

You can't spell 'crazy whacko' without 'coach'

SPORTS
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Commentary

If it were perfect world, all public figures would be even-tempered, soft-spoken role models; shining beacons of reasonable behaviour there to show us how to act under trying circumstances. But, since it isn't, we might as well make the best of what we have. And that means using famous sports figures' crazy-ass antics for our personal entertainment. Coaches and managers are particularly known for having hair-trigger tempers, and luckily for us, when they blow a gasket, it's usually caught on tape. Read our favourite freak-outs, then see them for yourself online at thegatewayonline.ca.

Justin Bolivar

Picture a typical NBA coach and you likely envision someone who exudes toughness and grit unparalleled by any coach in professional sports. The likes of Phil Jackson, Pat Riley, and Sam Mitchell are scary enough to make anyone back down in a fight, but there's one NBA coach who always seems to get caught in the middle of a brawl. This bench boss looks more like the water boy than the brains of the operation. This coach is Jeff Van Gundy.

It was during the intense Miami Heat–New York Knicks playoff rivalry of the late '90s: tensions boiled over

in 1998, when Heat centre Alonzo Mourning punched Knicks forward Larry Johnson in the fourth game of their first-round Eastern Conference series. Mourning's punch triggered a bench-clearing brawl on the hardwood at Madison Square Garden with both sides going after each other. But one detail seemed out of place in this fight: Van Gundy clutching onto Mourning's leg in an attempt to pry him away from Johnson. Of course, the only thing he accomplished here was shining the floor because Mourning didn't even notice he was there. The only thing Van Gundy got out of this was a gash to the forehead and some stitches.

Evidently, this action wasn't enough, for three years later he would be at it again, getting between Knicks forward Marcus Camby and Spurs forward Danny Ferry. He tried to separate the two during a heated exchange; however, Camby would have none of it and threw a right hook at Ferry. This didn't connect with Ferry but instead with Van Gundy's balding forehead, causing an excessive amount of bleeding and more stitches.

Nick Frost

While it may not have been as wacky as some of the other examples of coaches straight-up losing it, former Oilers bench boss Ron Low's immensely underrated tirade on former Avalanche coach Marc Crawford during the 1997/98 playoffs stands out to me. I can still remember watching the game and seeing Low so beet-red with anger that he looked like he was going to

suffer an embolism.

It was 2 May, 1998, and the Oilers were up 2–0 in game six against the Avs—who had a 3–2 lead in the series and, as we all know, ended up losing 4–3 to the Oil (clearly, Monica Lewinsky wasn't the only one blowing around that time). With the game near conclusion, Crawford sent in goons Jeff Odgers and Warren Rychel against a smaller Oilers line that featured Mats Lindgren and the recently concussed Dean McAmmond.

Low, however, took exception to this, and tried to take matters into his own hands by jumping the glass between the benches and laying a few haymakers on Crawford's coiffed pretty-boy ass.

The players restrained him, but they couldn't stop him from throwing his gum at Crawford from across the glass, flipping him the bird, and dropping a few F-bombs that could be easily noticed by the CBC-watching audience at home. It's not so much what he did, or tried to do, that stands out to me; it's the fact that I don't think I've ever seen anyone so incredibly infuriated like that in my life—far less a stocky, balding man in a grey suit with one hell of a mustache.

Marc Affeld

No discussion of this nature would be complete without a mention of the walking meltdown that is Bob Knight.

Consider, if you will, that despite being one of the most successful basketball coaches of all time—indeed, the winningest NCAA Division I head

coach in history—Knight will likely be most remembered by many for his often-violent and almost always profane outbursts on and off the court instead. The now-infamous 1988 game in which Knight tossed his chair across the court in protest of a technical foul called on his Indiana Hoosiers is actually one of his least controversial incidents.

The list of worse things he's done is extensive. In 1979, he was charged, and convicted in absentia, of assaulting a police officer while at the Pan American Games in Puerto Rico. In a 1988 television interview with Connie Chung, when asked how he handles stress, Knight replied, "I think that if rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it." In 2000, he was fired from Indiana University for allegedly grabbing and injuring the arm of a student while lecturing him on respect after the student addressed him by saying, "Hey, Knight, what's up?"

Over the years, Knight has also repeatedly been accused of kicking, choking, head-butting, and otherwise physically, and verbally, assaulting his own players.

Yet, in spite of all of these incidents, Knight continues to coach Division I basketball. Somehow, he consistently manages to brush off scandal after scandal by invoking the "Bobby Knight is just being Bobby Knight" defence.

Maybe my personal lack of respect for Knight stems from the fact that I wasn't even born the last time he led a team to a NCAA championship—or perhaps it has something to do with Knight once claiming at a press conference that sports journalism is "one or two steps above prostitution."

Paul Owen

Oklahoma State football coach Mike Gundy's rant at a reporter over what he saw as unfair criticisms levelled at his quarterback really should go down as the best coach tirade ever. Unlike other situations where a bench boss flipped, Gundy's shouting spree at *Oklahoman* columnist Jenni Carlson served not just as a glimpse into how crazy one man could be; it was also the best recruiting video his Cowboys could have ever have hoped for.

Forget about the fact that Gundy crossed many lines in his criticisms of Carlson—most notably saying that her childlessness was the reason she wasn't afraid either to bring up the relationship between the team's embattled quarterback Bobby Reid and his mother or to call him a wimp about it. Gundy did what every struggling player wants his coach to do: he stood up for Reid, telling reporters that it wasn't okay to criticize beyond what happens on the field, and demanding they come after him instead because he's "a man" and "40." Additionally, he managed to deflect all attention away from their mistakes on the field.

High-school players all over the Big 12's recruiting base should flock to Gundy, perhaps the most visible "players' coach" ever. Also, OSU claims that the vast majority of correspondence the University has received about the matter has been in favour of Gundy's actions. So not only should it make his team richer in talent, but it will also probably make his school richer. How many other coaches can boast that their temper tantrum did that?

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