

Dave Bliss Resurfaces

Contributed by Norm Hitzges
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I talked to an old friend yesterday. A friend who made some major mistakes a couple of years ago. Mistakes that were inexcusable and some would say unforgivable. My friend told me yesterday that life is about relationships. And because of his past mistakes, he has lost almost all of the relationships that he had accumulated throughout his career…throughout his life. My question is: at what point do you forgive your friend for doing the unforgivable?

For almost 2 decades, Dave Bliss had developed a remarkable reputation as a solid college basketball coach. He was a coach that could turn programs around. A coach that found ways to succeed at schools that did not have a history of basketball success. He succeeded at SMU. He succeeded at New Mexico. And, he was on his way to turning Baylor basketball into a respectable program.

Then, it all unraveled in the summer of 2003. As much as I hate to say it, Dave Bliss was not running a clean program at Baylor. As a matter of fact, he was violating several NCAA rules.

You see, college basketball programs have a limited number of scholarships that they can issue. And, Bliss was out of scholarships when urged Patrick Dennehy to transfer from New Mexico to Baylor. But that did not stop Bliss from finding a way to make arrangements for Dennehy’s tuition to be paid under the table. This is a clear NCAA violation.

Then, in June of 2003 Dennehy vanished. He was missing and there appeared to be foul play. This is when the end began for Dave Bliss. After weeks of searching, Dennehy’s body was finally found a couple of miles away from the Baylor campus. He had been shot dead.

The suspect in the case was a former teammate on the Bliss’ Baylor team, Carl Dotson. The ensuing investigation exposed accounting discrepancies in the basketball program. Investigators needed to know how Dennehy, a non-scholarship athlete, could afford Baylor’s lofty tuition payments.

Bliss knew that if the truth came out, he and his program would be punished. So, instead of admitting the truth and taking the punishment, he did the unthinkable. He hatched a scheme to cover up the violations.

He met with his assistants and some players that were going to be a part of the investigation. He told them to say that Dennehy paid his tuition from funds he raised from the sale of drugs.

This was an out and out lie from a man desperate to keep his job. And he got caught. One of his assistants had recorded the conversations and turned the tapes over to the authorities.

Bliss’ life as a respected NCAA Basketball Coach came to an end. But more than that, his life as a respected human being came to an end. He is now coaching the Dakota Wizards in the CBA. That’s a long way from big time college basketball.

Dave Bliss admits that he violated the trust of almost everyone that he cared about and everyone that cared about him. The ripples of what happened at Baylor in the summer of ’03 are still washing up on shores other places. The Baylor basketball team this year is suffering because of what Dave did.

Bliss came on the show yesterday not to look for sympathy…not to give excuses…he wanted to clear the air. Whether you hate him or not, whether you are ready to forgive him or you will never be able to forgive him, I thought that you’d just like to hear him.

It would be very easy for me to judge Dave Bliss on what happened in that summer of ’03. He was DEAD WRONG. Virtually everything he did was wrong and some of it was despicable. And he knows it. He lost his career. He’s fortunate that he didn’t lose his family. He’s lost his reputation. And there are hundreds, literally hundreds of people he affected negatively. I will say this again, Dave and I are friends. I don’t condone anything he did. But, all of us need forgiveness from ourselves sometimes. And, I just think that Dave is in the process of seeking his own kind of forgiveness.