

Celtics lure Pitino with \$70 million

■ **COACH:** Contract is the richest for any coach in the history of sports

The Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Rick Pitino is leaving one of college basketball's most successful programs to coach the NBA's most storied team — the Boston Celtics. His reported \$70 million, 10-year contract is believed to be the richest for any coach in any sport.

Pitino, who had called the Celtics' job "the greatest opportunity ever afforded a coach," announced his decision at a news conference today at the school he led to the Final Four three times in his eight years there, winning the national title in 1996.

He now returns to the NBA and the city where he began his head coaching career in 1978, at Boston University.

Pitino, who coached the New York Knicks from 1987-89, faces the daunting task of rebuilding the Celtics, who have more wins and titles than any team in NBA history but finished last year with a franchise-worst 15-67 record.

"I'd like to take this glorious tradition and see if we can bring it back," said Pitino, who had been flirting with a return to the NBA for several years.

He accepted a reported 10-year

contract worth about \$70 million, exceeding the \$25 million, five-year contract the Philadelphia 76ers gave Larry Brown this week.

Pitino, however, would not discuss details of his contract, which



he said he did not sign until 10 minutes before the news conference. He said he would hold another news

conference in Boston on Thursday.

"You don't at this stage in my life leave for money," Pitino said, adding that he didn't make a final decision until Monday night.

The Celtics, who refused to comment today, seemed ready to welcome Pitino with a front-office shakeup, which might persuade special assistant Larry Bird to remain with the team.

Pitino said last month he would be interested in the Celtics only if Bird stayed, an uncertain prospect since the Indiana Pacers are willing to give Bird a lucrative contract to coach his home-state team.

Yet personnel moves could satisfy some of Bird's public complaints about the management setup. The Boston Herald reported

that team owner Paul Gaston was still trying to keep Bird.

The Celtics vacancy developed when M.L. Carr quit last Wednesday after two nonplayoff seasons in which the team was 48-116.

Carr, who stayed as director of basketball operations, began notifying his assistant coaches they should be prepared to move on, the Boston Globe reported Monday.

Director of travel and team services Wayne Lebeaux and director of publications and information Dave Zuccaro were fired, both Boston papers reported. Two marketing employees also reportedly lost their jobs, and general manager Jan Volk also might leave after 26 years with the Celtics, the Globe said.

It also said Pitino is expected to bring Kentucky associate coach Jim O'Brien with him to Boston.

Pitino called himself a "small contributor" in building "this very strong house" at Kentucky, which has more wins than any team in college basketball. The Wildcats were one victory short of repeating as national champs this year, losing to Arizona in the NCAA title game in Indianapolis.

Pitino spent his first five years as head coach at Boston University, from 1978-83, and coached Providence from 1985-1987.

UCLA on probation, softball title taken away

■ **SANCTIONS:** Bruins penalized for listing softball players as multi-sport athletes

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — UCLA was ordered to forfeit its 1995 women's softball NCAA championship Tuesday and was barred from this year's national softball tournament.

The NCAA committee of infractions also required that a senior associate director of athletics be removed — which UCLA carried out last year. And the NCAA limited UCLA's scholarships for softball for the next two years.

The sanctions mean that the entire athletic program will be put on probation for three years. The probation only affects softball, but all other sports, including basketball and football, will be closely monitored during that period.

The violations involved listing some softball players as multisport athletes receiving soccer scholarships, although they did not compete in soccer. The senior associate director of

athletics was involved in arranging a soccer tryout for one of those softball players, but not until after the soccer season was over, the NCAA reported.

Further violations by the UCLA athletic program will be considered "repeat violations" if they occur in a five-year period following the Feb. 1, 1997, infractions committee hearing on the softball matter.

In 1995, the softball team, led by Tanya Harding, won the NCAA title as Harding had a 17-1 record and pitched all four victories by the Bruins in the national tournament. Harding did not become a student until the 1995 season and did not complete that semester's work — returning home to join Australia's Olympic softball team.

Harding and two other softball players whose scholarships were above the permissible limit were not identified in the NCAA announcement.

The committee chairman, law professor David Swank of the University of Oklahoma, said that UCLA removed the senior associate director from the athletic department in 1996.

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