

Penn State shaken after Wednesday night firing of Paterno

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 10 November 2011 12:42

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. (AP) — After nearly a half-century on the job, Joe Paterno says he is still getting used to the idea of not being Penn State's football coach. So is the rest of the shaken campus, after one of the most tumultuous days in its history.

In less than 24 hours Wednesday, the winningest coach in major college football announced his retirement at the end of the season — then was abruptly fired by the board of trustees.

Also ousted was Penn State President Graham Spanier — one of the longest-serving college presidents in the nation — as the university's board of trustees tried to limit the damage to the school's reputation from a child sex abuse scandal involving one of Paterno's former assistant coaches.

Paterno's firing sent angry students into the streets, where they shouted support for the 84-year-old coach and tipped over a news van.

In less than a week since former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky was charged with sexually assaulting eight boys over a 15-year period, the scandal has claimed Penn State's storied coach, its president, its athletic director and a vice president.

"Right now, I'm not the football coach. And I've got to get used to that. After 61 years, I've got to get used to it," Paterno said outside his house late Wednesday night. "Let me think it through."

Paterno had wanted to finish out his 46th season — Saturday's game against Nebraska is the last at home — but the board of trustees was clearly fed up with the scandal's fallout.

"In our view, we thought change now was necessary," board vice chairman John Surma said at a packed news conference where he announced the unanimous decision to oust Paterno and Spanier.

Defensive coordinator Tom Bradley will serve as interim coach, and the university scheduled a news conference with him for later Thursday. Provost Rodney Erickson will be the interim

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school president.

"I take this job with very mixed emotions due to the situation," Bradley said at a news conference Thursday morning. "I have been asked by the board of trustees to handle this. I told them I would do it last night. I will proceed in a matter that Penn State expects."

He also said: "I have no reservations about taking this job."

Bradley said he called Paterno after the firings last night but declined to divulge what was said.

"I think that's personal in nature," he said.

However, when asked, he was clear about his admiration of and devotion to the man he is replacing for the time being.

"Coach Paterno has meant more to me than anybody except my father. I don't want to get emotional talking about that," Bradley said. "Coach Paterno will go down in history as one of the greatest men, who maybe most of you know as a great football coach. I've had the privilege and the honor to work for him, spend time with him. He's had such dynamic impact on so many, so many, I'll say it again, so many people and players' lives."

He added: "It's with great respect that I speak of him and I'm proud to say that I worked for him."

As word of the firings spread, thousands of students flocked to the administration building, shouting, "We want Joe back!" and "One more game!" They then headed downtown to Beaver Avenue, where about 100 police wearing helmets and carrying pepper spray were on standby. Witnesses said some rocks and bottles were thrown, a lamppost was toppled and a news van was knocked over, its windows kicked out.

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State College police said early Thursday they were still gathering information on any possible arrests.

Paterno had come under increasing criticism — including from within the community known as Happy Valley — for not doing more to stop the alleged abuse by Sandusky.

Some of the assaults took place at the Penn State football complex, including a 2002 incident witnessed by then-graduate assistant and current assistant coach Mike McQueary.

McQueary went to Paterno and reported seeing Sandusky assaulting a young boy in the Penn State showers. Paterno notified the athletic director, Tim Curley, and a vice president, Gary Schultz, who in turn notified Spanier.

Curley and Schultz have been charged with failing to report the incident to authorities. Pennsylvania Attorney General Linda Kelly has not ruled out charges against Spanier.

Paterno is not a target of the criminal investigation, but the state police commissioner called his failure to contact police himself a lapse in "moral responsibility."

Paterno said in his statement earlier Wednesday that he was "absolutely devastated" by the abuse case.

"This is a tragedy," Paterno said. "It is one of the great sorrows of my life. With the benefit of hindsight, I wish I had done more."

The Penn State trustees had already said they would appoint a committee to investigate the "circumstances" that resulted in the indictment of Sandusky, and of Curley and Schultz. The committee will be appointed Friday at the board's regular meeting, which Gov. Tom Corbett said he plans to attend, and will examine "what failures occurred and who is responsible and what measures are necessary to ensure" similar mistakes aren't made in the future.

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In Washington, the U.S. Department of Education said it has launched an investigation into whether Penn State failed to report incidents of sexual abuse on campus, as required by federal law.

Surma said it was "in the best interest of the university to have a change in leadership to deal with the difficult issues that we are facing."

"The past several days have been absolutely terrible for the entire Penn State community.

"But the outrage that we feel is nothing compared to the physical and psychological suffering that allegedly took place," he added.

Sandusky, who announced his retirement from Penn State in June 1999, maintained his innocence through his lawyer. Curley has taken a temporary leave and Schultz has decided to step down. They also say they are innocent.

Sandusky founded The Second Mile charity in 1977, working with at-risk youths. It now raises and spends several million dollars each year for its programs. Paterno is listed on The Second Mile's website as a member of its honorary board of directors, a group that includes business executives, golfing great Arnold Palmer and several NFL Hall of Famers and coaches, including retired

Pittsburgh Steelers stars Jack Ham and Franco Harris.

The ouster of the man affectionately known as "JoePa" brings to an end one of the most storied coaching careers — not just in college football but in all of sports. Paterno has 409 victories — a record for major college football — won two national titles and guided five teams to unbeaten, untied seasons. He reached 300 wins faster than any other coach.

Penn State is 8-1 this year, with its only loss to powerhouse Alabama. The Nittany Lions are No.

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12 in The Associated Press poll.

After 19th-ranked Nebraska, Penn State plays at Ohio State and at No. 16 Wisconsin, both Big Ten rivals.

It has a chance to play in the Big Ten championship game Dec. 3 in Indianapolis, with a Rose Bowl bid on the line.

Paterno has raised millions of dollars for Penn State in his career, and elevated the stature of what was once a sleepy land-grant school.

Asked why he was fired over the phone, Surma said, "We were unable to find a way to do that in person without causing further distraction."

At Paterno's house, his wife, Sue, was teary-eyed as she blew kisses to the 100 or so students who gathered on the lawn in a show of support.

"You're all so sweet. And I guess we have to go beat Nebraska without being there," she said. "We love you all. Go Penn State."