

Sports

Tougher punishment needed in Miami- FIU brawl case

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MCT WIRE SERVICE

PHILADELPHIA

It doesn't really matter what University of Miami administrators say or don't say right now about the job status of football coach Larry Coker.

Coker's gone. That was true even before Saturday's spectacle against Florida International. Coker already had lost the support of many former Hurricanes stars and probably had lost some of his current players — and he almost lost to Houston.

His fate now is obvious. We'll see what direction the school takes next, since the current Canes image is suddenly out of control again, and the quote of the year in college football came Saturday from the Comcast SportsNet Southeast cable TV booth.

"Now, that's what I'm talking about," Hurricanes football analyst and former Miami player Lamar Thomas said as the brawl raged. "You come into our house, you should get your behind kicked. You don't come into the OB (Orange Bowl) playing that stuff. You're across the ocean over there. You're across the city. ... I was about to go down the elevator to get in that thing."

The one-game punish-

ments handed out for 12 of the 13 suspended Miami players — one got an indefinite suspension — are inadequate. It doesn't help that the one game is against Duke, which has lost 17 straight Division I-A games. The outside world sees it like this: Miami itself isn't punished at all by these suspensions.

"This university will be firm and punish people who do bad things," Miami president Donna Shalala said. "But we will not throw any student under the bus for instant restoration of our image or our reputation. I will not hang them in a public square. I will not eliminate their participation at the university. I will not take away their scholarships."

Actually, she will, next time. Shalala announced on Tuesday that any athlete who fights during a game will be dismissed from the team. She called it a "new standard," referring to a "zero tolerance" policy.

"It's time for the feeding frenzy to stop," Shalala said. "These young men made a stupid, terrible, horrible mistake, and they are being punished."

There was plenty of room between one-game suspensions and getting rid of people. An NFL defensive lineman, Albert Haynesworth of

the Tennessee Titans, was recently suspended for five games for stomping on another player's head. Taking part in a near-riot must be worth a couple of games.

Coker said after the game that he had been concerned going in about the potential for trouble, given that many of the players on Florida International were local ones who hadn't been recruited by nearby Miami. Since his concern made sense, why did Miami schedule the game in the first place?

Long before Saturday's brawl, Coker had been trying to distance himself and the program from its chest-beating past. But if you want to break with tradition, you better win. Coker won a national title in 2001, and almost won another one in 2002, but those were with players inherited from the Butch Davis era.

One rumor had Butch Davis returning next year. But now Shalala and other decision-makers are in a real tight spot. A lot of fans wanted a return to the U vs. the World swagger the Canes used to bring. That's out, obviously. They need to find a coach who keeps his players out of brawls and out of jail, but doesn't completely alienate former greats. He also needs to win.

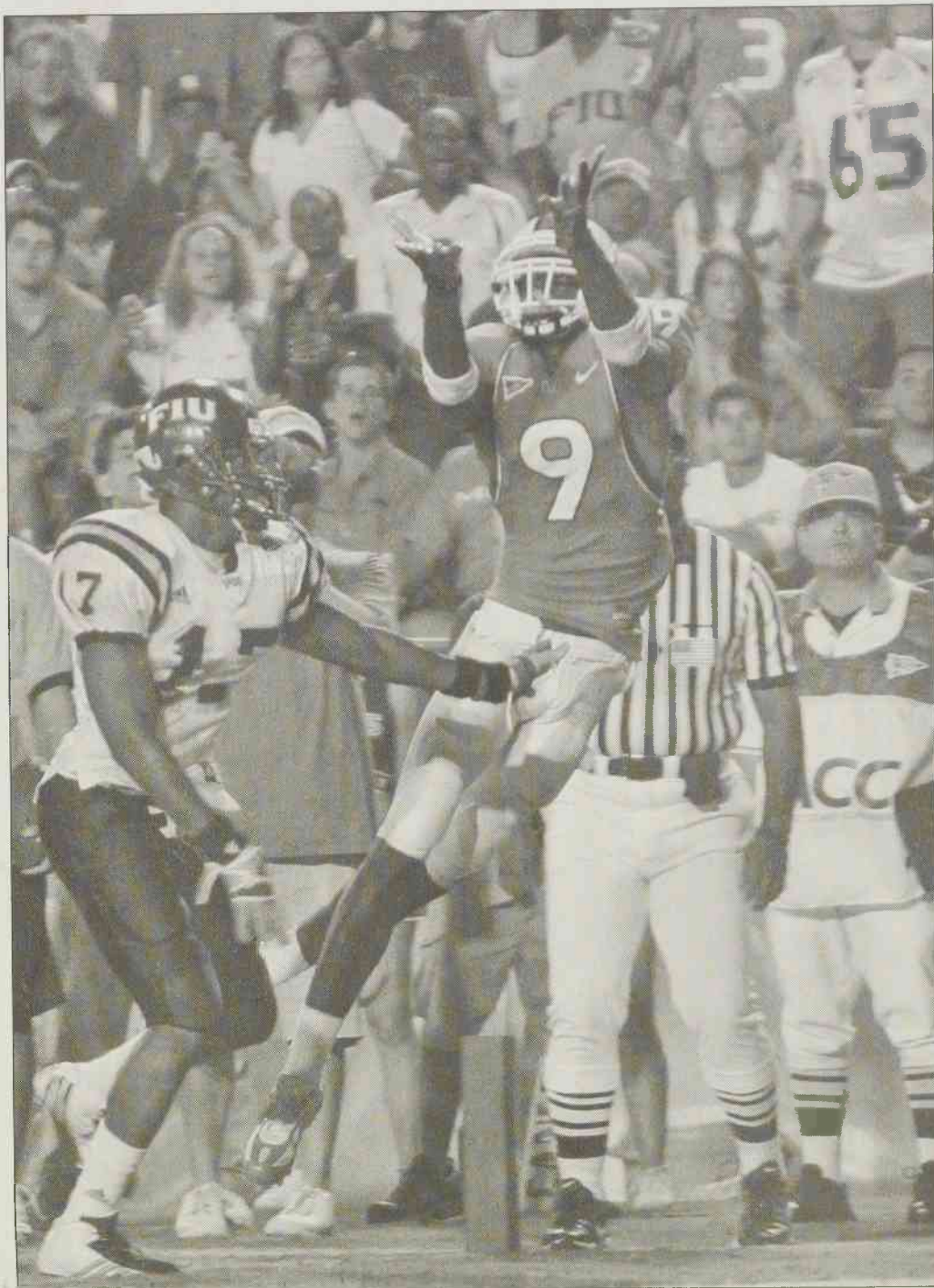


Photo courtesy of MCT Wire Service

Miami's Lance Leggett catches a Kyle Wright pass into the endzone for a touchdown as FIU's Robert Mitchell fails to defend as Miami beat Florida International 35-0 October 14 in Miami, Florida.

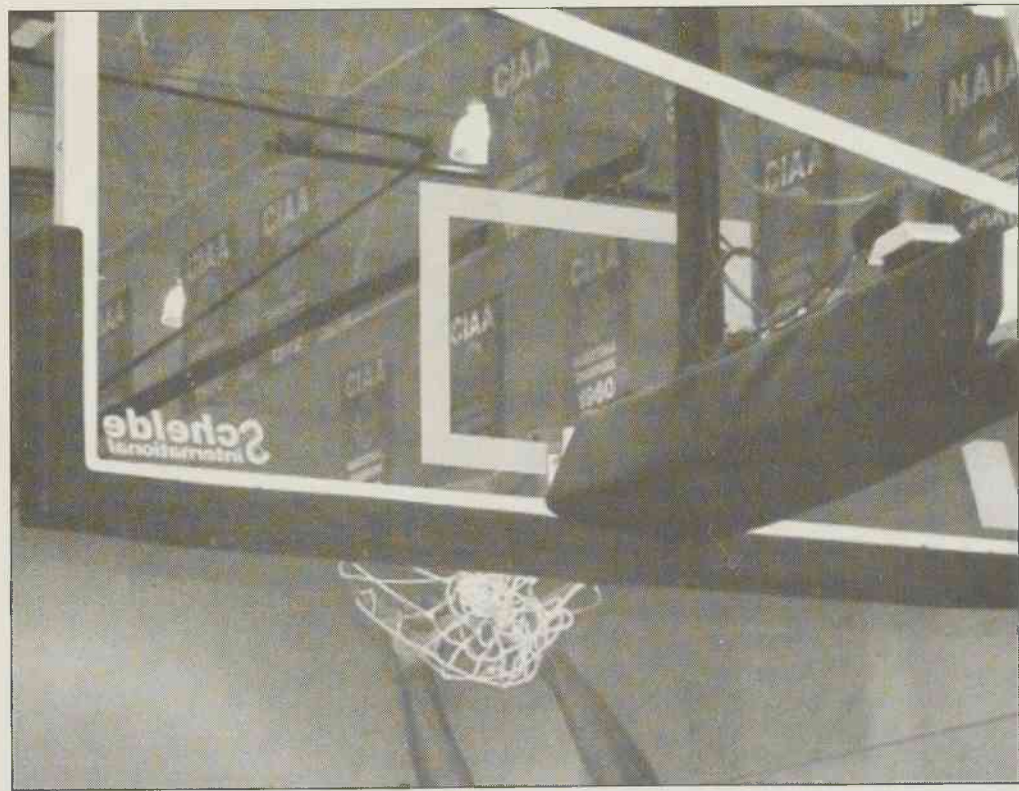


Photo by Sharrod Patterson

After years of playing in the CIAA the Rams will go into the MEAC.

Rams prepare for upcoming season

Steven J. Gaither
SPORTS EDITOR

On their second day of practice, the Rams basketball team opened up with the Lord's prayer. That's ironic, since no one else gives them a prayer this season because of their brutal schedule. The Rams will play 22 of their 27 games on the road.

"We've addressed the issue of being mentally tough," said new head coach Bobby Collins. "The way you get mentally tough is to stretch yourself, inside and outside of the classroom."

One tactic that Collins is using to instill toughness in his Rams is early practices. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the Rams will gather for practice at 5 a.m.

The Rams' first practice took place on Oct. 13. The practice was open to the public, as part of the Division I kickoff, and billed "Ram Madness." Collins says he was pleased by the fan support. He also said he was impressed at the effort the players gave, especially since it was pretty much just entertainment.

This season provides many challenges for the Rams. It is their first season in Division I, and they have a intense schedule. They only have five home games, and they will have to travel to play such national powers as Kansas, Georgetown, and Georgia Tech. They also changed coaches in the off-season, as Collins replaced the departed Phillip Stitt.

"He's a player's coach,"

said junior forward Darrell Wonge.

Collins said that although the players are smaller than he is accustomed to, he sees a lot of potential in this team. "Jamal Durham is an undersized post player that I'm going to have to depend on to carry the team early on," said Collins. Other players he said he was depending on to carry the load offensively were Wonge and guard Roy Peake.

Collins knows that the Rams have a tough road ahead. He said that a successful season for the Rams would be going .500 on the road. "No one expects us to (go above .500) because of the type of teams we are playing, but I really want to go above .500."

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