



(THE NEWS/files) For the first time in 39 years, hall of fame basketball coach Rich Goulet will not be behind the bench at Pitt Meadows secondary.

Hall-of-fame Pitt Meadows basketball coach 'fired'

Rich Goulet not happy about the way he has been asked to leave.

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After 39 years and more than 1,000 wins in high school basketball, including three provincial championships, Pitt Meadows basketball coach Rich Goulet will no longer be beside the bench.

He's not happy about the way he has been asked to leave, and neither are many of the Marauders' alumni.

Parents from last year's team complained to administration, and Goulet has been "fired" from the program he built.

Scott Walton said he feels terrible for his former coach.

Five years ago, Goulet suffered a stroke, but returned to coaching.

Last year, he endured kidney failure and dialysis, but kept doing what he loves.

He was no longer the animated coach pacing up and down the court in front of his bench, the one who led Walton's 1992 Marauders to the provincial tournament. They lost the final to budding NBA star Steve Nash and St. Michael's University that year.

"He's really taken a hit. He sits down, and the players huddle around his chair," said Walton.

"But he was still doing the junior and senior teams [coaching both], and heading the program."

Walton is now in his 18th year of coaching high school hoops in Prince George, and he hears his voice saying Goulet's words.

"I use a lot of things that I gained from him."

Walton also coached with his mentor on provincial teams and at Pitt Meadows. He said Goulet runs a Cadillac program, fundraising tens of thousands of dollars each season to keep it going.

"They're in Hawaii every two years and they're in all the best tournaments," he said. "You walk into a gym with him, and it's like he owns the place, and you know you're with the right guy," he added.

"The respect that I've got, and the love I have for him, and what I owe him ... you can't put it into words."

Mike Alain was selected for Goulet's first Grade 7 all-star team, and was coached by him from 1994 to 2000 – a run that ended in a provincial championship.

"I couldn't appreciate him more," said Alain.

"My mom has reiterated to me many times that I probably would not have graduated if not for him."

Goulet didn't only push kids on the court, he pushed them to excel as students.

Conversations between the coach and Alain would start with "I was talking to your math teacher ...

"He held us to a higher standard. We wore shirts and ties on game days. He believed we should be model students."

The headstrong Alain clashed with Goulet, who sometimes yelled until he lost his voice during a game.

"There were times when we didn't get along on the court," he said. "No one ever got into it more with Goulet more than I did."

But Alain never felt Goulet was treating him unfairly.

"There is no guy other than my father who I have more respect for."

He said Goulet deserves accolades and to retire on his own terms – not to be forced out of the game.

"It makes me sick to my stomach," he said. "That high school owes him. How is that gym not named after him?"

Bruce Duthie was coached by Goulet from the age of nine until he graduated – also part of that 1992 team.

"I have a huge degree of respect for him," he said of Goulet, and would like to see him honoured on his way out.

"My whole perspective is nothing but positive. He's a mentor, coach, a friend and a teacher."

Goulet coached him in Grade 3 in the Little Dribblers program.

"I fell in love with the game, and it became basically my life right through high school."

He recalls how Goulet would spend time working with him one-on-one.

"The dedication he provided us as athletes was nothing but positive."

"He pushed us, he was in our face, he worked our asses off, but it was never to the point of, 'this isn't right.'"

Duthie said working with Goulet in the gym was no different than working in a hay field and having a farmer tell him to work faster.

"We were used to adults yelling at us," he said with a laugh.

But some of the kids on last year's senior team were not used to it, and Goulet believes that's part of why he was asked to quit coaching.

"They think I was negative, because I gave a lot of speeches about what they needed to do to get better."

Goulet outlines a frustrating season, where many of his Grade 12 players were simply not willing to work up to the standards of the program. He said he had to fight with players, and bench them, to get "a basic effort.

"We weren't even competitive at triple-A ... my goodness," he said. "I never ask anyone to like me when I coach them. I just ask them to do what I want them to do.

“Maybe I got cranky.”

If he crossed a line, he said some of the players were also disrespectful to him.

His assistant coach, Ron Wallsmith, doesn't recall any incident that would have led to Goulet losing his status as coach.

“Those things don't stand out in my mind,” he said.

He was struck by Goulet's dismissal.

“It's tragic. He's disappointed. He was really looking forward to coaching this group coming up.”

Wallsmith was a coach at Pitt Meadows for 19 years, mostly leading the junior team, and more recently as an assistant to Goulet for the past three seasons.

“He's an unbelievable coach – so knowledgeable and respect by other coaches, and referees and others,” he said.

Wallsmith became an administrator, worked in China for four years, then returned after retirement to work with Goulet.

“I wouldn't have gone back to work with anyone else.”

He will now turn his attention to Holy Cross secondary games, where his son Kevin is a junior boys coach.

“Where did he learn it all, and from who? Rich Goulet.”

Goulet said the school board conducted an investigation into parent complaints, and afterward he was asked to return and help run the program – but not on the bench.

“Why would I do that? You just fired me as a coach,” he said.

"I'm not here to impose myself to people who don't want me ..."

Neither the school board nor Pitt Meadows secondary principal Mike Keenan would comment, saying personnel matters must remain confidential.

Goulet feels he was not given a fair hearing.

"I never got to meet my accusers."

He had been retired from teaching for 14 months, coaching as a volunteer, and says the school administration can dismiss a volunteer at a whim.

"It was unceremonious, that's for sure."

Walton said coaches around the province have pulled out of Pitt Meadows' annual Air Show Tournament, and threaten to boycott games against Pitt Meadows. Their schedule could be impacted.

"It's because of the way it was handled," he said. "Do it in a way where you're honouring him for almost 40 years of service."

Last year's junior team, which placed seventh in B.C., should have been Goulet's last good run, Walton said.

"He was excited about his junior group coming to senior, and I think he wanted to see them through, and then that would be it."

Goulet is going to miss it.

"I won't miss all the work, or going to practice at 7 a.m. in a freezing gym," he said.

"But I love basketball, and I love people who love basketball."

Goulet's accomplishments:

- Basketball B.C. Hall of Fame inductee;
- Prime Minister's Volunteer Award winner;
- Three-time provincial champion coach;
- Coached approx. 4,000 games at all levels;
- Has been coaching high school basketball in 1965;
- Coached provincial and national teams;
- Founded and administered the Steve Nash Youth Basketball league in Pitt Meadows.