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Morissette steps down as Rivier hoops coach

By TOM KING

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NASHUA - Shock waves rang through Rivier University on Monday as longtime Raiders men's basketball coach Dave Morissette announced he was stepping down, effective immediately.

Morissette, who was early into his 18th season at the helm, told The Telegraph he is leaving to take a job in the private sector that will allow him to spend more time with his family and watch his sons Cody and Joshua play sports.

Rivier athletic director Joanne Merrill said that current men's assistant and Rivier/Nashua North alum Lance Bisson will take over as interim head coach for the remainder of the season. Morissette and Merrill met with the players late Monday afternoon.

"This has nothing to do with the team won-loss, the school, the players," Morissette said. "It's a family decision. I just want to be a dad."

Cody Morissette is a three-sport athlete at Exeter High School, and, according to his father, is already being heavily recruited for baseball. Joshua, meanwhile, is a junior high athlete, also in Exeter, where the family resides.

Thus, it's not too surprising that Morissette would eventually step down after 17 full seasons of men's basketball and seven women's softball campaigns. But the timing is surprising.

"An opportunity (for a private sector job) came along and I couldn't pass it up," he said. "It's been my desire the last couple of years to not work nights and weekends. I wanted to make sure, give it another chance when Oct. 15 came around. ... But it's not about me anymore. It's about my family."

"It's the end of an era," Merrill said of Morissette, who compiled a 173-273 mark in his 17-plus seasons after taking over for the school's first-ever men's basketball coach, Jim Domoracki, in 1997. "I said to Dave that things happen for a reason. It's kind of a challenge all around for everybody."

"It (his tenure) has been a whole generation. It's bittersweet. I'm happy for him, happy for his family. But he saw the big picture of the whole department. You're losing a piece of history."

Morissette was also the school's assistant athletic director, third in the hierarchy behind Merrill and associate AD Craig Kolek. His best basketball season by far was a team that included Bisson - the 2006-07 team that went 20-9, won the Great Northeast Athletic Conference title and went on to lose to Keene State in the program's only NCAA Division III

tournament appearance. His 2008-09 team went 16-13 and was the runnerup in the ECAC New England tourney. He had a stretch of 13-straight conference tournament appearances and was the New Hampshire Division III Coach of the Year in 2008 and '09.

Morissette, who was a standout at Manchester Central High School and Plymouth State College, also was the head coach at Notre Dame College in Manchester before taking the Rivier job.

Morissette also served two separate stints as Raiders softball coach, his best season coming in 2011 with a 26-15 record, conference title game appearance and ECAC tourney bid.

Bisson, Merrill said, will coach through the end of the season, after which the job will be opened up. The rebuilding Raiders have begun the year 0-5 after going a program worst 4-21 finish last year.

"We have to open it up whenever there's a change," she said. "You want to see what direction you want to go in. Lance, though, has the right mindset, he was one of the best players we ever had (graduated in 2009) and I'm all in for him."

Merrill said she still needs to iron out the details for an interim softball coach, and also figure out what to do with the assistant AD position.

"We'll take a breath for now and figure out whether we want to re-organize or not," she said.

Meanwhile, Morissette says he's leaving a job and a school he loves.

"I love this place, I put my heart and soul into it and I believe in it," he said. "I love Nashua, I love Rivier. Met a lot of great people, a lot of great kids and I have great respect for Joanne Merrill, Craig Kolek, everyone."

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