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Vol. 16, No. 23

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

March 15, 1997

The End Of The Line

Geiger Cleans House, Fires Ayers, Darsch

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

It will go down in the annals of Ohio State University athletic history as "Black Monday."

In an unprecedented move, OSU athletic director Andy Geiger fired both men's basketball coach Randy Ayers and women's coach Nancy Darsch on the same day, March 10, ending rampant speculation about both coaches' future at the school.

"I thought it was the right thing to do rather than one today and one next week," Geiger said of the double firing at a hastily called St. John Arena news conference. "Let's have one bad day and do it all at once."

Ayers was dismissed after eight years at the helm and 14 overall at OSU, while Darsch spent 12 years as the Buckeyes' head coach.

According to Geiger, he established firm criteria with both coaches after last season. He challenged both programs to finish in the upper half of the Big Ten. Neither did.

Ayers was fired after a second consecutive 10-17 season and a ninth-place Big Ten finish, while Darsch's team went 12-16 and finished a school-worst 10th in the conference.

"It is my feeling we did not meet the goals that we set before the season began, which were upper half of the conference goals," Geiger said. "There has been some improvement, particularly in the men's program, but we simply didn't meet the goals and I think it's time for us to move on and move forward with an aggressive search and a new look for our basketball programs."

In the days leading up to the decision, it became clear both coaches would be fired. In fact, OSU president Gordon Gee, a staunch Ayers supporter in the past, issued a terse statement paving the way for the move on March 9.

"We have had four very tough seasons," Gee said. "This is the longest losing streak in the history of this university. Ohio State, for years, has set the standard in both men's and women's basketball. We're not now."

A day later, it was official, although Geiger refused to say when he decided

- Players visit Geiger, react to Ayers' firing (Page 11)

- A look at 15 possible candidates for the men's coaching post (Page 12)

- A timeline of Ayers' tenure at Ohio State (Page 12)

- Darsch stands behind her accomplishments with Buckeyes (Pages 14-15)

to fire both coaches. He notified them in separate meetings earlier in the day and also met with both teams.

"It was clear in the last few weeks of both seasons that we were not going to meet the goals and we had to consider what we were going to do next," he said.

Both programs have been national contenders under these two coaches. Ayers guided OSU with All-American Jimmy Jackson to a pair of Big Ten titles in 1991 and '92 and was the national coach of the year in '91. Darsch, with All-American Katie Smith as the star player, helped OSU advance to the 1993 NCAA championship game.

But both programs have fallen on hard times in recent years. The men's program was decimated by a two-year NCAA investigation into the recruitment of Cincinnati prep star Damon Flint and a spate of off-the-court problems that caused the entire five-man 1992 recruiting class to leave the school.

Since Darsch led OSU to that NCAA title game, the Buckeyes have made just one NCAA appearance in the last four years (For more on Darsch, see story on pages 14-15).

"I think our programs need to be perceived as national contenders," Geiger said. "That's what it takes to elevate the programs."

Ayers was unavailable for comment, although he did issue a statement.

"I have been very fortunate to head the Ohio State basketball program for the last eight years and to have been associated with The Ohio State University for the past 14 years," he



AYERS' LAST STAND — Ohio State men's basketball coach Randy Ayers signals during his team's season finale against Michigan March 9 at St. John Arena. The game, an 86-81 overtime loss to the Wolverines, was his last as the OSU coach.

This Is Last Weekly Issue Scheduled For Winter Season

This is the last weekly issue of *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* scheduled for the winter season.

BSB will return in two weeks with the first of four biweekly issues scheduled for the spring. The next issue, dated March 29, will be mailed on March 25. That issue will be *BSB's* spring football preview edition.

The following issue, dated April 12, will be devoted to the OSU offense. The April 26 issue will be devoted to the OSU defense. The May 10 issue will be the spring wrap-up.

Continued On Page 10

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No. 5	Oct. 12	No. 20	Feb. 22
No. 6	Oct. 19	No. 21	March 1
No. 7	Oct. 26	No. 22	March 8
No. 8	Nov. 2	No. 23	March 15
No. 9	Nov. 9	No. 24	March 22
No. 10	Nov. 16	No. 25	April 12
No. 11	Nov. 23	No. 26	April 26
No. 12	Nov. 30	No. 27	May 10
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OPINION

Ax Falls On Both OSU Coaches

Andy Geiger, sensing the feeding frenzy around Columbus — those satellite trucks stationed outside St. John Arena were a dead giveaway — made a decision to end the hysteria by announcing the firing of both Randy Ayers and Nancy Darsch late in the afternoon of March 10.

Two weeks ago, my gut feeling was both coaches would be retained to coach the final season at St. John Arena. Buying both coaches out — Randy Ayers has two years left; Nancy Darsch has one — seemed like a waste of money, especially since there is no immediate urgency to fill the Schottenstein Center.

But, with both seasons now over, I understand why both coaches are gone.

The most prevalent rumors have South Carolina's Eddie Fogler, Clemson's Rick Barnes and Utah's Rick "Fatty" Majerus taking the men's job. Former Buckeye Nikita Lowry, now at Detroit Mercy, is the leading women's candidate according to the rumors.

But with Ayers and Darsch still firmly in our thoughts, we will examine the pros and cons for each coach. Let me detail a few of them here:

Randy Ayers

• **Pro-Ayers** — Although this has changed a little in recent years — due to a mountain of adversity, no doubt — Ayers is a nice guy to be around.

His courtside demeanor is classy, to say the least. His one notable eruption at Indiana this year was rooted in his deep desire to get a fair shake for his kids.

His players respect him and like him. When he talks, they listen, although behavior problems have been a recurring problem.

Part of me wanted to see Ayers get a chance to rebuild the program and see exactly what would happen if Jermaine Tate was healthy, guys like Damon Stringer, Shaun Stonerook, Jason Singleton and Neshawn Coleman had another year to mature, and guys like Jon Sanderson, Michael Redd, Shamar Herron and Ken Johnson were added to the mix.

Ayers was part of the success that led to the movement to build the Schottenstein Center. Should he have had a chance to fill it up the first time?

• **Anti-Ayers** — Four years without a postseason game is too much. In years past, OSU fans typically went into a season knowing their team would fight until the end of the season to make the NCAA. In recent years, the suspense has been over at mid-December. That must change.

The OSU administration has been patient with Ayers. This was the year the pieces were supposed to come together, but they didn't.

The one bad break that befell OSU — Tate's health condition — was exacerbated when the Buckeyes had no one to fill in for him. The people who should have been there, Johnson and Ed Jenkins, weren't, and that's partially Ayers' fault as well.

Part of me says enough is finally enough. I'm not sure if the grass is greener on the other side but the monotony of losing seasons must go.

And then there's this small matter of filling the Schottenstein Center. Ayers' current product hasn't even filled St. John Arena the past three years, let

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK with Steve Helwag

alone an arena with an additional 6,000 seats.

And, we haven't talked about the money OSU has lost on men's basketball. Over the last three years encompassing 44 home games, OSU has averaged 2,164 below capacity. At a median ticket price of \$12 (students are \$8; adults are \$17.50), that's an estimated three-year loss of \$1.14 million in ticket revenue — and we haven't even mentioned missed program and hot dog sales.

Nancy Darsch

• **Pro-Darsch** — She led Ohio State to the NCAA championship game in 1993 and to the NCAA Tournament as recently as last year. This year's team was hamstrung when top returnee Marrita Porter was hampered by recurring knee problems.

Darsch has heavy credentials, serving as an Olympic assistant coach with Tara VanDerveer last summer.

Her recruiting has been a little better than some believe, bringing in out-of-state notables like Audrey Burcy from Chicago, Averill Roberts from Boston, Nikki Keyton from Michigan and Porter and Adrienne Johnson from Kentucky.

• **Anti-Darsch** — Her record in recruiting Ohio's impact players in recent years has been abysmal. This year alone, OSU was dismantled by former Ohio prep stars Jannon Roland of Purdue, Megan Chawansky of Northwestern and Helen Darling of Penn State.

It is no secret that some of Ohio's top girls high school coaches do not particularly like Darsch. A year ago, I said in this forum it was up to her to essentially get in her car and drive to these key Ohio hoops outposts, smooth over the hard feelings and end up at least getting a visit from some of the state's top talent.

That didn't happen, and Pickerington's Tamara Stocks is headed to Florida and Garfield Heights Trinity's Semeka Randall is headed to Tennessee. Some dismiss Stocks as another

Pickerington "program player," but I believe she was selected for a national prep all-star game.

Another barometer worth watching is attendance at OSU games. This year, the team averaged 4,480 in 14 home dates, marking the third straight year attendance has dropped from a program-high of 8,411 in 1993-94. At \$5 a ticket, the program netted in the neighborhood of \$250,000 less at the gate this year than three years ago.

And, like the men's program, the OSU women's program has a Schottenstein Center quota of about 8,000 a game to meet.

Sanderson Shines

One positive surrounding the OSU program is Lexington, Ohio, product Jon Sanderson.

I had a chance to see the 6-7 product in action twice recently in tournament action. Against Shelby, he essentially did it all, scoring from nearly every spot on the floor in racking up 28 points.

He likes to drive, he can handle the ball and he can stick the jumper from the arc in. He could stand to hit the weights a little bit.

I went back up north to Ashland to see him play against Sandusky Perkins, but he suffered an ankle sprain that knocked him out of that game and his team's March 8 tournament loss to Bellevue.

The ankle is not expected to be as serious as a knee problem he had that required surgery last summer.

In my final analysis, I would compare him to Stonerook a little bit. He's more of a scorer than Stonerook, but could stand to hit the weights a little bit to become as strong as Stonerook on the boards.

Program 'Killer'

Central Michigan coach Leonard Drake was recently drummed out after another subpar year.

That would be two Division I coaches that Charles "Killer" Macon helped get fired in the same season. Isn't that some kind of record?

Appropriately, when Macon was dismissed from OSU, *Columbus Monthly* said something to the effect of, "At long last it had become clear why Purdue's Gene Keady and Indiana's Bobby Knight did not actively pursue Killer Macon."

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COVER STORY: THE END OF THE LINE

Geiger Will Head Search For New Coaches

Continued From Page 1

said.

On the surface, Ayers was two years into a rebuilding process with a core of five sophomore players. Apparently the rebuilding task wasn't being completed quickly enough for Geiger, but Ayers predicts success for the young nucleus he brought to the school.

"I have grown very fond of the players I have had over the last 14 years, especially this current group," he said. "I think they will be a special group in the years to come and I hope the university will continue to embrace them."

Ayers' entire team made a last-ditch attempt to save his job by meeting with Geiger one day after its season ended with a disappointing 86-81 loss to Michigan.

"The decision was pretty much made (by then)," Geiger said. "I was impressed with their presentation. They are fine young people and they're very fond of their coach. They were recruited by him, they know him, and they have strong feelings for him. We had a good give-and-take on the subject."

The timing of the decision — on the eve of the NCAA Tournament — was ironic: The OSU men's program hasn't made the Big Dance in five years.

"We are seeking leadership, a strong, aggressive program, a program that is announced in the (NCAA) brackets," Geiger said. "That's where the program has been. That's what we hope the standards are for Ohio State."

"I think we've stuck it out very well. We've stayed patient with both programs. We've gone from a (women's) Final Four appearance to 3-13 in the conference. We would like to do better."

Geiger said he had no timetable in which to make his decisions. He did say he would assemble an unnamed advisory panel to help him, but he would have the final say.

"It's not a race," he said. "It's a search and we want to get the best coaches we can get for our programs and do the best and most thorough job we can."

Attendance at OSU men's games has lagged significantly the past three seasons



STEVE HELWAGEN

MEDIA ONSLAUGHT — OSU athletic director Andy Geiger answers questions following a hastily called press conference March 10 at St. John Arena. Approximately 50 members of the news media were on hand as Geiger announced his decision to fire OSU men's basketball coach Randy Ayers and women's coach Nancy Darsch.

as the team posted a combined record of 26-56. And with fund-raising efforts imperative for the success of the \$93 million Schottenstein Center (slated to open in late 1998), it became apparent something needed to be done.

Geiger refused to pinpoint the money matters as the reason for Ayers' firing, though.

"It doesn't matter, those kind of things," he said. "They were symptoms. The programs were not progressing at the rate I think they need to. That's what was behind it."

"There is always pressure and I don't think the pressure is any different because of the Schottenstein Center or St. John Arena or wherever we would

play."

Ayers was fired with two years remaining on his contract. Darsch had one year left on her deal. Geiger refused to comment on negotiations with each coach on their respective buyouts.

"That has not been completed yet," he said. "That process is ongoing. It would be inappropriate to discuss that now."

Who's Next

Speculation has been rampant for weeks regarding who would replace the two coaches. Geiger said in the press conference he has not discussed the jobs with anyone.

"(Stanford's) Mike Montgomery contacted me in November," Geiger said. "I've read that I've been contacting him regularly. I hired him at Stanford and he is a good friend of mine. He called me to ask what was happening with the Big Ten conference tournament."

"The other head coach I've talked to since that time is Bob Knight of Indiana. He called me regarding the same subject."

"I have not talked to any other coach of any other university casually or otherwise."

Geiger said OSU would be careful in dealing with coaches whose teams are still involved in NCAA Tournament play.

"We would probably contact the schools before we contact the coaches and we would be gentle about that because there is respect for the fact that their seasons are ongoing," he said.

The OSU AD bristled at the notion that the school must fill quotas for the job openings, looking at a black candidate or a woman.

"We hire people and we expect people to do a job," he said. "If we feel we have to make a change, we make a change."

Looking To Next Year

The OSU men's team stumbled to the finish line this year, dropping eight of its last nine games after Jermaine Tate and Sean Tucker were sidelined with health problems.

"I've enjoyed this team," Ayers said. "They've worked hard for me. I just think they're a player or two away from being a top team in the conference."

If he recovers from a heart ailment, Tate will join classmates Damon Stringer, Neshawn Coleman, Shaun Stonerook and Jason Singleton on next year's squad.

Stringer said that although the record was the same, he saw immense improvement in the team from a year ago.

"I would say it was a step forward," he said. "Last year, there were a number of ball games right after halftime that we weren't even in. We were just fighting to get into the game. This year, we were fighting to win the games at the end."

"We just have to be mentally tough and take care of the ball on offense."

The facts would bear out that analysis. Eight of OSU's 17 losses were by six points or less and just one was by more than 20 points. Last year, the Buckeyes lost nine games by more than 10 points.

"I think we were definitely a better team this year than we were last year," Coleman said. "We took care of the ball better, we're a year older. There were a lot of things we did capitalize on, but in close games we came up short. Hopefully those things will change next year."

Ayers' OSU Tenure

Here is a look at the eight-year record of OSU men's basketball coach Randy Ayers:



Randy Ayers

Year	All Games			Big Ten Games				Postseason
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.	Place	
1989-90	17	13	.567	10	8	.556	6th	NCAA Second Round
1990-91	27	4	.871	15	3	.833	1st (T)	NCAA Round Of 16
1991-92	26	6	.831	15	3	.833	1st	NCAA Round Of 8
1992-93	15	13	.536	8	10	.444	7th	NIT First Round
1993-94	13	16	.448	6	12	.333	8th (T)	_____
1994-95	6	22	.214	2	16	.111	10th	_____
1995-96	10	17	.370	3	15	.167	10th	_____
1996-97	10	17	.370	5	13	.385	9th	_____
Totals	124	108	.534	64	80	.444		

AYERS ERA ENDS

Players React To Ayers' Ouster

Roth, Buckeyes Ponder Future

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

St. John Arena, 6:20 p.m., March 10 — Ohio State assistant coach Randy Roth sat in his office knowing that he was most likely now Randy Roth, former OSU coach.

As that sobering reality was sinking in, athletic director Andy Geiger was still answering reporters' questions just yards away on the same playing floor where the Buckeyes wrapped up an unfulfilling 10-17 season the previous afternoon.

Roth, just 36 years old, was curled up in his chair, no doubt reviewing what went wrong and trying to grasp at what was ahead. Oh sure, the new head coach could decide to retain Roth, who has been by Randy Ayers' side at OSU for five years, or fellow assistants Jene Davis and Jerry Francis.

But none of that is likely as this dual move — Geiger's dismissal of Ayers and women's coach Nancy Darsch — is of the house-cleaning variety.

Like a trumpet, a promo for the sports news show "SportsCenter" blared about the firings while showing video of Ayers, Roth squarely in the background.

"Hey," Roth said, forcing a smile, "we just made ESPN."

But there wasn't much way to gloss this day. The Ayers era, and all it represented, was over.

"We did a good job keeping the kids out of the thing, I think," Roth said. "We never once told them they needed to play better or we'd be fired."

Roth said the coaching staff cut off pregame access to the players in late January for just that reason, to keep the "Randy Watch" out of the equation.

"I really believed that's why we played better (at the end of the season), because we just focused on basketball," Roth said.

But the Buckeyes pulled defeat from the jaws of victory in their final four games, and that seemed to force Geiger to drive home the final nails.

Players Defend Ayers

Before addressing the media, Geiger's day began with an impromptu visit from the entire men's team, led vocally by captains Damon Stringer and Otis Winston, as well as John Lumpkin.

"We let the captains and Lump talk for everybody, but we wanted to show we



John Lumpkin

were behind what they were saying, which is that we wanted Coach Ayers back," freshman Sean Tucker said. "I think he (Geiger) likes Coach Ayers, but he said it was his decision. I just think they ought to give him one

more chance, but we're going to have to deal with it."

Added Winston, a senior who professes a deep bond with Ayers, "It's sadness. He's been there for me, he gave me an opportunity, and that's why I went in to see Mr. Geiger this morning. Coach deserved a chance. He's the one who brought the sophomores in. But they didn't look at the whole situation. They just looked at the record."

Lumpkin has played only in the Big Ten portions of his two active seasons on the basketball team because of his scholarship commitments to football, but he was quick to defend Ayers, who has been a friend of his family for years.

"Keeping him would have been a real statement, but I don't think they were prepared to make that kind of statement and go against public thinking," Lumpkin told BSB. "That's not a knock on the administration."

"Andy heard us out, and I respect him for that. But it's pretty clear that by the time we got there he had his mind made up."

The 20-minute meeting, which began about 9:30 a.m., left team members fairly convinced they'd be without their head coach. Ayers made the news official to them at a 4 p.m. meeting at the Fawcett Center.

"He handled it real professionally," Lumpkin said. "He stayed strong for the players."

The news hit hard and permeated all walks of the team.

"He told us that he cared for us, and that he wanted us to stay together and keep working hard and just win some games next year," freshman walk-on Jeremy May said. "It was tough. He took partial blame, but it's not all his fault. It's a lot our fault for not executing when we needed to."

"Nobody (on the team) agrees with the decision."

All players interviewed said the Geiger meeting was not threatening in nature and that no players have expressed a desire to transfer, at least not yet.

Stokes Speaks Up

Former OSU captain Ronnie Stokes said he'll advise Stringer (his Worthington Summer League teammate), and whoever else asks his advice, not to make a hasty decision. But Stokes, who played from 1982-85 and was tutored by Ayers (then an assistant), can understand the players' concerns.

"I'm a little disappointed because Randy's a good friend of mine. I think the relationship you have with your coach is important, too — not just your four years you play here," he said. "I would have loved to see him get the opportunity to coach this team this year. If this nucleus stays together, there's no doubt in my mind they'll be a winner."

Recruits Puzzled

That Ayers may have already paved a winning road with three signees and 6-11 center Ken Johnson already on campus makes the move even more frustrating to his supporters.

As for the three players who signed with Ohio State in November — 6-5 Michael Redd of Columbus West, 6-7 Jon Sanderson of Lexington, Ohio, and 6-9 Shamar Herron of Detroit Pershing — there's a good chance all will still join the program.

Redd told BSB at his signing and during subsequent interviews that he was a Buckeye no matter the coaching situation. He maintained that view the day of the Ayers ouster.

"I'm still on my way to Ohio State," he said. "I wish Randy was there, but I still believe we have a chance to be a real good team and can contend in the Big Ten."

Sanderson echoed that statement when contacted at his home the night of the firing.

"I've made my choice and I'm definitely set on it," Sanderson told BSB. "It's strange to be committed to the school right now, but I can only hope for the best."

Ayers called all three signees the day of his dismissal and his disappointment was evident.

"I got it directly from Coach Ayers," Herron said from his Detroit home. "I was stunned, and the way he felt was the least of what I felt. It was obvious he was hurt."

Added Sanderson, "We only talked a

few minutes, but I could tell he was real disappointed. I felt bad because I have a lot of respect for him as a person and a coach. That the whole team met with the AD shows how much respect he has."

Herron admitted that Ayers was the sole reason he committed to Ohio State and cited his hankering to play for a black coach.

"That was one of my considerations, that I wanted to play for a black coach," he said. "But mostly, now that I've thought about it, I want to play for a respectable person who can teach and coach me and help me as a player and as a man."

"Now I've got to think things through. It's just going to depend on who they bring in. But I can't say much because I don't want to jeopardize my future."

"I just know I can't play for some screaming maniac type who would disrespect me in front of 21-5 (21,500 fans)."

Beginning The Search

OSU fans are as anxious as Herron to see a list of candidates develop, but Geiger gave only a crude outline for Ayers' successor, saying he would scour for someone who has a "track record coming from an effective program, a program that's known success, either as a head coach or an assistant coach that established an outstanding record."

But will the school also feel the need to find a "name" replacement to boost seat license sales in the \$93 million Schottenstein Center?

"I don't know if a name coach is just going to instantly make people decide if they're going to buy a seat license," said Tom Hof, OSU's associate director of athletics for development.

Hof is chiefly in charge of fund raising for the Schottenstein Center.

"Fortunately, I think Buckeye fans see that this new facility is the future of the program, and they've gotten behind it," he said.

When asked if he expects his phone will ring more now that Ayers has been let go, he replied, "I really don't know what to expect. Obviously, this decision wasn't based, in any way, on our need to sell seat licenses. Andy made the decision because he felt the program needed to go in a different direction."

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AYERS ERA ENDS

Who's Next?: BSB's Hot 15

Even before Randy Ayers had officially been fired, there was much speculation about who would be the next OSU coach.

In a March 8 ESPN broadcast of an ACC tournament game, Dick Vitale ticked off his top three choices as former OSU assistant Rick Barnes of Clemson, Eddie Fogler of South Carolina and Mike Jarvis of George Washington.

A number of other names have also cropped up in recent weeks.

OSU athletic director Andy Geiger, who will head the search, said he will begin contacting potential candidates as soon as possible.

"It will be an open search," Geiger said. "We will not be limited or constrained in our thinking. We want to do well with our search."

One observer believes it will be important for OSU to fill the position before the early April observation period for high school juniors.

"They should have somebody in place by early April," said Mark Karam of Ohio Roundball Prep. "The new staff, depending on where they're from, will want to get acquainted with the top Ohio players as quickly as possible."

It seems clear that OSU will need a high-profile coach to rejuvenate interest in the program, especially with the impending need to fill the 19,500-seat Schottenstein Center.

Here are thumbnail sketches of BSB's Hot 15 for the men's basketball coaching vacancy:

• **Steve Alford, Southwest Missouri State** — Alford, a Big Ten MVP at Indiana under Bob Knight, led his team to a 24-8 mark this year but just missed the NCAA Tournament. He is one of the young up-and-comers in the coaching profession.

• **Tommy Amaker, Duke (assistant)** — Amaker could be ready for the big time after spending time down the bench from his former coach, Mike Krzyzewski. Questionable since it would be similar to Ayers' hiring.

• **Rick Barnes, Clemson** — Coached at OSU under Gary Williams. Led Tigers to 54-33 mark in his three years, including 21-9 and an NCAA berth this year.

• **Jim Clemons, Dallas Mavericks** — Got big break last year, moving from Chicago assistant post to head job with Mavs. Possible friction with new GM Don Nelson could give him an early "out" to come to his alma mater.

• **Tim Floyd, Iowa State** — One of the hottest names in the coaching ranks now, including rumors he'll follow Phil Jackson with the Chicago Bulls. Cyclones were a steady 20-8 in



Rick Barnes

his third year in Ames.

• **Eddie Fogler, South Carolina** — Former Vanderbilt coach and North Carolina assistant may have turned in the best coaching job of anyone this season, leading Gamecocks to regular-season SEC title and 24-7 mark.

• **Pete Gillen, Providence** — Knows Ohio from coaching at Xavier. Was a prime candidate when Ayers was hired. Led Friars to 21-11 mark and NCAA berth in his third year.

• **Bob Huggins, Cincinnati** — Reports have him headed to the Cleveland Cavs, but Huggins has said before OSU could be a dream job. Has molded UC into a perennial top-10 power. Hard for some to believe Geiger and Gordon Gee would hire him.

• **Mike Jarvis, George Washington** — Suffered a difficult season this year, but has made GW a tough opponent in the Atlantic 10. One of the more established black head coaches.

• **Bob Knight, Indiana** — The General is one of the game's all-time legends and has the 700 wins to prove it. At 56, would he leave his comfort zone in Bloomington to return and finish up at his alma mater?

• **Rick Majerus, Utah** — From an apprenticeship at Bowling Green to MAC success at Ball State and into the big time at Utah, Majerus is now on everyone's A list. Led his team to a 26-3 mark and No. 2 seed in the NCAA. Could go deep in the tournament, causing OSU to wait awhile.

• **Mike Montgomery, Stanford** — Geiger hired him at Stanford in 1986 and the two have remained in touch. He's in a stable situation, especially after guiding the Cardinal to a 20-7 mark. Could be a top candidate if he's willing to change locales.

• **Skip Prosser, Xavier** — Finishing his third year at this Cincinnati powerhouse. The Musketeers overachieved with a 22-5 mark. He's already proven in his short stay that he can recruit Ohio well.

• **Tubby Smith, Georgia** — Made his name at Tulsa. It's doubtful he'd want to leave Georgia, where he signed a long-term deal. Led his team to a 24-8 mark and a berth in the SEC tournament final.

• **Gary Williams, Maryland** — Coached at OSU for three seasons (1987-89), then left for his alma mater. Worked under Geiger, although their relationship could be termed frosty. Knows better than any of the candidates what's possible at OSU and could be tired of living in shadow of tough ACC programs.

— Steve Helwag and Jeff Rapp

Reviewing The Good, Bad Of Ayers' Tenure

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For someone who will be remembered as a composed sideline coach and calming influence on many of his players, Randy Ayers leaves Ohio State with enough highs and lows to warrant a Dickens novel.

There were a pair of Big Ten titles and the excellence of Jimmy Jackson in the glory days, followed by NCAA probation and player scandal in the turbulence that followed.

Ayers makes excuses for none of it, but his personal strength and well-liked demeanor weren't enough to keep him from being fired by the university March 10.

BSB will take a more in-depth look at Ayers' coaching reign in the next issue, but the following is a capsule view of his eight years in charge of the Buckeyes:

1989-90

RECORD: 17-13, 10-8 (6th Big Ten).

HIGHLIGHTS: Making NCAA Tournament, where the Buckeyes reached the second round before losing to eventual national champ UNLV. Also beat Louisville after spotting the Cardinals a 17-point lead, and dumped Indiana in Ayers' first-ever Big Ten contest, the first of many triumphs over Bob Knight. Jackson won league freshman-of-the-year honors.

LOWLIGHTS: Finished sixth in Big Ten. Lost debut in inauspicious fashion by 18 to DePaul.

1990-91

RECORD: 27-4, 15-3 (T 1st).

HIGHLIGHTS: Won first of two straight Big Ten titles, OSU's first since the 1970-71 season, and was unanimously chosen Big Ten coach of the year and Associated Press national coach of the year. Beat Indiana twice, including epic double-overtime thriller in Columbus. Earned No. 1 seed and made regionals of NCAA Tournament. Jackson named Big Ten player of the year.

LOWLIGHTS: Bucks seemed to peak too early, losing momentum after second Indiana win. Lost in forgettable game with St. John's in NCAA Midwest Regional as the Johnnies shredded OSU's signature full-court press.

1991-92

RECORD: 26-6, 15-3 (1st).

HIGHLIGHTS: Won second straight Big Ten coach-of-the-year honor after leading OSU to consecutive league crowns. OSU gained top seed in Southeast Region and played in workmanlike fashion, rolling over powerful Connecticut and North Carolina. Jackson won All-Big Ten honors and made a few All-American teams. Five recruits signed on, including two-time Ohio player of the year Greg Simpson.

LOWLIGHTS: Lost in regional final to Michigan's "Fab Five," a team OSU had beaten twice during the regular season. Denied trip to Final Four, which would have been the school's first since 1968. Jackson declared for the NBA draft during a tearful press conference and three assistant coaches also left, beginning a disturbing trend of bad fortune.

1992-93

RECORD: 15-13, 8-10 (7th).

HIGHLIGHTS: Won first-ever Big Ten basketball game at Penn State to open league season and followed with a win over Iowa on national television, creating optimism. Simpson emerged a star in the game, likely causing him to win Big Ten freshman of the year over teammate Derek Anderson. Beat Indiana at home in overtime, another feather in Ayers' cap. Recruiting class, placed as high as second nationally, looked like future of program.

LOWLIGHTS: Team never coalesced, sometimes played out of control, and was smacked from the first round of the NIT after underestimating Miami (Ohio). Center Gerald Eaker redshirted after appearing unprepared — mentally and physically — for the college game. Dawn of criticism of Ayers coaching his own players.

1993-94

RECORD: 13-16, 6-12 (T 8th).

HIGHLIGHTS: Fired off four impressive home wins before losing to West Virginia. Hung

with North Carolina at the Dean Dome and Kentucky in Hawaii before succumbing. Beat ranked Boston College squad in consolation game in same Hawaii tourney. Dumped IU at St. John Arena for third time in four years and extended win streak vs. Iowa at home to seven games.

LOWLIGHTS: Turned in first losing season since 1976-77, which dated to Eldon Miller's initial year as coach, and was hit with NCAA probation for one year and the loss of a scholarship after committing 17 NCAA violations. The probe lasted close to two years and cost recruit Damon Flint (who fled to Cincinnati). It also hurt future recruiting and marred the reputation of Ayers and the program. Brushes with the law popped up like dandelions. Simpson, Charles Mason and Eaker all are kicked off the team for such incidents, and Anderson and Nate Wilbourne further hamper the team by transferring. Other notable scars: AD Jim Jones and assistant Mark Anderson resign their posts and Ayers (dislocated/broken ankle) and Derek Anderson (knee) are hobbled by injuries during league season.

1994-95

RECORD: 6-22, 2-16 (10th).

HIGHLIGHTS: Few and far between. Buckeyes at least become more admirable in the player character department as captains Doug Etzler and Ricky Dudley meshed in with non-scholarship players showing true grit — a group including Otis Winston, Don Jantonio, John Lumpkin and Kevin Martin. Etzler rung up George Mason for 37 points and Rick Yutd dropped 33 on Morgan State, both wins. League win over 22nd-ranked Minnesota cost Gophers an NCAA bid.

LOWLIGHTS: A boatload. Newly hired assistant coach Ken Turner succumbed to massive heart attack while jogging just prior to season, setting program back even more. Bucks posted school worsts in losses and winning percentage and tied all-time high for losses in league play. Ayers' record dipped all the way to 10-14. OSU ranked dead-last in the league in rebounding. Robert Shelton is injured after four games and never plays for OSU again.

1995-96

RECORD: 10-17, 3-15 (10th).

HIGHLIGHTS: OSU unveiled its season of hope as nine newcomers debut. Freshmen Damon Stringer and Jermaine Tate showed the most promise, finishing 1-2 on the team in scoring. Posted 7-1 start, including win over Seton Hall on ESPN. Garnered first league win when Yutd canned shot at buzzer vs. Northwestern. Won first Big Ten road game in two years with another win over NU. Yutd and Steve Belter graduate.

LOWLIGHTS: Trounced by Indiana and Penn State to end season, leaving only lowly Northwestern below in Big Ten standings. Continued to field a lineup lacking depth and inside muscle. Player strife also continued as frosh Jami Bosley and Scott Gradney were kicked off team soon after season's end for breaking into cars and theft. Scholarship forward Marlon Minifie transferred after disappointing two-year showing and 6-11 recruit Ken Johnson was ruled academically ineligible.

1996-97

RECORD: 10-17, 5-13 (9th).

HIGHLIGHTS: Team bonded with memorable summer tour of South Africa, which helped OSU through the Bosley-Gradney incident. Stringer and Shaun Stonerock continued their development and were named third-team All-Big Ten. Winston turned in a surprisingly effective offensive senior year. Bucks opened conference play with upset win at Michigan.

LOWLIGHTS: Washout JUCO transfer Ed Jenkins never played because of academic and rehab irresponsibility. The post game was further decimated with season-ending ailments to Tate (cardiomyopathy) and Sean Tucker (knee). A 31-point loss at Northwestern ranked with most embarrassing in program history. Team blundered in West Coast preconference trip and faltered down the stretch of several league games.

Ayers fired after posting eight-year marks of 124-108 overall and 64-80 in the Big Ten.

BSB staffer Mike Wachsman contributed to this story.

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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Darsch Stands Behind Her Record

Women's Coach Fired After OSU Finishes 10th

By MIKE WACHSMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer



Nancy Darsch

Anthony Rothman.

The decision was made by athletic director Andy Geiger, who, in a sweeping gesture, changed the landscape of Ohio State basketball, also axing men's coach Randy Ayers in the process.

Darsch compiled a 12-year record of 234-125, leading Ohio State to seven NCAA Tournament appearances, including a runner-up finish in 1993, losing the title game to Texas Tech. Just one year removed from a tournament berth, Darsch is now removed from her position.

"We didn't have as many wins as we wanted and didn't finish in the top half of the Big Ten," Darsch said. "But I'm proud of the way I conducted myself and the way I represented the university on and off the court."

Ohio State had some rocky times under Darsch, who inherited a pre-eminent program from Tara VanDerveer when she left to take the reins at Stanford. Though there were some downs, the ups were much higher, culminating in a run at the national title in 1993 behind the nation's top recruiting class, including No. 1 player Katie Smith from Logan, Ohio.

Prior to being dismissed, Darsch seemed ready to prepare for next season, when four recruits join the squad. Ohioans Jamie Lewis and Megah McCabe were shaken by the news, as was Michigan native Heather Frank, a 6-4 center from Milan. None of the three wanted to comment and Kylee Bogott, a 6-4 center from Illinois, was unavailable for comment.

Just before her ouster, Darsch commented on the season just passed and seemed to take things in stride.

"Losing is never fun, but, in spite of it all, this team had good relationships and good communication," Darsch said. "It

Darsch's OSU Tenure

Here is a look at the 12-year record of OSU women's basketball coach Nancy Darsch:

Year	All Games			Big Ten Games			Place	Postseason
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.		
1985-86	23	7	.767	16	2	.889	1st	NCAA Round Of 16
1986-87	26	5	.839	17	1	.944	1st (T)	NCAA Round Of 8
1987-88	25	5	.833	16	2	.889	2nd	NCAA Round Of 16
1988-89	24	6	.800	16	2	.889	1st (T)	NCAA Round Of 16
1989-90	18	12	.600	11	7	.611	4th (T)	NCAA Second Round
1990-91	11	17	.392	8	10	.444	5th (T)	
1991-92	15	13	.536	9	9	.500	5th	
1992-93	28	4	.875	16	2	.889	1st (T)	NCAA Runner-Up
1993-94	14	14	.500	7	11	.333	7th (T)	
1994-95	17	13	.567	7	9	.438	7th (T)*	
1995-96	21	13	.618	8	8	.500	6th (T)	NCAA Second Round
1996-97	12	16	.429	3	13	.188	10th	
Totals	234	125	.652	134	76	.638		

*-Finished second in Big Ten tournament.

was pretty much low maintenance. We didn't have a lot of whining, inner conflicts, finger-pointing. It was pretty much a trouble-free team, probably the most I've had in 12 years. That also happened to be the worst Big Ten record we've had in 12 years, so I hope there's no correlation there.

"This team actually turned the corner as far as being able to be on the court every day and be together a lot of the time and not have other issues going on. There were some plays here and there that could have made a big difference in where we were, but that happens with every team."

Reaction From The Team

The degrees to which OSU players knew differed. Sophomore guard Roz Barker first heard the news from a television reporter, while junior center Tiffany Glosson already knew.

Glosson, Shelly Nichols and Talia

Goudy were all present when Geiger broke the news about Darsch, and all remained fairly emotionless about it.

However, Glosson was anything but unemotional when asked about her take on the developments.

"I'm kind of disappointed for it being my last year," Glosson said. "I don't want to have to understand a new coach and learn a different style. I'm comfortable with Nancy's coaching and her style. It's disappointing, but it's a part of life. And life goes on."

But not for Darsch, at least at Ohio State.

When addressing reasons for the dismissal, Geiger was candid.

"There were goals that needed to be met and they weren't," Geiger said. "That was in both programs."

After the Big Ten tournament, where Ohio State upset Penn State and nearly did the same to second-seed Michigan State, Darsch addressed some of the con-

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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Ohio Girls Basketball Final Four Roundup

Here is a look at the Ohio girls high school basketball state playoffs, to be held at St. John Arena March 13-15:

Division I

Pickerington (26-0) vs. Wadsworth (24-1), March 14, 7 p.m.; Rocky River Magnificat (23-3) vs. Mason (23-2), March 14, 9 p.m. — Pickerington shoots for another state crown, led by Florida signee Tamara Stocks and spark plug LaToya Turner. Magnificat is its usual strong self-defensively, holding teams to under 44 points per game.

Division II

Columbus Hartley (22-4) vs. Elida (24-1), March 14, 2 p.m.; Warren Vincent (21-4) vs. Beloit West Branch (25-1), March 14, 4 p.m. — Hartley is coached by former OSU star Toni Roesch and has the dangerous combo of Duke signee Georgia Schweitzer and Mandy White. The Hawks would have to be considered the longshots based on record, but they've been red-hot in

the playoffs.

Division III

Wauseon (25-0) vs. Utica (26-0), March 13, 7 p.m.; Chagrin Falls (25-1) vs. Castown Miami East (23-2), March 13, 9 p.m. — Utica knocked off Oak Hill and OSU signee Jamie Lewis, playing a stifling zone and denying her penetration. Look for more of the same against a big Wauseon team. Miami East knocked off Buckeye signee Megan McCabe's Cincinnati Wyoming squad by a point, using patience to pull off the win.

Division IV

Kalida (24-1) vs. New Riegel (21-4), March 13, 2 p.m.; Berlin Hilland (24-2) vs. Fort Loramie (25-1), March 13, 4 p.m. — Fort Loramie is the real surprise here, knocking off Clark Southeastern in the regional finals, ending a 51-game winning streak by the Trojans.

— Mike Wachsman

cerns and problems this year's team faced.

"We learned things along the way," Darsch said prior to the announcement. "We had so much turnover from a year ago as far as who was going to get it done. We started thinking one thing and by January we thought another and by February we're thinking it's got to be this. We did make changes along the way, but maybe they were too late. There were probably some things on our end, like not recognizing everyone's pluses and minuses. But the players probably could have executed some of our options a little better."

Who's Next?

Geiger intimated a national search would be done, with assistants and head coaches alike being considered. A strong reputation and association with a winning program wouldn't hurt.

"Both jobs would be similar profile," Geiger said of the search. "A track record from an effective program, one that's known success. Either a head coach or assistant coach that's established an outstanding record."

A name frequently mentioned is Detroit Mercy's Nikita Lowry, until last year an OSU assistant and one of the school's all-time best players. She's currently coaching the Titans in the NCAA Tournament, leading them to a 23-6 record going into the tourney in her first season at the helm.

Other possibilities that meet the Geiger criteria include Stanford assistant and former OSU player Amy Tucker, who guided the Cardinal last year while VanDerveer coached the United States Olympic team; and Capital University's

Dixie Jeffers, who has molded the Crusaders into the dominant Division III program in women's basketball.

A dark horse choice would be Pickerington High School's Dave Butcher, one of the more respected prep coaches in the country and OSU assistant coach Nicole Sanchez's high school coach. Butcher has reportedly longed for the Ohio State job for years.

Darsch's Resume

Darsch came to Columbus after spending seven years at Tennessee, where she helped Pat Summitt build the program into national prominence.

She's also had a litany of international experience, serving as Olympic assistant to VanDerveer in Atlanta in 1996 and to Summitt in 1984 in Los Angeles.

Darsch also helped mine gold at the 1993 World Championship Qualifying Tournament in Brazil and assisted the World University Games team in 1991.

There's no word on Darsch's future plans, though there was talk — which she denied — of a possible stint in the WNBA, the fledgling women's basketball league that begins operation this summer.

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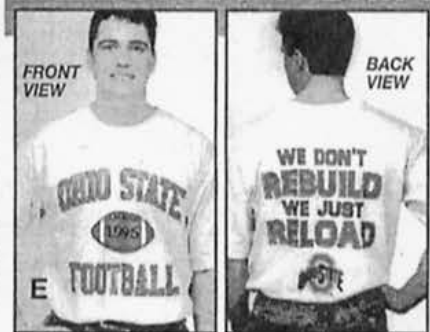
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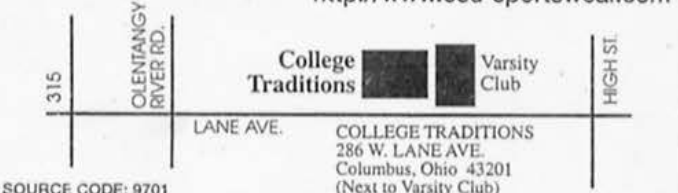
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THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Opinions Abound On Coaching Dilemma

By the time you read this, the fate of OSU basketball coach Randy Ayers will most likely be known. If I were a betting man, I would have to assume he will be out in one way or another. If the powers that make that decision were set to keep him, they probably would have said something to end all of the speculation that has been swirling around the program, as well as the women's basketball program, for weeks now.

While I don't know the fate of Ayers or Nancy Darsch as I write, I have heard much of the talk on the streets and on the radio talk shows and wanted to comment on some of the things I've heard.

- "OSU won't fire Ayers because they don't want to buy out his contract."

Talk about being penny-wise and pound foolish. Ohio State is losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost revenue thanks to all those empty seats at St. John Arena. And I don't think a lot of seat licenses for the Schottenstein Center have been sold lately.

A change in coaches would probably boost attendance and spur fund raising for the new arena. Buying out Ayers' contract would be small change in comparison.

- "Ayers is a lousy coach. The only reason he won those Big Ten titles is because he had Gary Williams' players."

If all it took was good players, Michigan's Steve Fisher would have enough rings to open a jewelry store. Ayers did a solid job coaching those early teams. That's why he was named national coach of the year and that's why all the people who want him out now were raving about him five or six years ago.

He *did* have better players. In fact, it is the view from this corner that recruiting problems have been Ayers' downfall, not an inability to coach. I doubt Gene Keady, John Wooden, Bob Knight or Dean Smith could make a Big Ten champion out of the current group of Buckeyes.

- "Williams is interested in coming back to Ohio State."

I've heard this from a lot of people. I know he has connections to Andy Geiger from Geiger's Maryland days, but why would Ohio State want him?

I've never understood the infatuation some Buckeye fans have with Williams. He had a lower winning percentage at OSU than Eldon Miller, was 0-6 against Indiana, and was unable to reverse a total collapse by the Buckeyes in 1988-89 when Jay Burson went down with a serious injury.

It may have been "with Williams' players," but Ayers has done something that Williams has never done — win two major conference championships. Williams couldn't win a crown in the Big East, in the Big Ten, nor has he been able to do it in the ACC at Maryland.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

He's had eight years to crack the ACC elite with the Terps and hasn't done it. What makes anyone think that a guy with two sixth-place finishes and an eighth-place finish in his first tenure in the Big Ten would do any better if given another try?

- The guy is more flash than substance.
- "If you fire Ayers, how do you know you will get somebody better?"

The reality of the situation is that there are plenty of coaches out there who, if given the opportunities at Ohio State, could at least do as well as Ayers is in recruiting and wins and losses. Eldon Miller could do as well.

Sometimes in sports you just have to make a change. Change is almost always followed by increased interest and excitement, which would translate into better recruiting and attendance, which is what Ohio State needs right now.

The Buckeyes haven't finished higher than eighth place in the Big Ten in the past four seasons. Things can't get much worse.

- "There's a double standard. If John Cooper had a record like this, he would have been long gone."

I think this one works in Randy's favor. Ohio State showed a tremendous amount of patience with Cooper.

When you weight football and its added tradition and opportunities at OSU vs. basketball, factor Ayers' success vs. Indiana against Coop's record vs. Michigan, consider Ayers' early championships vs. Cooper's early troubles, you see that Ayers hasn't been given that much more of a break than Cooper.

And I'm sure that the OSU administration feels that its patience with Cooper has paid off. Continued patience with Ayers might also ultimately pay dividends.

Where I would give Cooper a big edge over Ayers would be in his players' limited number of off-the-field problems, though there certainly have been some incidents. If Cooper's players had been in the news frequently when his early teams were struggling, I suspect he would have been gone.

- "OSU won't fire Ayers because they don't want to offend the black community."

This one bugs me. Am I the only one who finds this insulting to the black community? The implication would seem to be that black people don't want a winner at Ohio State or are more willing to accept mediocrity than white people. I wonder if the percentage of blacks who think Randy should be gone isn't comparable to that of whites.

Maybe some of our black readers can write and tell us what they think.

As far as my opinion on Ayers, I've always liked him and have always enjoyed working with him. He is a true gentleman who has represented Ohio State with a tremendous amount of dignity and class, even when his players didn't always do the same.

Unfortunately, situations sometimes get out of hand to such a degree that it becomes more and more difficult to improve them. Just the fact that I am writing this column, that Randy's future is on the minds of every journalist and fan who follows Ohio State basketball, is part of the problem. As long as his fate continues to be debated, it will be difficult to bring in the added help needed to take Ohio State to the next level, which at this point is only the middle of the Big Ten.

This might not be fair, but it's reality. Andy Geiger probably knows that. Randy probably realizes that.

If somehow Ayers survives this week, I would look forward to working with him in the future and I'm confident that the Buckeyes would continue to improve.

But if the powers that be decide to terminate him, it would be very difficult for me to argue with that decision.

Anticipating Opening Day

On a much more positive note, I am

excitedly looking forward to opening day for the OSU baseball team at the new Bill Davis Stadium.

Opening day is always special in baseball, but with the dream of OSU's new stadium now a reality, it is that much more exciting. I was one of those doubting Thomases who didn't think Ohio State could pull the stadium project off — at least not on time. The financing and completion of this beautiful structure bodes well for the athletic department's many other projects.

If you were to ask me who the most indispensable coach on the OSU staff was, I would without question say Bob Todd. The erection of the Bill Davis Stadium is a key step in keeping Todd at OSU, rather than risking losing him to some school in the warmer South or West.

Speaking of which, wouldn't it be great if Mother Nature cooperated and made this special opening day really special?

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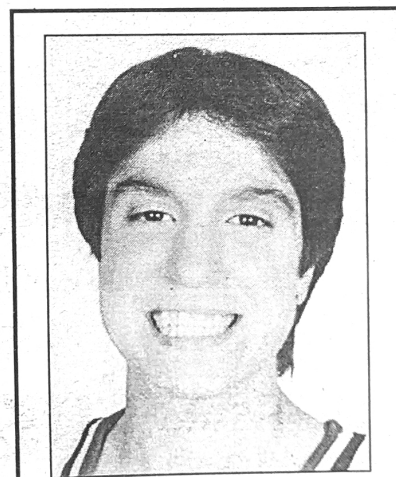
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