

An open letter to Tom Shatel, Lee Barfknecht, Steve Sipple, and Nebraska Basketball Fans Everywhere...

Gentlemen and Fans, after reading several sportswriter columns over the past couple of weeks, I had originally written a long letter questioning the validity of the firing of Doc Sadler that most of you guys and some of the fans seem to be calling for. Then I realized that like most of the newspaper columns, my letter was mostly just my opinion that Doc is a good coach, a good person, and a good fit for all of Nebraska, not just the University. I put in my letter that while it is true Doc has not been able to recruit the high level players that we all would like to see on the court, I believed the problem was not with Doc or Barry or whoever the coach may be but rather our **COMMITMENT TO MEN’S BASKETBALL**. It turns out that I’m likely correct in my belief that we have a serious lack of COMMITMENT. (figure below)

2010 Men’s Basketball Expenses*	National Rank*	School	Location
\$10,048,801	4	Northwestern	Evanston, IL
\$ 8,250,450	8	Michigan State	East Lansing, MI
\$ 7,653,945	13	Indiana	Bloomington, IN
\$ 7,539,418	14	Wisconsin	Madison, WI
\$ 5,692,149	38	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN
\$ 5,243,813	43	Iowa	Iowa City, IA
\$ 5,171,495	44	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN
\$ 4,980,589	49	Illinois	Champaign, IL
\$ 4,913,440	50	Michigan	Ann Arbor, MI
\$ 4,554,908	54	Ohio State	Columbus, OH
\$ 4,147,124	66	Penn State	State College, PA
\$ 4,104,289	67	Nebraska	Lincoln, NE
*Information from the Office of Postsecondary Education at http://ope.ed.gov/athletics .			

Yes, that is correct. You are looking at it. We spent less on Men’s Basketball in 2010 than any school in the Big 10. We wouldn’t have been 8th, or 9th, or 10th. We would have been last. Dead last. That’s a serious **LACK OF COMMITMENT**. Let me add in our supposed “little brother” to the east, the mid-major. (figure below)

2010 Men’s Basketball Expenses	National Rank*	School	Location
\$5,032,173	48*	Creighton	Omaha, NE

I’m not great at math but that looks like we spent almost 25% less on Men’s Basketball than Creighton did. Our supposed “little brother” athletically, at least in some of our minds. And we wonder why men’s basketball is floundering at UNL. Yes, firing Doc is a real possibility. Just like we fired Barry. What will that change? Will that change our COMMITMENT to Men’s basketball? After we tell someone nationally and locally recognized as a very good coach to go away and pay that 3.4 MM buyout does anyone think our real underlying COMMITMENT will change? And who are we going to get to come here next if we fire Doc? I’m sure we told Barry and Doc when we first



GO BIG RED!

met with them that we were committed to making men’s basketball a winner. Just like we are going to tell some new coach. But, is it true? Sure, we’ve got a new practice facility just completed and a new arena on the way. Things are starting to change. While a great start, it takes more than great facilities to win. It takes all out COMMITMENT. I’m pretty sure an apparent ranking of 12th out of 12 in the Big 10 on annual spending on Men’s Basketball does not represent COMMITMENT.

I know Doc pretty well. He wants to win as bad as anyone I’ve ever met. He works as hard at it as any coach we’ve ever had. My bet is it’s not his choice to be last in spending or in conference ranking. Yes, we all agree it’s been a tough season. And disappointing. And I’m sure Doc is the most disappointed person in Nebraska right now with regard to Men’s basketball.

Several national pundits have spent a great deal of time and effort calculating NCAA men’s basketball strength of schedule statistics by team. According to most, our Strength of Schedule ranks 10th in the entire country (and some rank it as high as 6th) as of Friday, February 23, 2012. Given that Michigan State is ranked nationally in the top 6, our Strength of Schedule is likely to go up after yesterday’s game.

What this all means is that Doc has played the 10th toughest schedule in the country according to these computer rankings, which by the way, are very well respected. 10th. Let me say that again. 10th. Without a healthy big man. (Some people say injuries are irrelevant-just think Peyton Manning) Playing in a new league. Not just a new league, but the Big 10. 10th toughest schedule in the entire country. And after yesterday at Michigan State, I would guess that the number might be about 7th. Seventh toughest schedule in the country? Without a big man? And we actually won some games? All the time, dead last on men’s basketball spending, relative to other the Big 10 teams. By all means, let’s fire Doc. He can’t coach a lick.

Maybe, instead of “on to the next guy” again, let’s change our COMMITMENT. Let’s seriously increase men’s basketball spending. Give Doc access to an airplane for recruiting purposes. Anytime he needs it. 7 days a week if necessary. Every big time school in the country does this. Mr. Shatel, please check with Billy Gillispie, Bill Self, Bob Huggins, Billy Donovan, etc, and see how they get to where they need to be while recruiting. I already know. Do we really expect Doc to coach our team and get where he needs to be to recruit without this? And if we are 12th out of 12 in the Big 10 on spending who thinks our assistant coach salaries are where they need to be? Based on the above chart I’m concluding they are not. As a matter of fact, if we are dead last in spending on men’s basketball, you might infer we don’t really have anything where it needs to be.

Let’s go hire that super recruiter or high school coach with great contacts for \$400,000 a year and get rolling. It’s within the rules and it’s been done forever. Clear back to Kansas hiring a truck driver named Ed Manning and getting a kid named Danny-who just happened to lead them to the 1988 NCAA championship. Oh, and yes, there was also that time a coach named Lon Krueger hired a certain Dana Altman and ended up with Mitch Richmond. UCLA just hired Korey McCray, former head coach of the Atlanta Celtics. Yes, the AAU Atlanta Celtics. UCLA did this. In LA. You know, the weather, the lifestyle, the co-eds. And just a little bit of basketball tradition right? Why in the world would UCLA need to do this? To win. Because UCLA is COMMITTED. It only takes a couple of kids to get this thing rolling. Good players want to play with other good players. I’m not sure we all would agree, but in my mind Lincoln, Nebraska is not exactly a hot spot location in the minds of most 5 star basketball recruits. Instead of being last in the Big 10 in men’s basketball spending maybe we need to be first. Why not? Do we want to have a winning culture and a mind set where making the big dance is routine, getting to the sweet 16 a normal thought in our minds, and thinking we might have a shot at winning the whole thing not a mind boggling event? Why not? Who says we can’t? I’m guessing if the chart above showed spending for football in the same last place that basketball is-the outcry all across Nebraska would be never-ending. And more relevant, at least to this person, that outcry would not be calling for Bo’s head. Change the culture. Make the COMMITMENT. Spend the money. And not just on facilities, although that’s a great start. Let’s do it everywhere within the program.

After seeing the spending/caring chart above does anyone really think we’ve done right by Doc? We know he can coach and we know that here at Nebraska he hasn’t been able to get the players we need. Those 2 things are true. But we haven’t had his back. We haven’t done what it takes and we haven’t given him what he needs to get it done. I know I’m not a very proud Nebraskan after seeing we are last in caring about men’s basketball - oops, I mean spending. And I’m not even one of those calling for his head.

Instead of spending 3.4 MM and firing a good coach and a loyal now Nebraskan, let’s have someone walk into his office and tell him whatever he needs our University and our State is behind him and he’s got it. We’ve got his back. And let’s mean it this time.

Neal Hawks
1984 Business School Alum
1987 Law School Alum
Doc Supporter
Basketball Fan