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Mutiny on the Bounty Hockey Panthers Call for Currie to Quit

By Kent Driscoll

In an eventful week of off-ice action, all 22 of the UPEI hockey Panthers requested the resignation of Head Coach Doug Currie three times during the week of January 13.

Team Captain Todd Walker cited irreconcilable differences between the team and the coach, as well as a fundamental lack of respect from Currie towards the players. The feelings of the team were summed up by one hockey Panther: "he doesn't treat us like people." The Panthers refused to comment on the specific nature of the problems.

The response of the university administration has been to back Coach Currie during his troubles with the team. According to UPEI Athletic Director Barb Mullally, "we have to respect due process, fairness to all sides and the contract we have with Coach Currie." Mullally also stated in a later interview that "the players do not pick the coach."

According to Mullally, this is the first discontent of which she has heard, and also went on to discuss Currie's player evaluations. It is the practice of UPEI Athletics to have their players evaluate the coach at the end of the season, much like students do for professors. Upon the onset of this crisis, Mullally looked over last year's evaluations of Currie, which were filled out by his players, and characterized them as "outstand-

ing". Mullally and UPEI President Elizabeth Epperly stated on CBC's Compass that they believe these problems to be a response to rumours that Currie was considering applying for the head coach position at Acadia.

The players have stated that the problems go back as far as September 1995, when Doug Currie replaced Billy MacMillian as the head coach. Todd Walker stated on behalf of the team that "the Acadia situation was just the straw that broke the camel's back."

During the Compass interview, Epperly stated, "the players were upset at the possibility of losing their coach." This is inconsistent with statements made by the players, who had previously asked Currie to resign three times. As one hockey fan put it, "when you are afraid of losing someone, you don't try to make him quit." Dr. Epperly was not available for rebuttal nor comment at press time.

Another issue with the Acadia head coaching situation is the validity of the rumour. According to Mullally, the rumour was "completely false," and Currie himself added that he was quoted out of context. When questioned about the context of the quotes, and the truth of the rumour, John McNeil, Sports Writer for the *Halifax Daily News*

and the author of the articles in question responded, "what I wrote is what they said."

The quotes in question were made by Currie's wife, Stephanie, who, when asked about whether Currie was considering applying for the Acadia job, reportedly responded, "it's true. He's excited and I'm certainly excited for him. You never know. We look forward to finding out."

McNeil also reports that during a lengthy conversation, the Panther coach mused about how simple it would be to switch his recruiting at this point, by quipping "that fax that I sent, throw it in the garbage. There's a new one coming in. It's not a P, it's an A." According to MacNeil,

Currie also added, "I can pick up and leave... but it's not exactly an easy decision."

Currie later stated to Charlottetown's *Guardian* that "I'm not going anywhere. It's ridiculous. I haven't applied." Mullally confirms that statement by saying, "according to [Acadia Hockey Chair] Don Wells, Doug Currie never applied for the position, and the deadline was Friday the 17th."

The Panthers have taken a blast from the Charlottetown media for not revealing the facts surrounding their displeasure with Currie. According to one local columnist, the Panthers were "a bunch of crybabies". By not describ-

ing in detail to any media outlet the nature of their problems with Currie, the Panthers are now receiving much of the pressure that was originally falling upon him. Also, due to his silence and due to the defence of the University, Currie is now avoiding much of the original criticism he received.

The burden of proof has been placed upon the shoulders of the Panthers. When questioned about this, team member Clarke Trolley stated, "all we want to do now is make the playoffs. At this point, we are playing for the students, the university, the fans, the community and Prince Edward Island. The rest of this can come out at a later date."

