

It's all on Dave Hart

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Now the spotlight shines on Tennessee Athletics Director Dave Hart. He will be the person most responsible for trying to stop the bleeding on the Hill.

Hart will decide the immediate future of Big Orange football. He will choose Derek Dooley's successor.

Hart's past record is pretty thin when it comes to hiring head football coaches. He hired three head coaches while a young AD at East Carolina. He hired Bill Lewis, who had two .500-type seasons before going 11-1 the third season. That bought Lewis a ticket to Georgia Tech.

Hart then hired Steve Logan, who had some success during his tenure there from 1992-2002. Today, Logan is out of coaching and doing a sports talk show in the Raleigh, N.C. area.

Hart later became AD at Florida State, where legendary Bobby Bowden was the head coach. Bowden hired Jimbo Fisher as FSU's offensive coordinator and Fisher was promoted to head coach upon Bowden's forced retirement. By that time Hart was working under AD Hootie Ingram in Alabama's athletics department.

The man who played basketball for C.M. Newton at Alabama, Hart will be hiring Tennessee's fourth head football coach in the past six years.

Hart wanted to see Dooley succeed, as did many Vols fans. I covered his father, Vince, at Georgia. Dooley's mother, Barbara, is one of the all-time great first ladies of Georgia football.

It's uncomfortable to see coaches get fired. Yes, they earn a lot of money at the top level, but as Hart said, Dooley is not unlike many families. He has a wife and children and losing a job this time of year makes it even tougher.

Perhaps Dooley will give thanks Thursday that he has been rescued from the sinking ship that Tennessee has become.

I think Hart probably wanted to keep Dooley, but Dooley gave him no ammunition to convince the administration and Vol Nation.

Dooley exited with class. He fulfilled his obligation to do his Sunday TV show after the Vanderbilt game. Talk about a horror film.

Hart now moves forward. The list of possible replacement presented in various mediums, isn't all that attractive.

While former Louisville and Arkansas coach Bobby Petrino is arguably the best coach, his character flaws off the field should prohibit Hart from hiring him.

If I were Hart, I would test the waters with UCLA coach Jim Mora Jr. Even though his father coached at UCLA and Jim Jr. grew up around the program, its facilities rank as one of the worst in the Pac 10 and the school can't afford to pay Mora what Tennessee can. His team just bounced preseason No. 1 and crosstown rival Southern Cal.

The other suspects are out there. You've seen the names. You can mark Jon Gruden off your wish list. Gruden is an NFL guy. He would have no interest in baby-sitting college players and I can't see him beg some high school Harry to come to Tennessee. Plus, that NCAA 20-hour rule that limits coaches to 20 hours a week with the players, would be in the books by Tuesday morning.

No, Hart will find his man on his own. I doubt he will eavesdrop on radio sports talk shows to compile his list. Believe me, that list has been under lock and key for quite some time now.

Hart knows what he is looking for. The trick is that two parties have to be looking for the same thing.

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