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Roosevelt girls' coach Resler ousted

No new contract for 'Heart of the Game' subject

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P-I STAFF

Roosevelt High School girls' basketball coach Bill Resler, who was a star of the documentary "The Heart of the Game" and featured in two recent Nike commercials, was told Friday he was being let go - three days before the season's first practice.

Resler said he was given a document in a meeting with Roosevelt principal Brian Vance and athletic director Michael Scott stating the school was going in a different direction with the girls' basketball program.

"I've been coaching at Roosevelt for nine years," he said. "We've won an average of 22 games each season, been to state six times, won KingCo five times and have a (4A) state title. My getting fired certainly isn't about Xs and Os, but the administration feels I'm so reprehensible that I shouldn't coach."

Seattle School District spokesman David Tucker said there is no pending investigation of Resler.

"His contract was not renewed," Tucker said. "We have a new principal at Roosevelt and he felt he wanted the girls' basketball program to go in a different direction."

A University of Washington tax professor by day, Resler has consistently drawn criticism from a few parents. In a March 2006 contract with the Roosevelt Basketball Alliance, parents requested he not use derogatory language around his players and requested that he not drink on summer basketball trips. Parents also complained he did not punish players who used foul language.

Resler, 62, has said he never drank alcohol around his players and only once shared bottles of wine with parents on a basketball trip. He insists he's done nothing wrong and is disappointed school officials wouldn't give a specific reason for why he's being let go -- though he suspects influence of a few parents played a role in his dismissal.

Resler drew praise and was made famous in "The Heart of the Game" for teaching "all-out aggression" with animal themes meant to foster players' development. He also wrote a book, "The Heart of the Team," with P-I reporter Casey McNerthney.

"It's sad because he's been there forever," said Darnellia Russell, the star player in "The Heart of the Game." "Everybody knows what he did for me."

Resler fought to keep Russell in school, and used her love of basketball as a motivator. When she became

pregnant during high school, he and others fought the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association for her fifth year of athletic eligibility, claiming Russell's pregnancy was a hardship.

Russell, who dropped out of North Seattle Community College, said she hadn't seen Resler in several months.

Emily Watson, a 2001 graduate, said she was among dozens of former players who called Friday to support Resler -- who came home to a tree covered in toilet paper and a poster that read "We love you."

"I don't know how they're going to find someone more dedicated to the team," said Watson, adding she did not know details of the current situation.

Assistant coach Chris Nefcy said Friday he and fellow assistant Meghan Miller, who played for Resler as a student, did not plan to attend practice Monday.

"Why didn't they fire me two months ago?" Resler said Friday.

"It's certainly not fair to the kids."

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