

Girls protest firing of Springfield coach

By Josephine Wollington
The Register-Guard

SPRINGFIELD (AP) — Most of Springfield High School girls basketball team members took a break from their final exams Thursday afternoon to protest the school district’s decision to fire their coach, Bill Wagner.

The girls — joined by Wagner’s former standout player Mercedes Russell, who now plays at the University of Tennessee — circled the district’s administration building in downtown Springfield, chanting: “Bring Bill back.”

“We want our coach back,” 16-year-old player Sydney Baker said. “We are hurt.”

Players spoke about how Wagner served as more than just a basketball coach to many of them, also teaching them how to work hard and overcome adversity.

“He taught us lessons in life,” 17-year-old player Shelby Blackwell said.

The girls carried blue balloons and signs. Some cheerleaders and students who knew Wagner in his role of dean of students at the high school joined the team in support.

Interim Superintendent Susan Rieke-Smith said in a statement Wednesday that Wagner’s immediate firing “was necessary for the good of students and the girls basketball program.”

The move followed a Springfield School Board

decision last month that found that Wagner’s behavior toward a player did not meet “expectations of conduct” expected of coaches, but did not constitute harassment.

Since then, however, the district has evaluated additional complaints against Wagner.

“Based on all the evidence we have gathered to date, it was clear that we needed to make a change,” Rieke-Smith said. “Change is hard to take sometimes, but this is in the best interest of our student-athletes.”

Wagner will remain the high school’s dean of students.

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PHOTO BY GARY MILLER

Past queens were a feature of the Sisters Rodeo Parade marking 75 years in Sisters.

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ART IN THE PARK: Event is first of several craft fairs

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up your fly with the hatching insects,” Avery said.

There was something for everyone to enjoy, including the little folks; with face painting to a bounce house, it was non-stop fun all day.

And the aroma of summer cooking was in the air with Bad Boy Barbecue ready to dish out a hearty meal for visitors.

This was event-organizer Richard Esterman’s 15th year with Art in the Park, and he was busier than usual with more vendors on hand.

“I sold out all 95 spaces this year, and it’s been really busy with a big crowd going through,” Esterman said. “First of 13 events and it was a great success. I take pride in creating an atmosphere where artists earn a living on what they love to do.”

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