Lavery Responds To Firing Criticism

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Concerned with the spread of more rumors in the wake of the firing of head coach Jimmy Sharpe, Lavery responds to the firing of athletic director Frank Moseley. President William E. Lavery said he wants to get the facts straight with Tech students.

In an interview with the Collegiate Times at his home Sunday, Lavery confronted the four main issues which he said are apparently bothering the students.

First, Lavery said that the decision to fire Sharpe was his alone.

"I did not base my decision on any alumni pressure. There are no alumni who are going to buy up Coach Sharpe's contract, and we had no fear that Lane Stadium funding would be withheld," he said.

Second, Lavery said the decision had been arrived at after many months of evaluation and discussion, and that the final decision was not made until last weekend.

"We did meet with Coach Sharpe and others in the Athletic Association (AA) as far back as April to discuss certain concerns. We also met and discussed the situation twice in August, once with Coach Sharpe and members of the AA, and once with Coach Sharpe alone," Lavery would not elaborate on what these concerns were, but he did say the others in the discussion were members of the AA board, Student Aid Association board, Alumni Association, and some students.

Third, Lavery said that before the Kentucky game he was asked by Sharpe to meet with the team to clear up rumors circulating at the time. These rumors involved not only Sharpe, but also concerned engineering technology, and the auditing of Tech airplanes.

"I can't believe what I said at the Kentucky meeting was misleading," he said.

He said he made no direct statement insuring Sharpe's job, only that no decision had been made either way at the time, and that therefore rumors contrary to this were false.

"The players did not know Coach Sharpe had asked me to come and speak to them so that might have something to do with the way they interpreted my statement," he said.

Fourth, Lavery said he did not know how the question of image has become such a big issue.

"I did not make image a major factor in the decision, and how it got to be such a big issue I don't know," he said.

Lavery said when he told Sharpe of his firing he may have mentioned image and that Sharpe apparently told his players about it. But he did not go into specifics with Sharpe, and it was not a major factor.

"Image was only an overlying factor of many of the primary concerns I had in making the decision," he said.

Asked if the drinking incident would be an example of the image problem, he said "certainly one drinking incident was not a major factor in the decision."

"I can think of a list of about 10 areas of concern rather than one major factor, and these concerns were evaluated and discussed over several months," he said.

He said for the protection of Sharpe and the university, he saw no need to go into details.

On other issues, Lavery said Moseley had not been forced to retire and the new athletic director would have sole responsibility for choosing a new coach.

Also, Sharpe had not been asked to resign to ensure the security of his assistant coaches as some papers had reported.

He said Moseley asked to retire because he had been considering retiring for several years, and that it would be a good time to step down and let a new athletic director choose the new head coach.

Lavery said although the committee which is picking the new athletic director is also screening applicants for the head coaching job, it is just to save some time, and that the new athletic director could come up with a name of his own rather than one from their list.

He said Sharpe had been asked to resign because it might help him in the future endeavors to have resigned rather than to have been fired. He also said the assistant coaches would be carried until they get a new job, or until June 30, whichever comes first.

Lavery said he was obviously well aware of the close relationship between the players and Sharpe. "I heard what the players were saying (referring to the threats of quitting), but it couldn't sway the decision that had to be made."

"I'm extremely optimistic about some of the names that are coming in for both jobs, and I'm sure the right person can pull it off so we don't see any downgrading in our program.

Although Lavery would not say who any of the potential candidates were, he did comment on the rumors of some of the big names mentioned like Ara Parseghian, formerly of Notre Dame and now an ABC announcer.

"All of the big names are worth checking into, but the likelihood of people who have already established such a reputation coming in here and starting all over again is slim. However, we believe we have an attractive opportunity for someone to build their own reputation.

Lavery said the decision to fire Sharpe was a no win type of decision, meaning it would have received criticism either way.

(See Sharpe's viewpoint on the firing on Page 8.)