

Saunders: 'I'm The Coach Until I Say I'm Not'

BY JON KRAWCZYNSKI
AP Basketball Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — As president, coach and part owner of the Minnesota Timberwolves, Flip Saunders holds as much influence with the franchise as any coach in the NBA.

So it will largely be up to Saunders to decide how long he wants to hold the dual roles of coach and executive that so few of his brethren do in the league.

At his end-of-the-season news conference on Monday following an NBA-worst 16-66 season that was filled with injuries, disappointment and the development of a new young star, Saunders gave no indication that he will be relinquishing the coaching duties this summer.

"I'll coach until I feel we need to move in a different direction," Saunders said.

Last summer Saunders had conversations with several coaches, including Michigan State's Tom Izzo and Dave Joergel of the Memphis Grizzlies before selecting himself to succeed the retired Rick Adelman.

The Wolves entered the season with hopes of emerging as a surprise team in the rugged Western Conference, much the way the Phoenix Suns did the previous year. But injuries in November to Ricky Rubio, Nikola Pekovic and Kevin Martin quickly short-circuited that plan.

The Wolves shifted course, trading veterans Corey Brewer and Mo Williams to open up more playing time for youngsters Andrew Wiggins, Zach LaVine, Shabazz Muhammad and Gorgui Dieng.

The short-handed team quickly sunk to the bottom of the league, but Wiggins established himself as the heavy favorite for rookie of the

year while LaVine, Muhammad and Dieng all made big strides as the season went on.

Saunders said the development shown by the young players working with his staff, including assistants Sam Mitchell, Sidney Lowe, Ryan Saunders, David Adelman and Mike Penberthy, convinced him that "it was the right thing to do."

Saunders did not completely rule out hiring a different coach this summer. But as the season wound down he did say that he would like the opportunity to coach a fully healthy team and establish some continuity with an impressionable roster.

"You have to keep on developing those players," Saunders said. "When they get to their third and fourth years, usually that's kind of what they are and they can make huge jumps these first and second years."

The Timberwolves will have the best odds at the No. 1 overall draft pick in the lottery on May 19. They can fall no further than No. 4, leaving Saunders with confidence that they will add another impact player to team with Wiggins, the No. 1 overall pick last year who came to Minnesota in the trade that sent Kevin Love to Cleveland.

He said the two biggest priorities this summer will be to improve defensively and 3-point shooting. The Wolves were last in the league in points allowed, opponent field goal percentage, 3-pointers made and 3s attempted.

"The difficult thing you have right now with us is we're a combination," Saunders said. "We need defensive players, and we need 3-point shooting. Many times, those guys don't go hand-in-hand."

Rubio and Pekovic both had surgeries near the end of the season.

Rubio's ankle will keep him from playing for the Spanish national team this summer, but won't stop him from being ready for training camp.

Pekovic's foot is much more problematic. He had surgery on the Achilles tendon to try to ease some of the chronic pain that has limited him the past two seasons, but his recovery is expected to take six months or more.

Saunders reiterated that he believes Kevin Garnett will play next season, and the Wolves can begin negotiating a new contract with the free agent-to-be on July 1.

"I don't want to get to the playoffs; I want to build a team that can win in the playoffs," Saunders said. "That's what we're trying to do. If you're going to try to do quick fixes just to get there, you might get there, but you might be back out of it soon. That's not what our

Huskers' Coach Miles Optimistic Seekamp

BY ERIC OLSON
AP Sports Writer

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Few college basketball coaches ooze optimism more than Nebraska's Tim Miles.

His sunny disposition is being put to the test this offseason, though, after the unexpected losses of two players and an assistant coach and the expected departure of All-Big Ten guard Terran Petteway.

All this followed a 13-win season that ended with nine straight losses.

"I'm really pleased with where we are in terms of players and our future," Miles said Monday. "Have there been some guys who transferred who I wish wouldn't have? Yeah. That happens every year."

Walter Pitchford, a two-year starter, surprised Miles by announcing on March 30 that he would declare for the NBA draft. The next day freshman guard Tarin Smith, who played significant minutes late in the season, said he planned to transfer. Petteway said Thursday he was declaring for the draft, and on Sunday assistant coach Chris Harriman told Miles he was leaving to become associate head coach at New Mexico.

Next season Kansas transfer Andrew White becomes eligible, and he'll be joined by five recruits who make up a class ranked No. 31 nation-

ally by ESPN.com.

"When was the last time Nebraska had one of these recruiting classes like this?" Miles said. "We've got a great core of guys returning. We don't have a big guy. That is my greatest concern."

Leading the newcomers are top-100 recruits Glynn Watson, a point guard from Bellewood, Illinois, and Ed Morrow, a forward from Chicago. The Huskers also signed forward Mike Jacobson of Wauke, Iowa, guard Bakari Evelyn of Hillcrest Academy in Arizona by way of Detroit, and forward Jack McVeigh of Gold Coast, Australia.

Miles is holding out hope that the Huskers can still bring in a big man.

"We're trying to explore every option conceivable," he said, "whether that be a late available high school kid, graduate transfer, junior college kid, (and) a foreign kid probably being the last option for us."

The Huskers' priority is to improve offensively. They were 337th nationally in 3-point shooting (28.4 percent) and 275th in overall shooting (41.2 percent). They were 305th in scoring

(61.5 ppg).

Harriman just finished his third season at Nebraska, and Miles said it caught him off-guard when he told him he was leaving. Miles said Harriman told him he thinks the move will improve his chances of becoming a head coach. Also, Harriman is a native of Australia and has strong recruiting ties there, and New Mexico has had several Aussies play there.

Petteway, who averaged 18.1 points the past two seasons, attended Monday's news conference with Miles. Petteway sat out one season after transferring to Nebraska from Texas Tech, and he will turn 23 in October. He said his age would work against him if he returned to school for a fifth year.

As it is, Petteway is projected no higher than a second-round pick, and he might have to go overseas to play professionally if he goes undrafted.

"Confidence level is real high," he said. "Once I get in those workouts, I'll move up on the boards and definitely be a first-rounder. I'm thinking about overseas, but not really."

FROM PAGE 7

on April 4 for review.

"I felt like we put a really good case together, but once it leaves your hands, it can be any answer," Oyen said. "In this type of a case, there wasn't a precedent."

Nonetheless, the final answer came by phone Monday afternoon to Oyen, who relayed the news to Williams, who — with Oyen — gave Seekamp the news.

"My heart stopped," Williams said. "We'd been really hopeful that this would be something that could happen, but I wasn't holding my breath."

The only condition provided by the NCAA was that Seekamp sit out the first two regular season games in the 2015-16 season. The two games are what the committee determined Seekamp played with an Australian national team after her high school graduation in December 2009.

Once she arrived in Vermillion, though, Seekamp wasted little time cementing her place in the USD record books. She already ranks seventh all-time in career points (1,484), sixth in assists (396)



P&D FILE PHOTO

University of South Dakota women's basketball player Nicole Seekamp was granted Monday a fourth year of eligibility for the 2015-16 season by the NCAA.

and sixth in steals (176).

She has twice been named Most Valuable Player of the Summit League Tournament, both times coming when the Coyotes lost in the championship game (2013, 2015).

After earning her undergraduate degree in Psychology on May 9, Seekamp will begin work on a master's degree in Clinical Psychology this fall.

Not only has Seekamp's work in the classroom revolved around Psychology,

her exploits on the court as a leader have left her coach to rave about Seekamp's "basketball IQ."

"From the first day I stepped foot on campus, I really felt like when I would say something, she could finish my sentences," Williams said. "She's familiar with me and our system, and she's just a great leader."

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Boston

FROM PAGE 7

Throughout the course, though, were reminders of the 2013 attack, which killed three people and injured over 260 others.

"Boston Strong" — the phrase that became the city's defiant rally cry after the attack — was everywhere along the route, which winds through seven Massachusetts communities and Boston.

Fans yelled it out, wrote it in chalk on the pavement, and displayed it in hats, shirts, flags and homemade signs. For some, it was the default answer for why they came.

"Boston strong," Suzy Degazon, of California, quickly replied when asked why she was running. "It's a very special race and I wanted to show support. People can't do that sort of thing. The community comes together."

Still, those that attended last year's marathon said the atmosphere this year felt less intense and emotionally charged.

Indeed, bars along the busy commercial heart of Back Bay were already packed with revelers by 11 a.m., some with lines out the door.

Many said they were simply enjoying the sights and sounds of the race, which is the world's oldest annual marathon and takes place each year on Patriots' Day, a Massachusetts holiday commemorating the first battles of the Revolutionary War.

"I'm thinking about the people who were affected but, at this point, it's about trying to turn the race back into something positive — purely a celebration of running," said David Parkinson, a New York City resident competing for his sixth straight year.

But at Newton's infamous "Heartbreak Hill," Lisa Roberts, a Hull, Mass. resident volunteering at a water station, suggested that a sense of normalcy may never return.



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