

Players

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coach Runge tremendous credit," Williams said. "She put this program in a spot where it's one of the top programs in the country, and you can't take that from her. Granted, she had her ways, but her ways got her program to where it was."



WILLIAMS

But it was also "her ways" that alienated many of her athletes who weren't satisfied with the way the program was run.

Unaka, for one, cited a severe lack of communication between coach and players:

"She didn't really develop relationships with her players off the court, and I think a lot of us really wanted that in a coach," Unaka said. "We just want someone who cared about us as people as well as basketball players."

Added Williams: "Coach Runge is a very strong-willed woman. She

has her ways and she's set in them. When she says something, she wants it done that way."

As of now, one of Oregon's three assistant coaches will be named interim head coach until a new coach is found. Moos, who said that he cares for Runge and her future, said the search for a replacement is underway.

"The players have been through a lot," Moos said. "I assured them that the process to secure a new coach is a priority to me."

The recurring message in each of the players' voices Monday was that this was a fresh start for the team. Oregon guard Jamie Craighead mentioned how "excited" she was.

"I want to wish coach Runge the best of luck wherever she goes, but I think this will be very good for our program," Craighead said. "I'm glad that it's over. It's been draining."

Runge, who wished the team well in a released statement, has not addressed her former team yet.

"If she wants to talk to us, that's fine," Unaka said. "But I think we're just looking toward the future."



On the court, the Oregon women's basketball players appeared happy with their wins. Off the court, though, there were problems. Emerald

Hockaday

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next season. No, no and no again. But instead of mediation, Moos used investigation. Instead of discussing options, the Athletic Department squeezed Jody Runge 'til she popped.

Lisa Gardner, who graduated from Oregon in 1996, is capital grants administrator for the Lane Transit District and an eight-year season-ticket holder for the women's basketball team. Gardner said the whole thing smelled of a "witch hunt."

"Coach Runge may well have had deficiencies in her coaching or communication style, but those deficiencies could have been addressed in private," Gardner said. "I haven't decided if I will renew my season tickets next year. Coach Runge brought a lot of the appeal and marketability to the program for me."

Can't we all agree on one thing? Can we please agree that we're glad it's over?

She's gone. The hiring process for a new coach will begin soon, and an interim coach will take over her position temporarily. People may even start to forget about the controversial Runge.

Of course, it's not really over. Newspapers, television stations, even the near-perfect Oregon Daily Emerald will continue to debate Runge's departure until Ernie Kent starts yelling at his players (in other words, forever).

But, like the Portland Trail Blazers' season, the ugliness has finally been put to rest.

In the process, a slice of life has been cut out of the Oregon athletic program. Some salsa was scraped off the burrito that is the women's basketball team.

Jody Runge can now enter the real world.

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