

Violent coaches strip colleges of educational integrity



ON JAN. 25, John O'Connor, first-year head coach of men's basketball at Philadelphia's Holy Family University, was conducting a "combat rebounding" drill at practice.

Dissatisfied with the performance of his players – who were struggling to play .500 ball at the Division II level – O'Connor stepped onto the court to show the team how the drill was supposed to be done.

He reportedly grabbed reserve player Matt Kravchuk, elbowed him in the face, knocking him to the floor, and then placed a foot in the direction of the bloodied player.

When the Holy Family athletic department and university administration failed to respond to the incident as Kravchuk had hoped, he filed a criminal complaint with the Philadelphia police.

The incident garnered national attention late last month when both O'Connor and Kravchuk – with their attorneys – appeared on ABC's "Good Morning America" in a failed attempt at reconciliation.

Although O'Connor apologized to the player, insisting that the incident was an "accident" and that he was "only trying to make Holy Family a better, more competitive team," Kravchuk rebuffed him.

The ugly incident is just the latest episode in college basketball's abandonment of educational responsibility.

A win-at-all-costs attitude appears to have become more important to some coaches than the obligation they have to use basketball as a vehicle to teach the more important

COMMENTARY

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life-lessons of teamwork, sportsmanship, commitment and acting with restraint under pressure.

Coaches such as O'Connor seemingly delude themselves into believing that their old-school approach is the most effective way of teaching those lessons.

The logic holds that screaming at players is a proven method of motivation. Forcing student-athletes to run "suicides" until they drop builds character. And demanding physical aggression in boxing-out drills can only improve mental and physical toughness on the court.

But the line must be drawn at physical abuse.

Violent behavior by head basketball coaches has gone on far too long. The most noted case is that of former Indiana University basketball coach Bobby Knight, whose boorish behavior included throwing a chair across the court during a game and an arrest for assault.

Despite that, IU employed him for nearly 30 years because he led the school to three NCAA championships and 11 Big Ten Conference championships.

Not until 2000 did Indiana terminate his contract, months after CNN Sports Illustrated aired a tape of a 1997 IU practice session that showed him apparently choking one of his players.

Temple University's John Chaney also prided himself in being a tough coach. On Feb. 13, 1994, Chaney threatened to fight University of Massachusetts coach John Calipari at a post-game news conference.

In 2005 Chaney made national headlines after ordering a backup forward to commit hard fouls in a game against St. Joe's University, which resulted in fracturing the arm of an opposing player.

But Chaney, who took Temple to the NCAA tournament 17 times, was only suspended for parts of the season in each case.

If a head coach can't control his temper, how do they expect their players to control theirs?

Just as guilty are the administrations of those schools for not imposing harsher punitive actions at the time of the offenses. They also have a responsibility to protect the academic integrity of the institution as well as the physical safety of the student-athletes who are enrolled there.

The Philadelphia Police Department recently decided not to prosecute O'Connor. In addition, the embattled coach spared administrators further embarrassment by resigning.

Neither action eliminates the fact that O'Connor and the administration of Holy Family are guilty of abandoning the educational responsibility they owed to their student-athletes.

Shame on them and their program.

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