

SRJC Basketball Coach Drops 5 Players

December 23, 2005

In a stunning development, Santa Rosa Junior College men's basketball coach Craig McMillan dismissed five players from the team for rules violations at the Hartnell tournament in Salinas on December 9th.

The dismissed players are: Amos Carter, Chris Bush, Jerome Armstead, Robert Mitchell and Eric Freeman. Carter, Bush and Armstead were the Bear Cubs' three leading scorers. SRJC Athletic Director Ron Myers said that the five players were benched for the first game of the tournament, following a curfew violation, and they missed curfew again that night. The players were reportedly then driven back to Santa Rosa after midnight and dropped from the squad. McMillan filled the vacant roster spots last week.

The team's record since the shake-up is 4-1. Before the dismissals, the Bear Cubs had lost six in a row. During McMillan's three-season tenure, his teams have gone 30-3, 24-8, and 28-6 while capturing two Bay Valley West Conference titles.

"The program stood up for what is right," said Myers. "We feel like we set some high standards. It's not only important for our department, but for our school that we abide by them."

"I give (McMillan) a standing ovation," said SRJC head football coach Keith Simons.

"Sometimes you have a bad mix of guys that make bad decisions, and that affects your whole team. You've got to get rid of those guys."

Simons concedes that losing five players from a 12-man roster is a major blow, equivalent to losing 20 players from a football team. But the move will pay off down the road, he said.

"It was an admirable decision," said assistant football coach Matt Collins. "You can't let the players dictate how the program is run. We put a good product on our courts and playing fields, and the last thing we're going to allow is guys to break rules."

McMillan was a starting guard on Arizona's (35-3) 1988 Final Four team that included future NBA players Sean Elliot, Steve Kerr and Tom Tolbert.

Best in the nation: The SRJC football team capped another dominant offensive campaign by averaging 404 passing yards per game.

According to JC Gridwire, this once again tops the nation. Simons' finely engineered "spread" offense has now led the nation -- 141 junior colleges play football -- in total passing yardage three consecutive years and five out of the last seven.

Emerging as a major star was Angelo Richardson, a sophomore 6-foot-2, 195-pound wide receiver, who led the nation in catches (93), receiving yards (1,367) and touchdowns

(18). Richardson has recently been offered full scholarships to Arizona, Arizona State and Purdue. Other schools are interested, including USC, and more scholarship offers are likely forthcoming.

"We had some moments early on," said Collins, who coaches the receivers. "Angelo had to make a decision what was important to him. He needed to do things our way."

"Angelo grew up this year," Simons said. "I'm proud of him for the decisions he made. If he keeps working and getting better, he can be making money on Sundays."

Richardson was the third SRJC receiver in three years to lead the nation in TD catches.

"We do as much as we can to teach technique," Collins said. "But what he does after the catch is just pure athletic ability."

Bear Cubs quarterback Ian Hetrick, out of Vintage High School in Napa, is on the recruiting radar as well. Against Fresno in

his final game, Hetrick completed 35 of 46 passes for 311 yards and two TDs in a winning effort.

"His name's all over the place right now," Simons said. "He's a hot commodity."

Ware a hot item: Scott Ware, the starting free safety for top-ranked USC, by way of Montgomery High School and SRJC, has been relatively healthy all season and earned second-team all-Pac 10 honors.

The next stop after the Rose Bowl versus Texas on Jan. 4 will likely be the NFL -- a scout from the San Diego Chargers recently predicted Ware will be a third- or fourth-round draft pick.

He's explosive, fast and a huge hitter, Simons said. He said that "people just missed the boat on him" after high school, and that, amazingly, Sacramento State was the only four-year school that offered Ware a scholarship.

Tinkering with NCS format: Yet another proposal to recombine the Redwood Empire and East Bay into a single football playoff conference is being considered by the North Coast Section. The last time the two regions squared off in playoff football was in the late 1990s. Will this proposal pass?

"Not a clue," said NCS Commissioner Tom Ehrhorn. "There are so many factors involved."

In this year's march to the Redwood Empire 3A title, Cardinal Newman drew no fresh opponents in the playoffs -- all three wins (Ukiah, Rancho Cotate, Maria Carrillo) were against North Bay League teams.

Meanwhile, in what may or may not be indicative of relative strengths between the two regions, Casa Grande, which began the season the top-ranked team in the North Bay, scheduled a November home game against Pittsburg and fell behind 31-0 before tacking on late points against the Pirates' second unit.

-by Ted Gross

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