

College coaches speak out amid mounting frustrations

BY AARON BEARD
AP BASKETBALL WRITER

The frustration was obvious for Vic Schaefer after the No. 4 Texas women lost by double figures at No. 5 Vanderbilt. “We’ve got no heart,” the Longhorns coach said in a blunt analysis.

He hasn’t been alone, on the men’s or women’s side, when it comes to coaches angrily calling out their teams in the pressure-packed final month of the regular season.

The list has included No. 21 Tennessee’s Kim Caldwell on the women’s side and Colorado men’s coach Tad Boyle. Then there was Kansas State’s Jerome Tang, whose postgame comments after a lopsided loss at Cincinnati stood out in their intensity — and were ultimately cited by the school’s athletic director when Tang was fired Sunday night.

It’s a delicate dance for coaches, finding the balance between tough-love motivation and a softer-touch inspiration. Look no further than Schaefer, who went from letting his players have it after the loss to Vanderbilt to praising their response when they beat Tennessee three days later.

“I do think there’s some motivating factors when you get in front of a microphone and talk about ... individual standards and program standards,” first-year Florida State men’s coach Luke Loucks said this week. “But I also think it’s our responsibility as coaches to get the most out of our group. That’s why we get paid a lot of money to do this.

“If it were easy to do, we wouldn’t get paid as much as we get paid. So we have to find ways to squeeze the orange, so to speak.”

VOCAL CRITICISMS
Indeed, it’s a long-running test for coaches in finding



Wade Payne | AP

Tennessee head coach Kim Caldwell talks to her players during a timeout the second half of an NCAA college basketball game against Texas in Knoxville, Tenn., Sunday.

the right message to reach their players. Their team might need the firmer assessment that challenges pride and even embarrasses, then the next year’s group might need a lighter touch.

That was true even before today’s transfer-portal era creating more yearly roster churn with fewer holdovers. But in any era, saying it publicly rather than in a team meeting or a closed-door practice magnifies the spotlight and potential blowback.

This month has offered plenty of examples:

—Caldwell after a 93-50 road loss to No. 3 South Carolina for the worst loss in program history on Feb. 8: “We just had a lot of quit in us tonight, and that’s been something that’s been consistent with our team. ... I have a team that will just quit on you.”

—Boyle after a 78-44 loss at No. 13 Texas Tech on Feb. 11: “I’m embarrassed by our performance. ... We deserve to be on a 6 a.m. flight out of Lubbock, commercial, Southwest — whatever airline you choose. We don’t deserve a charter plane back to Boulder tonight.”

—Tang after a 91-62 home loss to Cincinnati on Feb. 11: “These dudes do not deserve to wear this uniform. There will be very few of them in it next year.”

—Schaefer after the 86-70 loss at Vanderbilt last Thursday: “I just thought they were tougher, they were more physical, more aggressive, we whined, we complained. We just have no heart. ... It’s probably the softest team I’ve had in years.”

LASTING MESSAGES

Some call-’em-out deliveries live on for years.

Notably, Pat Knight held nothing back in February 2012 after his Lamar men’s team lost at Stephen F. Austin, starting when he walked in and dismissed player Mike James from the news conference, saying: “You don’t have a clue what it takes to win.”

“We’ve got the worst group of seniors right now that I’ve ever been associated with. Their mentality’s awful, their attitude’s awful,” Knight said, even referencing off-court problems of “classroom, drugs, being late for stuff.”

Clemson men’s coach Brad Brownell understands

the challenge of finding the right message amid rising frustration. Now in his 16th year, he’s the longest-tenured Atlantic Coast Conference coach after a multiyear sideline overhaul that includes retiring Hall of Fame titans such as Duke’s Mike Krzyzewski, North Carolina’s Roy Williams and Syracuse’s Jim Boenheim.

“I think every so often, it’s OK to talk about your guys in a way that, hey, you expect more out of them, we’ve got to do a little better,” Brownell said. “But at the same time, obviously, our jobs are trying to inspire our players. We’re trying to bring out the best in them.

“So there’s a fine line with all of it. Obviously when coaches are winning, hey man, it’s tough love and we enjoy all the banter. But when coaches are losing, everything they say is looked at much more critically. And so I do think as a coach, you better keep that in mind.”

TANG’S FIRING

Tang’s comments, in particular, stood out as a viral moment even before the firing days later.

The Wildcats followed the loss to Cincinnati by playing with no names on the backs of their jerseys in Saturday’s loss at No. 2 Houston. Tang said he was pleased with the team’s preparation after the loss to the Bearcats, and said he even had players Abdi Bashir Jr. and Nate Johnson take the lead on scouting work for the Cougars.

“I thought it was the right message,” Bashir said. “I don’t think Coach Tang said anything wrong. I think that people forgot why we’re here. I think we needed to be reminded of that, like we’re here to play for K-State. I think they responded the right way. Nobody took no hard feelings toward it.”

A day later, Tang was out of a job, coming with the Wildcats (11-15) near the bottom of the Big 12 three years after Tang’s first team made the NCAA Elite Eight. Athletic director Gene Taylor said the school was firing Tang for cause — a designation that could reduce or eliminate Tang’s buyout — while pointing to contract terms about conduct that “could potentially bring embarrassment.”

Taylor later said Tang’s comments about the players “really concerned me.”

“Basically his comments about the student-athletes and the negative reaction to those comments from a lot of sources, both nationally and locally, is where I thought we needed to make the decision,” Taylor said.

POSITIVE RESPONSES

Both Caldwell and Schaefer saw some positive response to their tough assessments.

Caldwell’s Lady Vols beat Missouri by 45 points four days after the South Carolina debacle. As for Schaefer, his Longhorns regrouped after the Vanderbilt loss to beat Tennessee 65-63. And the coach had gone from saying he

would call AD Chris Del Conte to apologize for his players’ performance to praising their response.

“This team has a ton of heart,” Schaefer said. “I want to make sure y’all know that, we just didn’t play with any on Thursday, in my opinion.”

Schaefer, who turns 65 next month, said he was “too far down the road to change” his belief that he must teach accountability.

“When they leave me, they go out in the real world, they understand: ‘Hey, you can’t show up for work and give that effort at my job because I might get fired,’” he said. “I think my kids understand that.

“I hope they do. I hope they know how much I love them and I care about them. ... Sometimes you just have to have those real conversations.”

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Nebo Water District

Women’s outlets redefine playbook in sports coverage

BY CLAIRE SAVAGE
AND ALYCE BROWN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Veteran sports columnist Christine Brennan remembers when male colleagues used to laugh at her for insisting on covering women’s sports back in the 1990s.

“It was absolutely infuriating to me,” said Brennan, a best-selling author who served as the first president of the Association for Women in Sports Media.

Now? Entire media outlets dedicated to centering women’s sports are springing up, growing rapidly and tackling coverage themselves, including in the 2026 Milan Cortina Olympics.

Alongside the historic growth of women’s sports, the women’s sports media ecosystem is likewise flourishing, and outlets like TOGETHXR, The GIST, Just Women’s Sports, The IX Sports, GOALS and Good Game with Sarah Spain are expanding their reach.

“The male-dominated mainstream sports media totally missed the boat on women’s sports,” said Brennan, a sports columnist at USA Today now covering her 22nd Olympic Games, adding that she is heartened by newer outlets “doing a job that should have been done by mainstream sports media.”

While even mainstream sports media have upped their game by increasing the scale and quality of women’s sports coverage, University of

Andy Wong | AP

ESPN reporters Sarah Spain, right, and Alex Azzi wait to interview the athletes after the first run of an alpine ski women's giant slalom race at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, Sunday.

Michigan sport management professor Ketra Armstrong says the recent influx of women-led outlets is uniquely “liberating” because women athletes are “owning their stories and not waiting for it to be filtered through any traditional lens.”

That’s how Just Women’s Sports got its start. When founder Haley Rosen stopped playing professional soccer, she realized how hard it was to keep up with her sport in the news.

“Everything I was seeing just felt nothing like the world I had known,” Rosen said. “It felt very young, very pink and glitter, a lot of lifestyle content. And I was just like, where are the sports?”

So Rosen built Just Women’s Sports, which started as an Instagram

account back in 2020 and has since grown into a prominent industry outlet with brand partners like Nike and Amazon Prime. One of the most important things to her is that women’s sports get covered with the same intensity and seriousness as men’s sports, she says.

“These women are the best athletes in the world, competing at the highest level. And I think we have to treat them as such,” Rosen said.

The GIST, a Toronto-born “fan-first sports media brand,” was created by a similarly frustrated spectator.

Co-founder Ellen Hyslop describes herself as “a super-massive avid sports fan.” But despite watching ESPN SportsCenter every morning, “the default was

always, ‘Oh, you’re a girl, so you’re not a sports fan,’ as opposed to just being welcomed into those communities,” she said.

Founded with college friends Jacie deHoop and Roslyn McLarty, Hyslop said The GIST was designed for readers who felt shut out of traditional sports media. Today, the outlet prides itself on providing equal coverage to men’s and women’s sports and reaches roughly 1 million newsletter subscribers — nearly 50% growth over the past two years— most of them Gen Z and millennial women.

“Sports are supposed to be for everyone. They really do have the ability to unite people,” Hyslop said.

Sarah Spain, ESPN veteran and host of daily women’s sports podcast

Good Game on iHeart, credits a combination of social media, WNBA star Caitlin Clark, and the women’s national soccer team for accelerating the industry’s growth, pointing to “a very organic and natural push for more women’s sports coverage.”

Spain also noted that media attention is critical for the success of any professional league, and women’s sports have suffered from the lack of it.

“There was this blaming of the product of women’s sports, without understanding the incredible ecosystem and infrastructure that was lifting up and bringing fans back over and over again to men’s sports,” she said. “Now we’re finally catching up in terms of investment.”

The Olympics have long shown that when women’s sports receive meaningful media attention, they attract an enthusiastic audience, according to Spain, a sports journalist of more than 16 years who is in Italy covering her first-ever Olympics for Good Game.

The Milan Cortina Games are no exception: Skiing star Lindsey Vonn, downhill champion Breezy Johnson and snowboarding phenom Chloe Kim continue to dominate headlines.

“The Olympics are the shining star for women’s sports coverage that proves if you tell people that there’s value, and you give them the information, and the nuance, and the context to care, that they will be die hard for it,” Spain said.