

Buckeyes fire men's, women's basketball coaches

■ **COACHES:** Ohio State's men's team went 10-17 while the women went 12-16 on the year

The Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio State made sweeping changes in its men's and women's basketball programs Monday, firing coaches Randy Ayers and Nancy Darsch.

Ayers and Darsch, both having enjoyed great success with their teams in the early 1990s, had two years left on their contracts.

The men's team has gone 10-17 the last two seasons, including 5-13 in the Big Ten this past season. The women finished 12-16 and were 3-13 in conference play.

"These are terribly difficult decisions but ones that I felt had to be made in the best interest of the university," athletic director Andy Geiger said after dismissing both coaches in separate meetings.

"I have the utmost respect and admiration for both coach Ayers and coach Darsch and their years of loyal service to Ohio State. However, it is necessary at times to make a change, and I think we have reached that point with both programs."

Adding to the pressure on both coaches was the construction of a new \$90 million arena set to open in the fall of 1998. Sales of seat licenses have lagged as both teams have suffered.

Ayers met with his team Monday afternoon following his dismissal. It was not yet clear if Darsch spoke with her players.

Ayers was 124-108 in eight years as coach. The firing came a day after the Buckeyes finished their season with an 86-81 loss in overtime to Michigan on Sunday.

Darsch is the winningest women's basketball coach at Ohio State, going 234-125 in 12 seasons. Seven times she took the Buckeyes to the NCAA tournament.

Under Ayers, the Buckeyes won Big Ten titles in 1990-91 and 1991-92 and both times were seeded No. 1 in the NCAA tournament. Ayers was The Associated Press national coach of the year in 1991.

Darsch guided the Buckeyes to the national championship game in 1993, an 84-82 loss to Texas Tech that concluded a 28-4 season.

But for both programs there have been few high points since.

The men's team has had four straight losing seasons, something that had never happened in the 98 years the school has had a college team.

Over those same four years, the women's team never finished higher than sixth place in the 11-team Big Ten.

In 1992, Ohio State's men made it to the Southeast Regional final, losing to Michigan. Since then, almost all the news coming from the program has been bad.

The next year, the Buckeyes — having lost star guard Jim Jackson to the NBA a year early — went 15-13 and were beaten at home in the first round of the National Invitation Tournament.

In January of 1993, the NCAA began investigating the recruitment of Cincinnati player Damon Flint. Ohio State admitted to 17 violations. Flint ended up at Cincinnati, whose rise in national stature mirrored Ohio State's fall.

During the four losing seasons, there were continued problems off the court. Three players were charged with driving under the influence in the span of five weeks in 1994. Various assaults, misdemeanors and complaints led to the dismissal of prized recruits Greg Simpson, Gerald Eaker, Charles "Killer" Macon, Jami Bosley and Scott Gradney. Two others, Derek Anderson and Nate Wilbourne, transferred to escape the commotion.

Wake's Duncan heads list of All-Americans

■ **NCAA:** Stanford's Brevin Knight was named to the second team

The Associated Press

Tim Duncan of Wake Forest was a unanimous selection Monday for the All-America team and became the first repeat choice since Shaquille O'Neal of LSU five years ago.

Duncan, the 6-foot-10 senior center from Wake Forest, was named on all 68 ballots by the national media panel and received 340 points, four more than Keith Van Horn of Utah, who missed being a unanimous choice by two votes.

The other first-team selections were Ron Mercer of Kentucky, Raef LaFrentz of Kansas and Danny Fortson of Cincinnati.

Van Horn and Fortson were both second-team selections last season.

Duncan was the only one of four underclassmen on last year's All-America team who opted to return to school. Marcus Camby of Massachusetts, Allen Iverson of Georgetown and Ray Allen of Connecticut all declared for the NBA draft. The other first-team member was senior Kerry Kittles of Villanova.

Duncan led the Demon Deacons to a 23-6 record and a Top

10 ranking all season while averaging 20.9 points and 14.3 rebounds. He shot 61 percent from the field and blocked 94 shots in earning his second straight Atlantic Coast Conference player of the year selection. Duncan, a third-team choice as a sophomore, needs 10 rebounds for a career total of 1,538 — making him college basketball's most prolific rebounder over the last 25 years.

"I think we can all agree, without any kind of dissent, that he is certainly one of the best to ever play in this league, not only at his position, but at any position," Wake Forest coach Dave Odom said. "I think he has done it with great style and great emotion and great compassion."

The last unanimous selection was Purdue's Glenn Robinson in 1994.

The 6-10 Van Horn turned from star player to TV star last week with his consecutive buzzer-beaters in the Western Athletic Conference tournament. He averaged 22.2 points and 9.4 rebounds for the Utes, who enter the NCAA tournament with a 26-3 record and a No. 2 ranking.

"I'm surely honored," the three-time WAC player of the year said Monday. "I think it really reflects the effort and success of the team as well as myself. If it wasn't for my teammates and the

people who support me, I wouldn't be talking about this."

Mercer, a 6-7 sophomore who has already announced he will turn pro after the season, was the third-leading vote-getter with 289. The star of last season's national title game victory averaged 18.4 points and 5.2 rebounds for the Wildcats (30-4). He was forced to assume a much larger role in the offense when Derek Anderson went down for the year with a knee injury midway through the season.

"He's as good a basketball player as there is," Kentucky coach Rick Pitino said Monday. "We've been lucky to have him."

Like Mercer, LaFrentz, a 6-11 junior, really stepped up when a teammate went down. He scored at least 20 points in each of the nine games that center Scot Pollard missed with a stress fracture in his foot, tripling the longest string of a player to score at least that many points a game under coach Roy Williams.

LaFrentz, who received 266 points, averaged 18.7 points and 9.1 rebounds and shot 59 percent from the field as the Jayhawks (32-1) held the No. 1 spot for 15 straight weeks.

"I'm fortunate because I am surrounded by an extremely talented, extremely unselfish group of guys who are genuinely excit-

ed for me to be named an All-American," LaFrentz said. "As thrilled as I am, I have to admit I would trade it in for an opportunity to cut down some nets later on."

The 6-7 Fortson is one of the strongest players in college basketball, and he was the Conference USA player of the year the last two seasons. He averaged 21.4 points and 9.2 rebounds for the Bearcats (25-7), who were the preseason No. 1 choice.

"Danny has worked so hard to make himself one of the best players in the country," Cincinnati coach Bob Huggins said Monday. "Everyone notices his size and physical strength, but I don't think there's a player who plays with as much heart."

Senior point guards Brevin Knight of Stanford and Jacques Vaughn of Kansas were on the second team along with sophomore forward Antawn Jamison of North Carolina, sophomore guard Chauncey Billups of Colorado and senior guard Bobby Jackson of Minnesota.

Seniors Shea Seals of Tulsa, Ed Gray of California, Keith Booth of Maryland and Andre Woolridge of Iowa were joined on the third team by Colgate's junior center Adonal Foyle, who said he will apply for the NBA draft.

Army football to join Conference USA in 1998

■ **COLLEGE:** Army can withdraw from the conference in case of a national emergency

The Associated Press

WEST POINT, N.Y. — After more than a century as an independent, Army broke with tradition on Monday and joined Conference USA.

Army will begin conference play in 1998, giving the league eight teams. Cincinnati, Houston, Louisville, Memphis, Southern Mississippi and Tulane are the current members, with East Carolina to begin play this fall.

"This is an exciting day," Army coach Bob Sutton said. "From a football aspect, we recognize that it will be a great challenge for us. We've played East Carolina before, we've played Louisville before, so we know the competition that we will be involved in. The challenge for us is to be able to do that week after

week."

There is one caveat: Army can withdraw from the conference in case of a national emergency.

The change, effective immediately, comes after more than a year of discussions. But the final decision came easily.

"We chatted on Friday, and it took about 30 seconds to get the vote," said Dr. Joseph Steger, chairman of the board of directors for Conference USA. "You must understand that to get presidents to unanimously do anything is a miracle. All of the colleges and universities are looking forward to this. I think it's natural."

The move leaves Navy as the only service academy without a conference affiliation — Air Force is in the Western Athletic Conference. And it comes after one of Army's most memorable seasons. The Black Knights were 10-2 last year, losing only to Syracuse during the regular season and Auburn in the Independence Bowl.

It was the first postseason appearance for the Black Knights since they suffered a 29-28 loss to Alabama in the 1988 Sun Bowl. The Army brass said it hoped joining Conference USA would boost the university's exposure and its chances of playing in the postseason more often. The conference champion gets an automatic berth in the Liberty Bowl, and Conference USA commissioner Michael Slive said discussions were under way for the conference to participate in other bowls.

Lt. Gen. Daniel Christman, superintendent of the academy, said he realized the move is significant for West Point and many of its alumni. But he said that joining Conference USA would create enormous opportunity.

"It will allow us to take the Army team to the heartland of America's Army," Christman said. "We will play all of our games away from Michie Stadium within a half-day's drive of many of the major installations of

this great Army. Soldiers will have the chance to cheer, chant and maybe even chest-pump for the great old Army team."

Christman said the university sought feedback from its graduates and got plenty of it, most in favor of the move.

The end of the 107-year-old tradition of independence will be significant. Army will no longer be able to pad its schedule with foes from Division I-AA. Just about every opponent will be from the top echelon of college football.

"Each game will mean something," Christman said. "We fully expect the quality and winning spirit of West Point and America's Army will be brought into more and more American homes."

Army athletic director Al Vanderbush said there would be some schedule changes. He said the 1998 Michigan game is the only one that has been shelved so far.

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