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Rich Goulet, set to turn 71 this month, has been told he's no longer head coach of the Pitt Meadows program he created. (Wilson Wong, UBC athletics)

FEATURE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL

Rich Goulet: With NBA stars stunned by his firing, 70-year-old Pitt coach talks hoops, and his future

📅 September 2, 2017 👤 Howard Tsumura 💬 Comment(0)

PITT MEADOWS — In his 2008 book ‘Outliers’, Malcolm Gladwell most famously expressed that investing 10,000 of hours of work into your passion allows you the chance to achieve greatness.

Imagine, over the course of a 40-plus-year career, doing just that many, many times over, and in the end, asking for not a penny in return?

And then try to imagine, as you enter your twilight years, being stripped of the opportunity to continue your life’s work?

In mid-July, following complaints of his coaching style by



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some of the parents of players on his senior varsity basketball team at Pitt Meadows Secondary, legendary B.C. high school coach Rich Goulet, 70, was told by the school's administration that he was no longer welcome back.

Public reaction has been resoundingly in Goulet's favour, and as someone who has reported on the world of B.C. high school sports since 1983, I can say with great certainty that over the last 30-plus years, I have never seen public outcry like this before within our provincial high school sports scene.

"I find it so distasteful that someone of Rich's stature could be treated this way," said B.C. High School Boys Basketball president Paul Eberhardt, who was barely out of his teens when Goulet began to mentor him as a coach.

"All of us as high school coaches, we're volunteers," continued Eberhardt, "and so it's not just about Rich. It's about all of us, and that if a few parents get upset, that it can get to this level. And what really concerns me is that he's never had an opportunity to discuss this with the parents. It has all been done behind his back. It could have been resolved another way, by following fundamental process. But technically, he doesn't even know who his accusers are."

Kudos to reporter Neil Corbett from the Maple Ridge News for his excellent reporting over the past few days on this story.

In one of his stories, Corbett wrote "Neither the school board nor Pitt Meadows secondary principal Mike Keenan would comment, saying personnel matters must remain confidential."

A CLASH OF IDEALS

At the heart of this issue is a clashing of old-school ideals with the new generation of student-athlete and their

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families.

All enduring coaches see the need to adapt to the times, and even if Goulet was still one of the more vocal within his profession, he too had made changes.

Those, along with his recovery from a stroke suffered five years ago, and the daily dialysis treatments he endured this season for kidney failure, had created a more tempered version of his former self.

Yet what would never change was his reason for coaching and his belief that there was a lesson to be learned from daily toil.

“A high-intensity coach, some low-intensity athletes who don’t want to make a commitment, and parents who feel like they are entitled to everything,” Goulet told me Saturday of how his past couple of seasons at the school had felt like oil and water. “But you find happiness by working in a process together to get where you want to go.”

Yes, Goulet can be vocal.

But he has also cajoled and encouraged, and until only recently, had been a teacher in the classroom at Pitt Meadows to so many of his players.

Yet the brief time he took for himself to recover from his stroke and his daily absence from the hallways of the school since his retirement may well have created a disconnect with some of his players.

Whatever the case, he held out no hope that he would ever coach again at the school he first coached and taught at in 1979 following a very successful stint at Burnaby’s St. Thomas More Collegiate.

Goulet led STM to back-to-back B.C. titles in 1975 and ’76, and later led Pitt Meadows to provincial crowns in 1989 and

2000.

Yet over the course of four decades there were plenty of seasons when his teams weren't a B.C. favourite.

Still, he persevered, coaching Grade 9, junior and senior varsity teams at Pitt Meadows in the same season.

This past year, even with his dialysis treatments sapping his energy, he coached both the senior and junior teams, taking the latter to the quarterfinals of the B.C. tournament in March.

I can remember talking to Goulet just prior to that B.C. Final 8 game, against Vancouver's Sir Charles Tupper Tigers, and he looked like someone who had weathered a storm.

If he only knew what was awaiting him just around the corner.

Goulet says that during the months in which administration conducted an investigation, he went about his annual business of getting the senior and junior teams ready for the 2017-18 season.

He did all the scheduling for both teams, conducted 40 practices, took both teams to a pair of spring leagues and then to a U.S. tournament.

In total, between April 1 and July 13, the day he was officially fired, he coached over 150 games.

"The comment that I got was that I am negative," says Goulet, who turns 71 later this month. "Telling them they had to improve was bad. It's all about getting better but kids today can be very different. They don't want to hear the bad stuff. Even with my dialysis, I thought I worked harder this year than I had in many years. My junior team seemed to understand my situation, but it was like my seniors had no idea what I was going through."

ANOTHER CHAPTER AWAITS

News of Goulet's firing only became public this week after he had informed coaches of teams invited to his annual Pitt Meadows Air Show tourney, that he would no longer be coaching the team.

The news went viral on social media, and among those standing up for him were B.C.'s three high school-to-NBA grads Steve Nash, Robert Sacre and Kelly Olynyk.

"That has been awesome," Goulet said. "So many people have supported me, so many of whom I don't even know. It's meant a lot to me. I'm not a teacher anymore. I am a volunteer but I was put through the grill by the school board like I was a bad guy."

What's next?

Goulet loves the game too much to fade away.

He says he will continue to invest energy into making the B.C. Grade 8 championships a top-flight event.

And about coaching?

"I don't think I would start another program," he said, adding that if the right school asked him, he would consider either a head coaching or assistant coaching position.

"Pitt Meadows enjoyed a reputation of being somebody in our basketball community," Goulet said. "Our kids were given the best. They went to the best places. They played the best competition they could have possibly played. Now I fear they've lost so many aspects to this program, things that will never be recovered."

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