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UDM's Watson honored at emotional farewell dinner

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A crowd of more than 240 gathered Monday at the Detroit Golf Club to honor former Detroit Mercy basketball coach Perry Watson.

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And after the season-ending awards were given to the UDM players, Watson's childhood friends, former players, UDM staff and fans were among the many to pay tribute to the man whose 30-year career officially ended last week when he retired.

Interim head coach Kevin Mondro and Horizon League commissioner Jonathan B. LeCrone were among the many to pay emotional tribute and present gifts to Watson, who began his career at Detroit Southwestern in the late '70s.

"I can never tell you how much you meant to this league," LeCrone said through teary eyes.

There was video montage of highlights of some of Watson's biggest victories -- NCAA tournament triumphs over UCLA and St. John's in the late '90s.

Watson graciously accepted the gifts and had special thanks for many -- including the current players who suffered through an injury-filled 7-23 season.

Watson, who missed the last 16 games after taking a medical leave of absence midway through the season, hinted he was leaving while he is still relatively in good health.

He also was critical of the state of recruiting. When he first started, education was the focus of home visits. Nowadays, the focus is how many shots a recruit will get. He playfully joked with his wife, Deborah, sitting at the front table and he ended with a forceful endorsement of Mondro for the top job.

"I would consider any insight he could offer helpful," athletic director Keri Gaither said afterward.


She declined to give a timetable on the hire or say who has contacted UDM about the job.

NOTEBOOK: Despite media speculation that he would be a candidate for the UDM job, Tennessee assistant **Tony Jones** told the Free Press on Monday he wasn't interested. Despite his Detroit ties, Jones could have opportunities at other Division I schools.

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