

Mike Haywood's Pitt Screw-Job

Written by {ga=mikeperry}

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Call it buyer's remorse, call it second thoughts, call it bending to public will...but don't call it fair.

The University of Pittsburgh hired former Miami head football coach Mike Haywood to take over the Panthers football program after Dave Wannstedt was not retained. Haywood, who took the RedHawks from the depths of futility and ineptitude and, in two seasons, turned them into MAC champions. He is a well-respected member of the fraternity of college coaches in this nation and has never been in trouble. Never, that is, until last Friday when he was arrested in South Bend, Indiana on a domestic violence charge.

Pitt announced Haywood's hiring at a Dec. 16 press conference, a press conference that saw Pitt athletic director Steve Pederson rave about his new coach's character. Now, after the arrest, Haywood has been terminated and will not coach Pitt, or anyone else the chances are. This is a sham.

When Pitt announced Haywood would be taking over for Wannstedt, a very popular coach in Pittsburgh, the response was tepid. In fact, it was widely criticized by quite a few fans and alumni. Panthers fans were looking for a bigger name to take over their beloved program, and

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most responded to the hiring of Haywood by saying "Mike who?" It was not a popular move.

Now Pederson and the university has moved in another direction. Haywood has been fired before landing a recruit, holding a practice, coaching a game or even moving into his office. And it is not right. Since the arrest the charges, which were originally misdemeanors, have been bumped up to felony domestic battery in the presence of a minor.

Haywood was arrested after a custody issue developed with a woman with whom Haywood has a child, according to police. The unidentified woman told police Haywood grabbed her by the arm and neck and pushed her as she tried to leave the home Haywood owns in South Bend, where he was once a Notre Dame assistant. Assistant St. Joseph County Police Chief Bill Redman said the woman had marks on her neck, arms and back.

Yes, this is a bad situation and Haywood, if he did anything improper, should be punished. However, at this point nothing has been proven. Haywood has been found guilty of no crime and he deserves due process. Instead, Pitt jumped the gun and pretty much ruined the guy's life without actually knowing exactly what happened and if Haywood did anything wrong.

Said Pitt chancellor Mark Nordenberg: "This is a matter of real regret for the many people at Pitt that looked forward to working with (Haywood). However, head coaches are among the university's most visible representatives and are expected to maintain high standards of personal conduct and to avoid situations that might reflect negatively on the university."

So what did Nordenberg want Haywood to do? Not worry about his child? Just let this woman do whatever she wanted with his child, regardless of if he was comfortable about the situation or not? Look, I have two children. My wife and I have a great relationship and will remain married for the rest of our lives. However, if there was a situation where I did not think the kids should go somewhere with her...say she was sick and medicated and wanted to drive somewhere in a snowstorm (not that she would, but I am making a point) I would not let the kids get in the car with her. How do we know what happened that led to the point where Haywood was arrested?

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This is why I think Pitt screwed up. Though I am sure they have some additional information, there is no way they know the whole story, and that is why they should let things play out before they ruin Mike Hayward's life.

"It isn't fair. The truth will eventually come out," Haywood told the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review following his firing. That is what everyone should wait for, for the truth to come out. Pitt did not do this.

I have to think if the news of Haywood's hiring was met with cheers and excitement, if season ticket sales took off and everyone was thrilled he was coming to the Panthers, Pederson and the university would have handled this quite differently. We would be deluged with press releases explaining how Pitt owed it to its new coach to stick by him until the case was resolved and all the facts came out. But, with the lack of excitement Haywood's hiring was met with, Pitt decided to take a mulligan and open a new search. Ignorant.

Look at it this way, what happens if the woman drops the charges and says the situation was not as serious as all the media attention made it out to be? What if the case goes to court and it is found that Haywood has done nothing wrong? What if he is completely exonerated of any wrongdoing? What would Pitt's responsibility to Mike Hayward be then?

This whole thing was bungled, and Pederson should be given all of the blame. He went through the process and hired the man he thought was the best fit to take over the Pitt Panthers football program. He should have the balls to stand by that decision.