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Neuheisel cries on stand in personal testimony Monday

Former Washington football coach Rick Neuheisel is suing UW and NCAA for wrongful termination

BY TIM KORTE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KENT, Wash. — Rick Neuheisel cried on the stand Monday while discussing his being fired as Washington's football coach, being separated from his former players, and the impact on his family and career.

"It was devastating to my family. It was devastating to me professionally," he told jurors in the King County Superior Court trial of his wrongful termination lawsuit.

"Having people stare at you like you're a zoo animal," he said. "I was used to being seen in public, but this was foreign. ... I was being likened to Pete Rose, this guy who was gambling. It never, ever seemed accurate or fair."

He admitted that he wasn't fully forthcoming when initially questioned by NCAA investigators about gambling on NCAA basketball, explaining that he feared implicating himself or harming his friends.

Neuheisel is suing the NCAA and the University of Washington. He finished his second full day of testimony and is expected to return to the witness stand today. He claims Washington

administrators fired him in June 2003 under pressure from the NCAA.

Neuheisel broke down when he recalled the meeting in which his boss, Washington athletic director Barbara Hedges, told him he could either resign or be fired. Hedges, who retired in January 2004, testified earlier in the trial that the main reason for the firing was Neuheisel's dishonesty.

He also cried when he described the impact on his family and while recalling the realization that he would no longer be coaching his players.

University of Washington officials say Neuheisel lied when he denied interviewing for a head coaching vacancy with the San Francisco 49ers in February 2003 and then lied to NCAA investigators about taking part in off-campus basketball pools in 2002 and 2003. He told NCAA investigators the truth later the same day.

Neuheisel claims he lied about interviewing for the 49ers because he was honoring that team's demand for confidentiality.

Later on Monday, University of Washington lawyer Lou Peterson questioned Neuheisel about when he learned of a key piece of

evidence: an e-mail by a former Washington compliance officer that mistakenly authorized gambling in the off-campus NCAA basketball pools.

Neuheisel agreed that he never mentioned the memo during his June 4, 2003 interview with NCAA investigators nor during meetings with Washington administrators as they discussed his fate.

"I didn't recall an e-mail," Neuheisel said. "I just knew in my head it was OK."

Not until Washington sports information director Jim Daves gave him a copy of the e-mail late on June 5 did Neuheisel have a connection, he said, between what he knew he had read somewhere and a written copy to back it up.

"I was holding it like it was the Holy Grail," he said.

Neuheisel also complained about "many, many, many" comments by NCAA officials in newspaper articles during the week after his NCAA interview when Washington officials were preparing to fire him.

"It gave me no chance," he said.

And he described his difficulties finding work until being hired as a quarterbacks coach for the NFL's Baltimore Ravens last month. He will earn \$250,000 per year, a huge cut from the \$1.6 million he earned in his final year as Washington's head coach.



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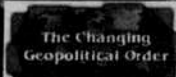
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Track: Harmon ranked No. 11 in nation

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For the women, senior Laura Harmon continued her quest to run at the national meet in Fayetteville, Ark. Harmon, an All-American this past season in cross country, finished seventh with a 16:18.56 time.

"It would have been nice to get an automatic time," said the Vancouver, Wash., native. "But the goal was to break 16:20, so I accomplished that."

Harmon, whose run was only nine seconds off the automatic mark of 16:10.00, is now ranked eleventh nationally with her personal-best run this past weekend.

In what has become routine this indoor season, sophomore Tommy Skipper won the pole vault competition

with a clearance of 18 feet and 6 3/4 inches. Skipper's opening jump of 18-1 bested the NCAA automatic mark of 18-0 1/2. The Sandy native missed three tries at 19-1, which would have been a conference record height. Skipper finished last year's indoor season as the NCAA runner-up and then won the outdoor championship the following spring.

Abildtrup makes season debut and finishes second

In Idaho at the Holiday Inn Invitational, senior Sofie Abildtrup ran her first 400 meter of the season, finishing second (55.37) to LSU's Deonna Lawrence (54.22). Abildtrup finished less than a

second behind the NCAA provisional mark of 54.40.

Also placing high for the Ducks was junior Brittany Hinchcliffe, who placed second in the weight throw with a toss of 54 feet and 7 1/2 inches.

For the men, senior Leonidas Watson improved his standing on the provisional long jump list with a jump of 25 feet and 3 1/2 inches. The leap, good for second place behind national leader Fabrice Lapiere, is currently the indoor season's fourth-longest jump in the country.

Oregon indoor teams will see sparse action this weekend in preparation for the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation Championships in Seattle on Feb. 25 and 26.

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