

Hoop Dream Ends for FAMU's Coach Clark

Contributed by Stephanie Haughton - Black College Wire
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AD says Lady Rattlers need 'improvements'

After a seven-year tenure as head coach of the Lady Rattler basketball team, Debra Clark is no longer going to be patrolling the sidelines for the Florida A&M University squad.

Administrators announced March 25 that Clark's contract would not be renewed for the 2008-2009 season.

"Improvements need to be made," said Bill Hayes, University athletic director, "and we're looking for a new beginning for the women's basketball team."

Clark's exit comes after a rollercoaster season that saw the Lady Rattlers jump out to a 9 -1 winning streak to begin the season, but drop 12 of their last 17 games.

The team finished with a 14-17 record and landed eighth in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference.

Hayes mentioned that the decision to let Clark go was a difficult one, but one that the University thought would benefit the program the most.

"Clark is a good person, but it's been seven years and you have four losing seasons," Hayes said. "We need to get FAMU back at the helm of the MEAC."

Numerous attempts to contact Clark were unsuccessful.

Clark, a graduate of Hampton University, has fought for the past seven years to keep the struggling program afloat. The 2007-2008 season started rocky before the team set foot on the floor. It was announced early in the season that star freshmen Marke Freeman and Secrette Anderson would no longer be on the team. Not to mention the loss of another starter Diedra Jones because of injuries.

Clark's players expressed their sentiments about losing the only college head coach they have known. Senior guard Q'Vaunda Curry said the news came to her as a surprise and should have been relayed to the team in a better manner.

"Coach Clark was one of those people that always follow the rules," Curry said. "It's going to be difficult for the team to adjust. And I just felt like they could have prepared us for this news a little better."

Despite Clark's previous losing season, the team began red hot, with a 9-0 start but fizzled as the season came to a

close.

The season was Clark's fourth in a row below .500 with the Lady Rattlers.

Hayes said Clark's release should come as no surprise to her. The renewal of Clark's contract had been previously discussed before her termination.

"When Coach Clark asked me about her renewal a couple weeks ago I told her that the chances were unlikely," Hayes said.

The FAMU athletic staff also expressed sentiments over Clark's dismissal.

Alvin Hollins, assistant athletic director for external operations, said Clark's presence will be missed.

"We are extremely proud of what Clark has done for the team over the years," Hollins said. "She has helped build the team academic wise. Losing her on staff is like losing a sister. We want the team to be back to the '99 year when our men and women were both at the top of the MEAC."

Clark - who coached alongside her husband John Clark - had her most successful season in 2003-04 when the Lady Rattlers raced to a 17-14 mark.

Before coming to FAMU, Clark coached at Winston Salem University, a position she held until 2001. She holds career wins of 211-194.

Hayes said the process to find a new coach is already underway.

"We are now in the process of putting together a committee," Hayes said. "We're moving quickly and expedite as possible."

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Stephanie Haughton writes for The Famuan, which originally published this article.

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