



Sports in our neck of the woods.

In Denver, in recent months, the two most capable and successful coaches were released while the two least capable and least successful were retained. We're talking real sports here - not chess, Arena football, indoor soccer or lacrosse.

In Laramie, a successful football coach was terminated and one was hired who has never been a head coach and has been desperately seeking such an appointment for the past few years.

Remember when Loyola-Marymount had a highly successful basketball program under Paul Westhead? Did you happen to notice that they went 3-28 in the 2008-2009 basketball season? Missouri football is the latest Loyola college athletic program. When your program boasts about winning ten games for two consecutive seasons, you're talking ... well, you're talking Wyoming football. Except that was the case with Mizzou, from where Wyoming plucked a career assistant coach to lead the Cowboys football program for the next three years.

Dave Christensen will become known in these parts of VK2 - Vic Koenig the Second.

You see, the same Athletics Director, Tom Burman, chose this untested guy as chose the head coach for men's basketball - the Brylcream Boy. Since Pat Riley retired, sports needed a model for vaseline in the hair and this second year coach has grabbed the mantle.

We've chronicled here how UW is trying to put a winning team on the court by ignoring high school graduates in favor of junior college transfers and fifth and sixth year "high school" seniors who finished up their extended high school careers in nefarious "prep schools." These schools are simply training camps for college teams and/or the pros.

To enable a fast start so fans might be lulled into believing his team was good - and so the empty-headed sportswriters in Wyoming would praise his team, without knowledge or regard for quality of opponents - Brylcream Boy somehow arranged a schedule of home games and cupcake opponents to get off 11-2. To his chagrin, someone had scheduled UCLA and that game exposed just what he had assembled in Laramie. Once he went to Logan to play Utah State, the downhill slide was underway.

This year's UW team of mercenaries did not defeat any of the top three teams in the MWC until the tournament. Their 7 conference wins came against teams below them in the standings (Air Force, CSU and TCU) and the two right above.

Will the 19-13 record earn an NIT berth? Very possibly. But they didn't draw flies

in Laramie this year so they likely won't get a home game. Maybe the NIT will think the men can capture the magic the women had two seasons ago. They can't. Few relate to this team of imports.

There are few players for UW fans to identify with. BB built a team with no identity. One ball hog, one sharpshooter for a single season, a tall hustler from Cody and another under used big man in the middle. Then five prep schools "students" on the roster. One is ineligible, one doesn't play and one is being red-shirted. You might think those guys could play at a higher level sooner - what with having five or six years of high/prep school ball under their belts. Four of the players are from the notorious basketball factory of Simi Valley, California - Stoneridge Prep.

The fifth prep school alum (Afam Muojeke) left high school in the Queens to attend another noted basketball factory - Genesis One Prep in Mississippi.

Interestingly, the UW player's roster does not disclose that four of the guys came through Stoneridge. Of the four players, only Arthur Bouëdo is shown to be a product of Stoneridge. Mahamoud Diakite, Djibril Thiam, and Boubacar Sylla (not eligible until next season) are shown as transfers - which all three were **AFTER** Stoneridge. The UW program shows no reference to their time at the California basketball factory. May not be too proud.

The Stoneridge prep school recruits didn't play any part in UW's early success against the tomato can opponents Schroyer scheduled. Thiam became eligible at midyear after transferring to UW from Baylor. He plays appreciable minutes but is not a force. Diakite plays little.

Schroyer whined this year about not having a full complement of scholarships available because of academic problems with Steve McClain recruits, but he still wasted three on players who would not, or could not, play this season.

How many of these five prep school guys will make it in school? Any? At New Mexico, Steve Alford introduced his recruiting class for 2008-2009 and it included a player, Isaiah Rusher, who would have entered UNM this year as a 21 year-old freshman, having played at the same Mississippi prep school as UW's Muojeke. Rusher's name then did not appear on the '08-'09 UNM roster and it has been learned that Rusher will play one more year of "high school" basketball - at a top prep school in North Carolina. If Rusher makes it to UNM next season, he will turn 22 as a freshman.

At UW, when Boubecar Sylla will be eligible next year as a sophomore (after transferring from Auburn), he will turn 23 years old before the season begins. What happened to 18 year old freshmen?

Brandon Ewing, who came to UW out of high school in Chicago, will graduate after this season (or at least use up his college eligibility) and he is younger than the UW prep school sophomores who won't graduate (if they ever do) or use up their college eligibility until they're 24 or 25. Is that what the people of Wyoming want in a college basketball program?

In Denver, Avalanche coach Joel Quenneville was released after taking the Avs to the second round of the playoffs last year - losing to the eventual Stanley Cup champions, the Detroit Red Wings.

So, who replaced the best coach in Denver? Tony Granato. After proving in an earlier stint that he didn't have what it took to be a coach in the NHL, a successful coach was released and a failed Avs coach returned. Quenneville was unemployed for a very short time. Signed as a "coach in waiting" in case the Chicago Blackhawks started slowly, and they did, Quenneville was back behind the bench five games into the season.

At this writing, the Avs are 30-37-1 and sinking. The Blackhawks are 37-20-9 and lead the NHL in average home attendance per game. They also recently played the Red Wings at Wrigley Field in this year's outdoor NHL game.

On the 25 man roster, 11 Avs are 30 or older. This team is going nowhere and won't make the playoffs - they are fifteenth in the 15 team Western Conference now. Quenneville's new team, the Blackhawks, are young and skilled. They could go far. Surprisingly, the franchise of Bobby Hull, Stan Mikita and Glenn Hall has not won a Stanley Cup for 47 years - the longest drought in the NHL.

Denver's other best coach, Mike Shanahan, was released after an 8-8 season in which they lost a three game lead with three games to play - for the first time since division play began in 1967 - and missed the playoffs. Broncos fans will someday have to accept that the real "genius" or "mastermind," if you prefer, wore No. 7 on his uniform and played QB. Since Elway's retirement, the Shanahan-coached Broncos won but one playoff game. He made a lot of poor personnel decisions but was a decent coach with the players he gave himself.

He wanted to be all-powerful and that did not produce a third Super Bowl win. Jake Plummer took the Broncos to a 13-3 record in 2005 and a playoff win over two-time defending Super Bowl champions, the New England Patriots. The Broncos then lost the AFC championship game. In 2006, Plummer started 7-2 but then had two consecutive losses and that was the end of Plummer with the Broncos. Replaced by Jay Cutler, who went 2-3, the Broncos missed the playoffs.

Of the Broncos top ten salaries in 2008,

only two were players drafted by the Broncos - Jay Cutler and Ben Hamilton. Not even the most devoted Broncos fan probably knows that the highest paid Broncos player in 2008 was Dre' Bly, who pulled down \$10,400,000 - \$2 million more than next in line, Champ Bailey.

Amazing that two consistently successful coaches (Quenneville's teams have never had a losing season) were shown the door and two mediocre ones (Clint Hurdle and George Karl) hang around.

There are those who would argue that George Karl-coached teams have won over 900 games. Yes, and no team coached by George Karl has ever won the NBA championship. The Denver Nuggets will not change his luck. His teams have included some of the best NBA players in history. Allen Iverson was supposed to bring "The Answer" to Denver last season. He didn't. This season, it is Chauncey Billups who is supposed to take Karl further. He won't either. The Nuggets descent has begun.

Karl was a successful coach in the CBA. But not in the NBA. He's been fired by the Cleveland Cavaliers, Golden State Warriors and Milwaukee Bucks. He left the Seattle SuperSonics after that team was the first No. 1 seed in NBA history to lose a playoff series to the No. 8 seed.

George Karl has been an NBA head coach for 21 seasons. Of the 18 times he had the job at the end of the season, 17 times his team made the playoffs. He is in his 21st season now and he has been fired twice *during* the season. Only once has a Karl-coached NBA team missed making the playoffs. But, that's when his troubles begin. Of the 17 times a team coached by Karl reached the playoffs, that team lost in the first round ten times, in the conference semifinals four times, in the conference finals twice, and in the NBA finals once. His teams have lost in the first round of the playoffs for the past five seasons, including four with the Denver Nuggets. In his last eight seasons, his teams missed the playoffs once and were eliminated in the first round the other seven times.

And, Clint Hurdle? The one World Series appearance in 2007 may have secured him "for life" status as Shanahan had thought he had. But, with Don Baylor and Jim Tracy now coaches, the Brothers Monfort won't have to go far to get a replacement. Hurdle is good only at chomping bubble gum. Without Matt Holliday, Willie Taveras and Brian Fuentes, there is only one direction for the Rockies and it ain't up.

That 90 win season in 2007 was an aberration. The 4th and 5th place finishes all other years are not. Clint Hurdle has had the luxury of good attendance for mediocre records. That will end. And with the decline in attendance, wins and excitement, Clint Hurdle will have failed as a big league manager just as he did as a big league player.

Five of the Broncos highest paid players in 2008 have been released. And Cutler may be traded.