

# Five quit Rams over alleged racial comments by coach

AMIT SHILTON  
The Eyeopener

TORONTO (CUP)—She is Ryerson’s reigning female athlete of the year. She’s a former MVP of the women’s basketball team and a five-time female athlete of the week. This was supposed to be the year for Amanda Redhead and the women’s basketball team.

But the all-star forward has decided to call it quits in her final year, along with four of her teammates, and file a formal complaint against head coach Sandra Pothier, accusing her of repeatedly making culturally insensitive remarks towards her players.

Josephine Agudo, 22, Julia Ounphongxay, 19, Vanessa Smardenka, 21, Danielle Williams, 18, and Redhead, 24, resigned from the team at different intervals throughout August, vowing only to return if the University fires Pothier.

Pothier has been ordered by Ryerson officials not to comment about any allegations while an investigation is underway—leaving her side of the story untold. But she did have high praises for Redhead.

“I think Amanda is a great player and I have a lot of respect for her work ethic. I don’t have anything negative to say about Amanda,” Pothier said.

However, Redhead has a different view of Pothier, who has coached the team for 15 years. The former women’s national team scout coached Ryerson to a 17–49 record during Redhead’s time at Ryerson.

The conflict reached its peak during a player-coach meeting on 26 July.

Redhead has charged that in their meeting, Pothier said that, because of Redhead’s black heritage, she respects the suggestions of male authority figures more than their female counterparts, due to the prevalence of single-parent families in the black community. It was the last straw for Redhead in a three-year battle that has only gotten worse.

“I took that to heart,” Redhead said. “When you lose respect for someone, you can’t play for them. It doesn’t matter whether or not you don’t like them, you have to have a certain respect for them and obviously she doesn’t have respect for who I am. So I said, you know what, ‘eff’ it, I’m quitting.”

Two weeks after Pothier allegedly made the comments to Redhead, Ounphongxay confronted the coach. Pothier defended herself, asking the player if she would take offence to the statement that all Asian people are sheltered and hide their feelings, Ounphongxay said.

“When we play, we represent our coach,” Ounphongxay said, adding she doesn’t feel she can represent Pothier. Ounphongxay said she “didn’t grow up like every Asian kid” and doesn’t appreciate the generalization.

Terry Haggerty, Manager of Interuniversity Sports for Ryerson University, isn’t willing to confirm or deny the allegations against his women’s basketball coach.

“You’re really going to get a ‘no comment’ from anybody here,” Haggerty said. “That’s an investigation completely separate from us, and we don’t interfere with the process.”

David Dubois, Director of Sports and Recreation at Ryerson, would only say that, to his knowledge, there has never been any “big complaint or issue” with Pothier.

But the Eyeopener has learned that similar allegations were made in 2001 and 2003. In 2001, a formal plan to settle issues between coach and players was developed by Dubois and Pothier.

Victoria Owusu-Ampong, a former Rams women’s basketball player, said in a statement to the Eyeopener that Pothier was often the source of conflicts within the team.

Other coaches dismissed the alleged infighting, saying tension is a part of any team.

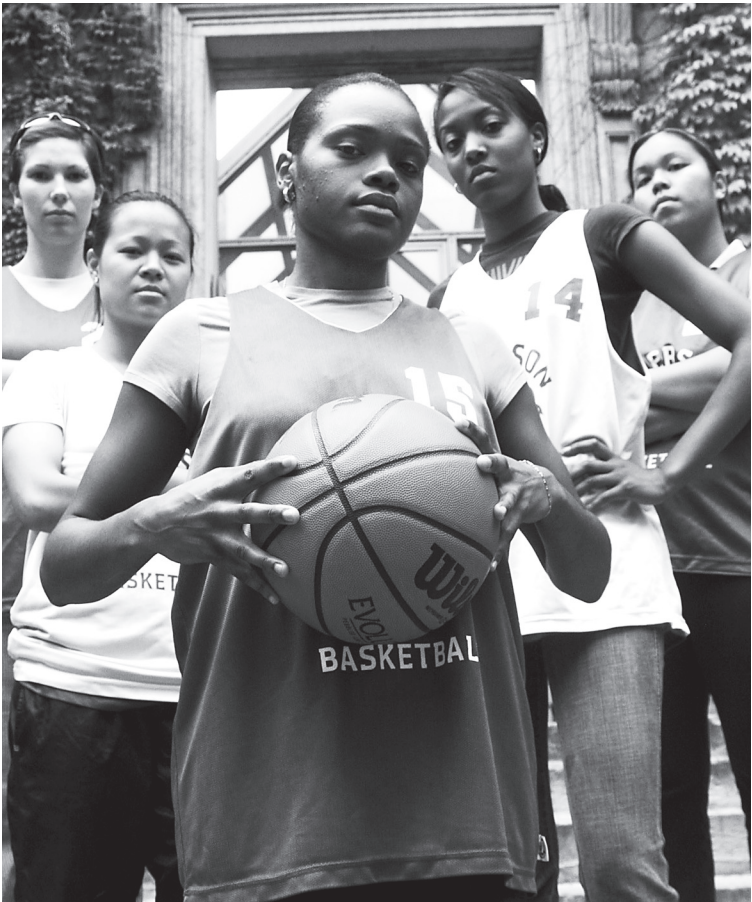
“That’s going to happen in any setting whether that’s a basketball team, an office or a family,” said assistant women’s basketball coach Jason Andrade. “There’s always going to be people that drift off together for whatever reasons.”

But for Redhead, unity is the most important element to having a successful team.

“We’re a team, and [when] we’re playing against another school, we have to show that we’re together,” Redhead said. “On any team there’s going to be some type of trouble, it’s not going to be perfect ... for me, it’s after three years and I’m just like, enough is enough.”

Still, Pothier is respected by many around the league for her experience with the women’s game.

Brad Schur, Royal Military College’s women’s basketball coach, coached against Pothier for the past five years



JOHN MATHER, THE EYEOPENER

**WE WON'T TAKE IT** Redhead and her teammates want Pothier fired.

and holds her in high regard.

“I started on the men’s side so she’s kind of helped me get my feet on the ground, so to speak, on the women’s side. She’s always been a great help that way, getting used to the women’s game and helping to get to know people,” Schur said.

Pothier and the players are still waiting for a resolution before the season begins in early November. Since the complaint was filed, neither side has received any definitive answers from legal counsel. Williams, who averaged 12.4 minutes per game last season, just wants to play again.

“I’ve been playing basketball for ten

years,” she said. “Every single year, I’ve never had a break. That’s what I do, I play basketball and I go to school. This year, I’m only going to school. It just hurts that something I love has to go.”

Redhead, who is entering her final year in public administration and governance, wants the issue resolved so she can find her way back to the courts.

“As a player, I’m so agitated because I know all of us love basketball and we all work hard,” said Redhead. “The thing that really, really agitates me is that this is not the first time. Why doesn’t anybody do anything about it? No one says anything. Everybody’s scared. Scared of what?”



MIKE OTTO

**RUN LIKE THE WIND, BULLSEYE** The cross-country teams train at Hawrelak.

# Cross-country looking for leaders

NICK FROST  
Sports Writer

With another season ready to begin and training already a month under way, the University of Alberta cross-country team will be looking to regroup from a season that saw both teams finish below expectations.

The Bears’ side is coming off of a season that saw them finish just out of the medals at the CIS Championships in Halifax, which brought to a halt any aspirations that the Bears may have had of a fourth-straight bronze medal and a sixth-straight Canada West title; however, the snapping of their medal streak has done little to dampen their view of last season.

“Last year’s result was definitely not disappointing,” third-year head coach Georgette Reed said. “We were right where we needed to be to hopefully get another bronze or challenge for the silver, but Victoria came up and their fifth runner pulled off something phenomenal, which was something we weren’t expecting and, probably, they weren’t expecting either.”

The Vikes managed to squeak past the Bears by four points to take the bronze medal last November, thanks to their fifth runner finishing six places in front of Alberta’s fifth. The top-five finishers score for each team.

This year’s edition of the team will see the emergence of new leaders, on both the women’s and men’s sides, with the departures of their respective MVPs, Liz Ramage and first-team All-Canadian Adrian Lambert.

“It [would be] nice to have [Lambert and Ramage] here, because then you know that there’s always somebody in form,” Reed said. “But, there’s really not a huge impact—as far as ability—because other people have stepped it up, and we’ve got other leaders that are coming on to take their place.”

Reed feels that the men in particular will have absolutely no issue finding the right runner, or combination of runners, to get them back to the medals.

“We have people like Sean MacDonald—who has really come on this year—Jason Carver and Mike Metcalfe; those kinds of people are coming on, and will soften the blow of

losing someone like Adrian,” she said.

The Pandas’ side, however, will be harder pressed to find a formidable leader to carry the team, because of the losses of not only Liz Ramage, but also veterans Stephanie Hirtle and Heather Hurdle. There was hope that last year’s women would achieve a top-six finish in the overall standings; however, the women finished well back in eleventh. Now, having lost three of their top runners, the women will need huge contributions from returnees like Jenny Hockin, Terra Manca and Kristen Rylance, as well as any new recruits to propel them back into the top-ten or higher.

Both the Bears and Pandas are aware of what is necessary to achieve greater results in 2006/07. One of the big focuses in the teams’ early season training has been the team dynamic.

“It’s all about training as a team, giving a group effort,” Reed explained. “We’re only as strong as the weakest link. So we’re trying to make sure that we look at a team approach and really value how much strength we have as a team, and build from there.”



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