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Players suspended for scheme

LEXINGTON, Ky. (AP) — After learning that three of his players were involved in a free-throw swapping scheme against Vanderbilt, Kentucky coach Rick Pitino hit each of them with one-game suspensions.

Guard Travis Ford, center Gimel Martinez and forward Jared Prickett will not make the trip with the No. 7 Wildcats to play Tennessee on Wednesday night, Pitino said Tuesday.

"This type of behavior cannot be tolerated from a Kentucky ballplayer," Pitino said. "It's important that all the kids that look up to Kentucky players as role models understand that they made a mistake, a spontaneous mistake."

"These three men are outstanding young men who work very, very hard, but they made a mistake."

Ford is averaging 12 points and 6.3 assists and Prickett averages 8.6 points and 7.1 rebounds, and both are starters. Martinez averages 7.1 points and 2.8 rebounds.

The players were not available for comment.

Ford had acknowledged that players who were fouled in the Vanderbilt game allowed another player with a better free-throw percentage to go to the line in their place, apparently when officials were confused about who should shoot. Kentucky won 77-69.

Pitino said he called Vanderbilt coach Jan van Breda Kolff and apologized for the incident, and that both agreed the free throws didn't influence the result of the game.

On one occasion late in the game Martinez (80.5 percent) shot free throws even though Prickett (54.9 percent) had been fouled.

"I don't think it was a malicious act," Pitino said. "I don't think they thought about the consequences of it at all."

Pitino said he was told of the switch at a team meeting Monday night.

"He was really upset," forward Jeff Brassow said. "It was probably the most upset that I've seen him."

Martinez' free shots came with 2:44 to go in the game. He made

one of two to give Kentucky a 63-55 lead.

Ford confirmed to a television reporter after the Vanderbilt game that he set up another swap when he motioned Walter McCarty (51.2 percent) to shoot for Andre Riddick (31.8 percent). McCarty sank both to give Kentucky at 59-47 lead with 6:26 left in the game.

"That didn't take too many brains to figure that one out," Ford said in the post-game television interview. "I saw the ref run to the (scorer's) table real quick. He had no idea who was supposed to shoot the free throw. I turned to Walter and said, 'You get on the line.' And it worked out fine."

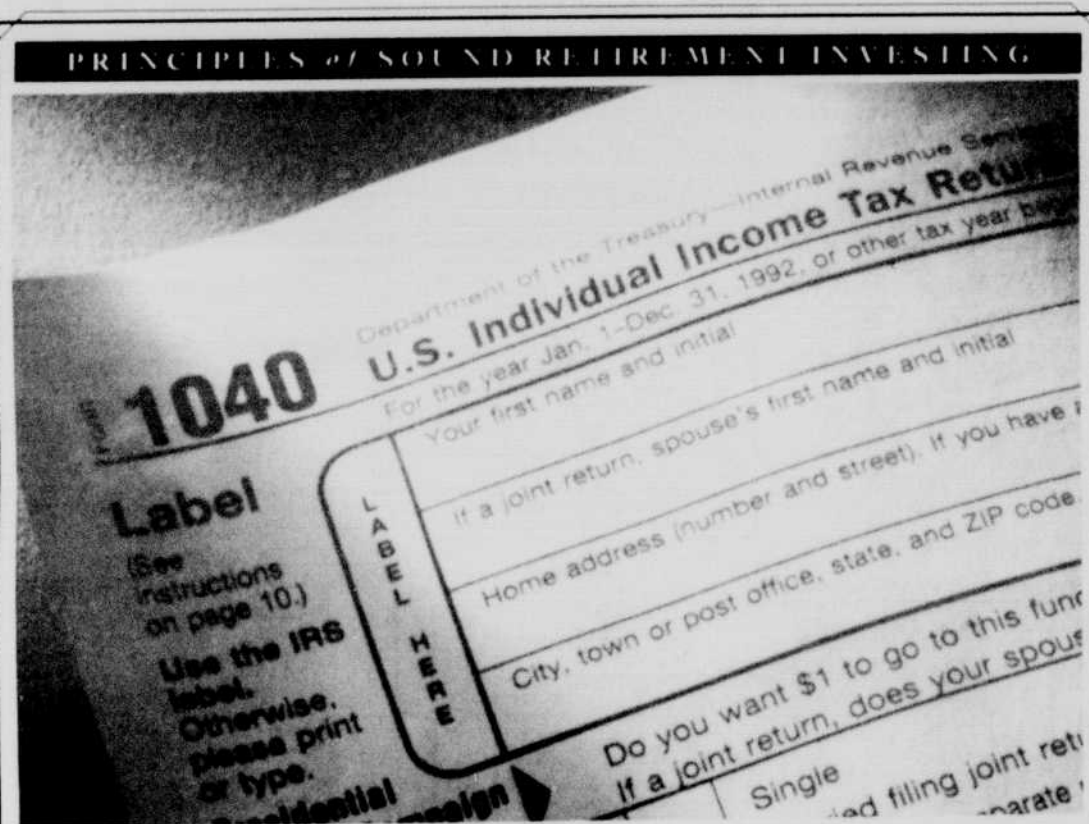
Pitino was upset that the players made light of the swaps.

"I think it was a grave mistake on our players' part, not only to do it but to joke about it afterward on television," he said. "I don't think it was a joking matter. I think it was dishonest."

Neither McCarty nor Riddick received sanctions.

"(McCarty) told me he didn't know whether he was fouled on the play," Pitino said. "He did not know he was not shooting. He thought he was the shooter because he was told that (by Ford). Riddick didn't know it either."

The Southeastern Conference will not take any action, said associate commissioner Mark Womack.



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