SPORTS

BOYS SWIMMING AND DIVING

Board ends Dawnn Taylor's coaching contract

New head coach sought at FHS

BY KEVIN BONESKE
Sports Editor

It's now official – Dawnn Taylor is out as head coach of the International Falls boys swimming and diving team.

At a special meeting Wednesday, six of the seven Falls School Board members voted to terminate Taylor's coaching contract following an open hearing. The other board member, Michelle Hebner, who is also an assistant boys swimming coach, abstained from voting.

Falls superintendent Kevin Grover recommended to the board to end Taylor's contract because she planned to be away from coaching 15 days during the season, in which she was entering her second year as the Broncos' head coach.

Grover said the number of days Taylor planned to be gone from practices/events came to his attention when he was contacted by Falls athletic director Beth Shermoen.

"Administratively, we met, discussed the expectations of our coaching staff, and the consensus was that we expect our coaches to be here the majority of the time...," he said. "There's not a set number, but 15 days of roughly a three-month season – our feeling, and I back that feeling – was too much."

Grover said he directed Shermoen to meet with Taylor in an effort to see if the majority of days she planned to be away could be reduced.

"The result of that meeting was that majority could not be – that she needed to be gone on those days," he said.

Grover said he then suggested that Taylor be asked to resign, or else the process to terminate her coaching contract would begin.

After Taylor informed Shermoen that she wouldn't resign, Grover said he sent Taylor a letter and a copy of the related state statute of that process and then Taylor, who was no longer allowed to coach the team, requested a hearing.

"There's no question that she's qualified to be a swimming coach," Grover said. "(The termination of her contract) is based on the number of days that she's requesting to be gone for a variety of reasons."

Taylor, who has an extensive background coaching swimmers in both the United States and Canada and also has been the head coach of the Fort Frances Aquanauts club swimming team, requested the days to be away from coaching the Broncos this season for matters such as professional development and to also watch her son, Donovan, compete in swimming at the collegiate level for South Dakota State University.

She said she requested an open hearing "because I believe the public needs to hear my side of the story and not just innuendo that comes up out in the public."

"I chose not to be forced to resign, so that the board and public are well aware of the circumstances of my departure," said Taylor, who also emphasized "ownership" in her remarks to the board.

"I'm here to take ownership for everything that's happened," she said.

Taylor talked in detail about a series of events taking place that led to her being out as the Broncos' head coach, claiming it involved more than the 15 days she planned to be away this season.

She said she first met Oct. 31 with Shermoen and high school principal Tim Everson when she explained her coaching philosophy for the upcoming season, in which she expected mostly seventh- and eighth-graders on the team.

"The high school schedule for this area, for this district, is way too comprehensive for young boys," Taylor said. "They cannot compete every two days, every three days, and expect proper results. It's not good for their bodies. It's not good for their health. It's not good for them as continuing athletes. That was my belief, and I made sure that they knew that."

Because of her coaching philosophy with young swimmers, Taylor said she informed the high school principal and athletic director that the team would not be attending all the events on the schedule, which included not participating in a relay scrimmage before the season started and the Taconite Invitational.

"A relay scrimmage requires (a swimmer) to dive over the top of another (swimmer) coming into the wall," she said. "I have seen disasters in my years of coaching.... A relay scrimmage for seventh- and eighth-grade boys I have not watched for more than two weeks, don't know if half of them can dive properly or not, is insane in my mind."

Taylor described the Taconite Invitational as a large varsity meet that would overwhelm the team.

At that initial meeting with Everson and Shermoen, Taylor said she also informed them of why she planned to away from coaching.

"I have other jobs," she said. "This is not my end-all, be-all."

Taylor said that included having to go to Oklahoma for five days related to her job as an equestrian judge, in which she can earn $500 a day to judge a horse show. She also noted she would have an opportunity to learn more about being a swimming coach by being on hand for an NCAA meet in which her son competed.

"Those two weeks I could not give up," she said. "It just wasn't happening."

Taylor said the Oct. 31 meeting "went well" with Shermoen and Everson, whom she noted did not object at that time with her planning to be gone for 15 days during the season.

Taylor said "some dissension" started over her being the Broncos' head coach because of a swimmer on last season's boys high school team who then participated in the club team she coached.

Because of state high school rules, Taylor said the boy could either keep swimming with the club team throughout the year, or she would step down as the Broncos' head coach if he wished to compete for three months on the high school team.

"If you wish to do high school swimming, I will back out," Taylor said she told the boy. "I won't coach, because I'm not going to stand in an athlete's way."

After the boy decided to remain with the club team, Taylor said in November two boys on the high school team "bullied him and harassed him about the fact that he wasn't coming back to swim."

The father of the boy who didn't return to the high school team attended the school board meeting and spoke on Taylor's behalf. He blamed Hebner for his son not returning to compete for the Broncos.

"My son has the ability to swim on the swim team regardless of who's coaching," the father said. "(Hebner) singled my son out and made life really difficult for (him) to the point where he chose not to swim here until (she) is gone as a coach....

"I think it's disgusting. I think that all this backstabbing, all this behind-the-scenes stuff that's going on, this is the stuff that make's people not want to come to this school. This is the stuff that makes people choose to leave here. I hope that we learn something here and that we treat each other with more respect and that stuff like this doesn't happen in the future."

Taylor also told to the board that she didn't favor the swimmers having captains practices without coaches before formal practices began because of safety concerns with the young team and that an incident occurred when the captains practices took place anyway.

When formal practices began Dec. 1, Taylor said she received a revised meet schedule "that was news to me" and had dates in which she had conflicts. She also noted she "received a very negative attitude from my manager to the point where she first came in she was confronting me about our meet schedule."

Taylor said a high school team only has to participate in three meets to be allowed to compete in the postseason, also noting the Broncos didn't participate in all the meets on their schedule in her first season as head coach when Grover was the athletic director.

"I have to coach the way I've been taught to coach, so that these boys are competitive, and that they're successful, and they don't get hurt," she said.

In her closing comments, Taylor said she would have hoped Hebner would have supported her, but instead didn't even ask what she had planned to cover her absence for a home meet.

"I had the whole meet ready to go, because I knew I would be gone," she said. "Nobody asked me that. It was just, 'You're gone.'"

During the board's discussion, board member Michael Holden said it was important for a head coach to be on hand for practices.

"If you start having head coaches who aren't here for practices – head coaches now – it sets a precedence for other coaches to do the same thing," Holden said. "Head coaches are important. They have to be here for the kids. You can't be teaching – unless it's a medical thing all the time – you can't be teaching kids and stuff somewhere else."

Board member Heather McBride told Taylor that she appreciated "where your heart is" to be the Broncos' head coach. But McBride also questioned what the effect would be in other sports, such as football, if a head coach planned to be away for that many days.

"If this would be a football coach, like Mr. (Stuart) Nordquist years ago, I don't believe it would have been acceptable for him to miss 15 days or more," she said.

Board member Tom Holt, who also been an assistant football coach, told Taylor that her "qualifications are outstanding and your concern for the kids – that's what we love to see in coaching."

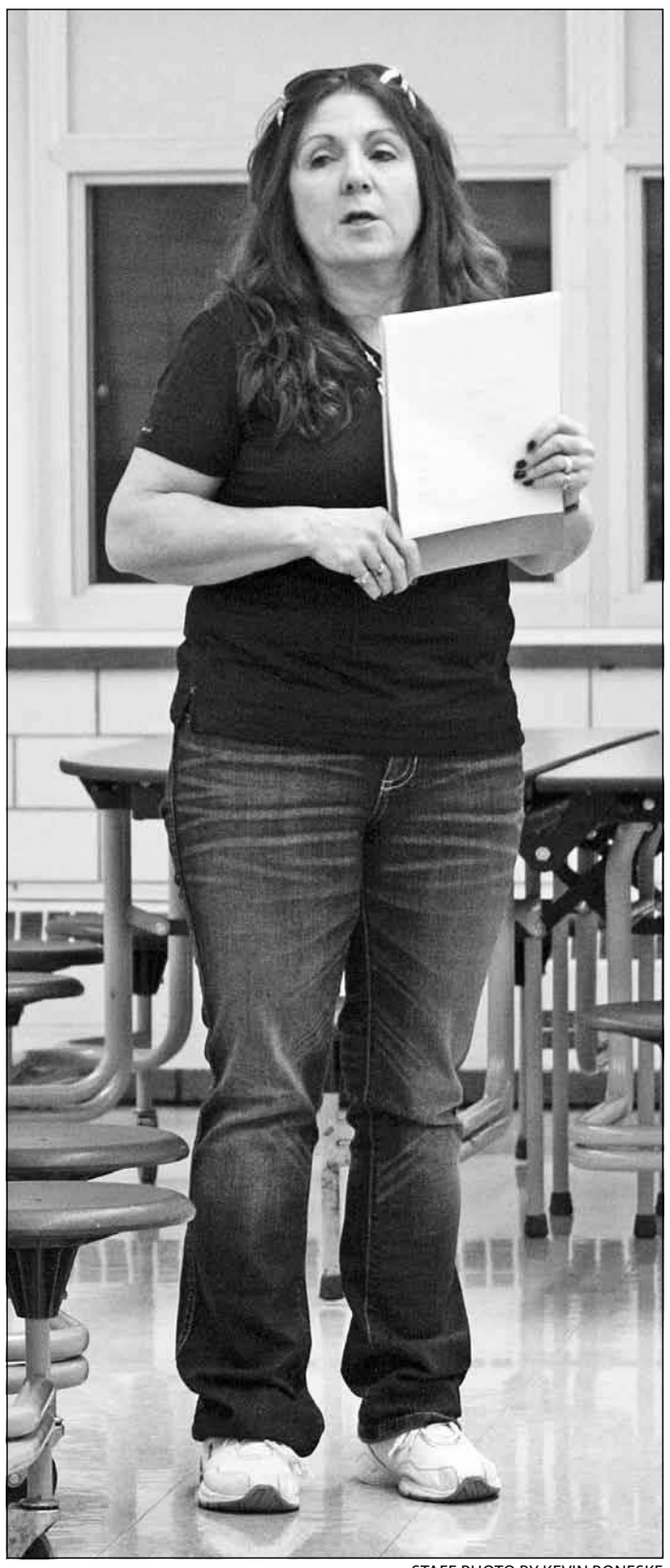
However, Holt also said the number of days Taylor planned to be away from coaching would be too many.

Taylor told the board members she believed they had already made up their minds to terminate her contract.

"I was here so that you could hear my side of the story, and you could understand that there was a lot more to it than just (being gone from coaching for) 15 days," she said.

Following the board's vote Wednesday, Grover said the head coaching position would be posted the next day and open for a week for those interested to apply with the possibility a new coach could be approved at the board's regularly-scheduled meeting later this month.

The Broncos' previous boys swimming and diving head coach, Hailey Silvers, has been helping coach the team following Taylor's departure.



STAFF PHOTO BY KEVIN BONESKE

Dawnn Taylor speaks during an open hearing at Wednesday's International Fall School Board meeting, in which the board terminated her contract as the Broncos' head boys swimming and diving coach because of the number of days she planned to be away from coaching this season.

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6pm: Wing Eating Contest at the Viking Bar
$5 entry fee
Come test your wing eating skills!
Each person will get 12 wings. First to finish their wings WINS!
1st Place: $75 2nd Place: $50 3rd Place: $25
7pm: Redneck Trivia at the Viking Bar
There are 5 rounds of Trivia, with 10 questions in each round. Each round a winner will be determined by the most questions answered correctly out of 10.
The winner receives a FREE DRINK for each round won.
FRIDAY:
7pm: BARGO AT THE UNION HALL
BARGO just like like bingo, but bar style. Every 10 minutes there is a chance for you to win a FREE DRINK. BARGO cards are given out until 8pm only.
Buy a drink, and get a card for FREE! At 9pm the BLACKOUT BARGO game begins. Cover your card in a certain amount of numbers and win the jackpot of CASH!
10pm: CAN CRUSHING CONTEST at the UNION HALL
Contestants will be given a crusher and cans. Who ever crushes the most cans in 1 minute win $50!
SATURDAY:
1pm: Toilet Seat Toss outside the VIKING BAR
Great event for all ages! Come test your toilet seat tossing skills. Who ever can toss the seat the furthest wins! Winner in the kids division gets a certificate to the Dairy Queen along with a trophy. The winner in the Adult division gets a certificate for the Viking Bar along with a trophy.
2:30pm: Kid Smoosh Races outside the VIKING BAR
Smoosh boards are provided. 2 kids per set of boards. All kids get a prize for participating. Trophies will be given for 1st, 2nd & 3rd place teams.
3pm: Adult Smoosh Races outside the VIKING BAR
4 adults per set of boards. Grab some 2x4's and old shoes, screw your old shoes to the boards and come race for 1st Place!
Trophies will be given for 1st, 2nd & 3rd place teams
1st Place: $100 2nd Place: $80 3rd Place $60
SIGN YOUR TEAM UP at the VIKING BAR 218-283-4000
9pm: LIVE BAND AT THE UNION HALL
The "Shackshakers" at the Union Hall. Come out for some fun after all the IceBox Days Events!
Warm up & Dance the night away!
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