mix, securing a commitment from Matt Marinichick of Hudson, Ohio, and Sean Connolly, a standout at Providence who was set to transfer to OSU.

On the football front, the news was not so encouraging as Rob Murphy, who had figured to be a key cog along the Buckeyes' offensive line in 1999, lost his eligibility due to academic difficulties.

Assistant coach Mike Jacobs was set to return to the football program after pleading no contest to a disorderly conduct charge in connection with a January incident involving his ex-wife.

ONE YEAR AGO — 2003

To the surprise of no one, head football coach Jim Tressel was awarded a six-year contract extension in the wake of OSU's first national championship in 34 years.

The contract, running through 2008, began with a base salary of \$1.309 million and topped out with a base salary of \$1.871 million.

"It's obviously exciting," Tressel said. "It's not something that has dominated my thinking. But I have a lot of confidence and faith in the people I work for that I will be treated more than fairly."

OSU football legend Archie Griffin left his post as an associate athletic director to become the new president/CEO of the Ohio State University Alumni Association effective Jan. 1, 2004. Griffin replaced longtime alumni association head Dan Heinlen.