



Subscribe Now | Pay Bill | Place an Ad | Contact Customer Service | Contact The Detroit News

RSS | Email Newsletters | PDA

Search bar with 'shopLocal.com' logo and archive links: Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun | Mon | Today

Home News Local Sports Autos Business Entertainment Lifestyle Opinion Classifieds Jobs Cars Real Estate For Rent Shopping Editorial Columnists Editorial Cartoons Blogs Forums Cybersurveys

Columnists

Columnists RSS Feed Email Headlines Text Alerts On Your PDA



Article Tools: Print Email Comment Text Size: [font icons] Save Share

Thursday, March 6, 2008

Bob Wojnowski:

Low-key exit suits Watson



DETROIT -- He started to think it was time when he buried three of his old high school classmates last December, and when his body began sending him warnings. He started to think it was time when he realized the game had changed, that the focus of young players had shifted and his message didn't always get through.

In many ways, Perry Watson was a coach from a different time, when Detroit high school basketball was among the best, when University of Detroit Mercy basketball was all about possibilities. Many -- although not all -- of those possibilities were realized as Watson rebuilt the UDM program, posting nine straight winning seasons from 1996-2004.

On the day he stepped away, he felt no somberness, and no regrets.

"I'm not sad at all," Watson, 57, said Wednesday as he retired after 15 seasons as Detroit's head coach. "It's a happy day.

I look forward to retirement, but that doesn't mean I sit in a rocking chair. I just think you get to a certain point in life and you say, 'What else can I do? What other type of contribution can I make to young people or to society?' I might have done as much as I can as a basketball coach, because people are taking basketball the wrong way."

Advertisement

Advertisement: Find Foreclosures! Get great deals in your neighborhood! SEARCH NOW! RealtyTrac

That's not a knock on anyone, Watson wanted to be clear. It's just his observation, that it got harder to preach teamwork and graduation rates as more kids (and parents) grew more concerned about playing time and pro possibilities.

Something to build on

This is the end of an era, although it shouldn't be the end for UDM's program, which needs to take the best of what Watson did and update it. Associate head coach Kevin Mondro did an admirable job keeping the team together after Watson took a medical leave on Jan. 7 and didn't return. The Titans were partly doomed by injuries and finished 7-23, capping an 18-42 two-year stretch.

After nearly three decades as a Detroit basketball icon, Watson exited quietly, strangely, with a simple, glowing

statement from the school. The low-key departure was fine with Watson, who wasn't much into flash, even when he was taking Detroit Southwestern to nine Class A championship games, winning two, while compiling a 302-34 record from 1978-91.

Watson followed with a whirlwind and controversial two years with the Fab Five at Michigan, and then 15 mostly successful seasons at Detroit, in his beloved hometown. He preached defense and grinding toughness, and for a long time it worked.

The Titans were 258-185, including back-to-back NCAA Tournament appearances in 1998 and '99, when they beat St. John's and UCLA.

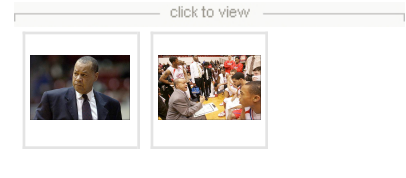
Those were heady times, conjuring memories of the program jump-started in 1973 by Dick Vitale, a program that went mostly dormant until Watson's arrival in 1993. But once the misfortune started piling up for the Titans the last four seasons, it was hard to stop.

And Watson knew it was time to go.

"I'm not bitter, but we got undone by injuries," said Watson, whose team finished this season without its top guards, Jon Goode and Woody Payne. "It wasn't a hard decision because I never considered myself a basketball coach as much as an



Perry Watson led Detroit Mercy to two NCAA Tournament appearances, but none since 1999. (Steve Perez/The Detroit News)



Previous Columns from Bob Wojnowski

- Save the Tigers - 03/07/2008
Low-key exit suits Watson - 03/06/2008
Spartans must run if they want to win - 03/03/2008
Sheffield: Tigers' lineup beats '06 Yankees - 03/01/2008
Lions must ride it out with Rogers - 02/27/2008
Read more from Wojo
Get Wojo's columns by RSS

Most Popular

Most Read E-Mailed Printed

- Ex-clerk: Detroit mayor's wife hit dancer, report said
Tigers' Cabrera gets timing down
Madonna lights way for Hall of Fame's Class of 2008
Ford offers dealers buyouts
Mayor bolsters legal defense team
After the golden years
Air race to roar over Detroit River
Tough home tests await for Pistons
Surging oil prices bad news for drivers
Bell approves a one-year deal with Lions

educator. My commitment was to young people, and I just happened to use basketball."

Basketball is a sport that can use people too. As summer AAU leagues became a bigger influence, Watson said he found kids more interested in honing their individual games.

Watson could be stubborn, reluctant to embrace those changes, to pump up his offense. He didn't recruit as well, and the best players in Detroit were gobbled up by bigger programs.

"Dealing with young people now, it's a lot different," Watson said. "I don't know if kids have changed that much or if it's the parents. In the last few years, when I started talking about education, they changed the subject -- 'Could my kid start? How many minutes will he play? Will he go to the pros?' "

Watson seemed less willing to play the rugged recruiting game. He also felt it was time to address his own health concerns, issues he declined to specify except to say they're precautionary, not major.

Lives touched

Watson molded many, starting with his days at Southwestern when he coached future NBA players such as Jalen Rose, Howard Easley and Voshon Lenard, many of whom still call or visit. He was always willing to fight for his program and his hometown, but Watson admits he grew tired of some elements of the job.

He said when he watched the retirement of Michigan's Lloyd Carr, he completely understood. You pour as much as you can into something, until there's not much left to pour.

"Next to my father, Coach Watson is the most influential person in my life," said Mondro, a former UDM player who has diligently climbed the ranks and would love to be considered for the job. "The guy was so committed to the program, driven for so long, he needs time to enjoy life."

There were other coaching opportunities a decade ago but Watson never wanted to leave Detroit. He has no plans and doubts he'll coach again.

"If I do, it won't be at the Division I level," he said. "I don't know what's next for me. I'll see what excites me. I love basketball, but I've never been one to allow others to define what I'm about."

It's a definition muddled by some, embraced by others. Ultimately, it comes from the young people he influenced more than the games he won or lost. That's how teachers are judged, and that suits him just fine.

You can reach Bob Wojnowski at bob.wojnowski@detnews.com

Article Tools: [Print](#) [Email](#) [Comment](#)

In the Blogs...

Politics Blog



Jeffrey Hadden: Holding an honest election with results that can be trusted shouldn't be that tough. But Michigan Democrats, with help from their national party, have made a hash of ... [Continued](#)

Tuned In: TV Blog

Mekeisha Madden Toby: David Simon and company wrapped up the world we knew as "The Wire" very nicely last night. My favorite touch was the circuitous nature of life in B-More. Mike became ... [Continued](#)



Terry Foster's Blog



Terry Foster: It sounds like we missed one of the all-time great hockey games when Orchard Lake St. Mary's and Marquette shared the Division I prep hockey title after eight overtimes ... [Continued](#)

[More blogs](#)

MORE IN: COLUMNISTS

[Manny Lopez:: Rebound for Big 3? Not likely this year - 03/06/2008](#)

[Bob Wojnowski:: Low-key exit suits Watson - 03/06/2008](#)

[Neil Winton: Geneva Motor Show overview: Ford Fiesta is the star of the show - 03/06/2008](#)

[Mekeisha Madden Toby: Tuned in: TV season shapes up after writers strike - 03/06/2008](#)

[John McCormick:: Consumers react as the high price of gas starts to sink in - 03/06/2008](#)

[Molly Abraham:: Golden Gate builds on the Indian buffet craze - 03/06/2008](#)

[Dave Dye: Michigan State: Future Spartans help Dantonio build momentum - 03/06/2008](#)

[Eric Lacy: Michigan: Will U-M's watershed win finally come vs. Purdue? - 03/06/2008](#)

[Laura Berman:: Berman: Hillary's women rally to her cause - 03/06/2008](#)

[Tom Greenwood:: One driver may spur 'shockwave' jams - 03/06/2008](#)

[Marney Rich Keenan:: Spring in Michigan is worth the wait - 03/06/2008](#)

[Kate Lawson: Simply the best: Put your spoon in this old classic - 03/06/2008](#)

Site Index

[Essentials:](#) [News:](#) [Autos:](#) [Sports:](#) [Entertainment:](#) [Forums:](#) [Lifestyle:](#)

Special Reports

- Home
- Page One PDF
- Sports PDF
- Weather
- Horoscope
- Lottery
- Crossword
- Sudoku
- Contact Us
- Multimedia:**
- Photos/Video
- News Photos
- Autos Photos
- Audio Galleries
- Video
- Photo Store
- Nation/World
- Politics/Govt.
- Elections
- Religion
- Local/State:**
- Metro/State
- Wayne
- Oakland
- Macomb
- Livingston
- Commuting
- Schools
- Michigan History
- Obituaries
- Death Notices
- Autos Insider
- Drive
- Joyrides
- Auto Shows
- Auto Reviews
- Auto Photos
- Autos Talk
- Test Drive blog
- Business:**
- Business News
- Personal Finance
- Stocks
- Technology
- Sports
- Lions/NFL
- Pistons/NBA
- Red Wings/NHL
- Tigers/MLB
- Shock/WNBA
- MSU
- U-M
- More Colleges
- High Schools
- Golf
- Motor Sports
- More Sports
- Ski Guide
- Scoreboards
- Entertainment
- Music
- Calendar
- Movies
- Movie Finder
- TV Listings
- TV/Radio
- Restaurants
- Wine Report
- Celebs
- Performing Arts
- Casinos
- Puzzles/Games
- Forums Index
- Lions Talk
- Wings Talk
- Pistons Talk
- Tigers Talk
- Ask Mike O'Hara
- Big Ten Talk
- News Talk
- Autos Talk
- Faith Talk
- Opinions:**
- Editorials
- Letter to Editor
- Blogs
- Columnists
- Cybersurveys
- Lifestyle
- Homestyle
- Food
- Recipe Finder
- Health/Fitness
- Fashion/Shopping
- Families/Parenting
- Travel/Recreation
- MichMoms
- MichDads
- Other**
- Special Reports



Michigan never forgets its favorite celebrity bad girl

Madonna might belong to the world now, but we had her first in Michigan. On March 10, 2008 -- 25 years after the release of her first album -- our own Material Girl will be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. - Feb. 28, 2008

© Copyright 2008 The Detroit News. All rights reserved.

[Terms of Service](#) | [Contact](#) | [Help](#)

Special report: Detroit's mayor under fire - Jan. 24, 2008

Special report: The foreclosure factory - Nov. 26, 2007

April 15 and you: Help with figuring out your taxes - Jan. 31, 2008

Special Report: Restoring the glory - Feb. 8, 2007

More Special Reports