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Redhawks Reckon with Resignation

Matt Price and Cielita Maguddayao

The Seattle University community learned of the resignation of the Men's Basketball Head Coach Jim Hayford Nov. 11 after he allegedly called his players the 'n-word.' The incident reportedly took place during an exhibition game where Hayford repeated the slur that his player had said back to his bench. Seattle U placed Hayford on administrative leave Nov. 5 after Bally Sports reported the incident.

An anonymous student-athlete commented on what he heard his friends on the basketball team say about the incident.

"The coach became angry and said the 'n-word' with a hard 'r' back to the players and yelled it. The players said they did not want to play for him anymore as a result. As a Black male student-athlete, it makes me feel unsafe that they did not fire him because I feel like they are enabling an oppressor to repeat [his actions]," the anonymous student-athlete said.

According to Bally Sports, this is not the first time Hayford has used the n-word during practice. Seattle U Executive Vice President Timothy Leary informed The Spectator that the Nov. 4 incident was the first time he heard of any slur being verbalized by Hayford to the team. After the university placed Hayford on paid administrative leave, an investigation into the team was initiated.

A former Seattle U basketball player who has chosen to remain confidential countered Leary's point.

"The athletic department did get complaints about things that were going on within the basketball program and they didn't do anything about it. As far as being supported by the athletic department ... I didn't feel that way," the former basketball player said.

Hayford was hired by current Athletic Director Shaney Fink to coach the Redhawks. Since his hiring, he has been the most successful coach for the basketball team since 1963-64. He finished his tenure at Seattle U with a record of 63-55 after the Athletic Department announced his resignation in a statement.

"It is clear to me that Coach Hayford is no longer able to effectively lead the team ... The top priority within the Athletic Department is, and always will be, to support the wellbeing and success of our student-athletes," Fink wrote in the statement.

Caitlin Carlson, an associate professor in the Department of Communications and Media, commented on the lack of urgency that Seattle U had when communicating this incident to the public.



Photo via CBS

“The whole situation could have been handled with more transparency and accountability. Even when you see the news coverage where the Athletics Department is telling us what happened, ultimately, when you are in charge of an organization, it is their responsibility,” Carlson said. “I could see the potential legal constraints on them [the Seattle U administration] to not be able to act more quickly ... But I think it sends a message that they are more tolerant of this kind of hate speech than a lot of us would like them to be.”

The anonymous student-athlete went on to express his concern with how the situation was handled before the resignation was made public.

“The way the school handled the situation made it look as if there was not enough to fire him right away. To me, he should have been fired immediately, although he ended up leaving the school. I just feel like the school could have taken a couple more precautions to reassure their athletes that they are on their side and not just the [department’s] side,” the anonymous student-athlete said.

Former Seattle U men’s basketball player Morgan Means commented on what playing for Hayford was like during his tenure playing for the Redhawks.

“He did a lot for me during my years there. He always spoke a lot about love and being together and having each other’s back,” Means said. “We definitely never had anything like that where there was any kind of disrespect.”

Leary believes that the basketball players should be commended for their courage. He emphasized that credit needs to be due to the members of the men’s basketball team for their courage to speak up.

“I think it’s important to know that we had some courageous ballplayers that stepped up. And I understand that they were deeply hurt and I’m impressed by the way they handled themselves,” Leary said.

Leary went on to express that Fink has a racial equity working group where students are heavily engaged to make sure situations like this do not occur.

“Fink was talking to us about trainings and racial equity programs to prevent this from happening. But things like this are still going to happen and it’s about what you really stand for,” the student-athlete said. “We always get these emails about the school standing with this and that issue, but do they really? Or are they just saying that so the school looks better? The fact that I do not know if they are being genuine is a problem.”

There are no further ongoing investigations into whether employees of athletics or athletes use racially disparaging language within the athletic department, according to Leary.

“[We] couldn’t necessarily connect with our coaches and dealing with the BLM movement, we couldn’t really talk with our coaches in that regard because there was a disconnect,” the former basketball player said. “[I]t was a very toxic environment and I think an entirely new culture needs to be established where you’re bringing in more students of color [and] more staff of color so it’s more diverse.”

Seattle U has not issued an official apology for the Hayford incident. According to the university’s diversity statement online, “the university shall periodically review its diversity-related policies and programs to determine their achievements, and to adjust them as necessary to further those objectives.”

As the Seattle U community is awaiting the administration’s response, Means said he is glad that this incident occurred before the season started because it allows players to focus on the season without outside stressors.

Coach Chris Victor, who was hired by Hayford along with the rest of the current coaching staff, has taken over for him on an interim basis. He has gone on to lead the Redhawks to a 4-1 record so far this season.