DY STAUFFER ILLISTRATION

As jobs go, coaching at the college level is about as rewarding as it gets. It's also about as relaxing as working in a high-pressure cooker that's about to blow. Not only are coaches expected to win, they face an unrelenting barrage of often unflattering media attention. In this issue of FOCUS, we look at how Boise State coaches handle that pressure, look at the impact of Title IX and provide an update on what's happened to some of Boise State's better-known team mentors.

Coaches and the Media

When headlines meet the foul line, tensions are sure to mount

By Kathleen Mortensen

here's no doubt about it — former Boise State football coach Dirk Koetter was having a great season. Just two games away from securing a berth in his second straight Crucial.com Humanitarian Bowl game, the coach was feeling the pressure to perform. He responded with hard work and long hours on the blue turf.

So when a reporter stuck a microphone in his face on election night and asked if he'd taken the opportunity to vote, he answered honestly — "No," he hadn't had time. The truth of the matter was he hadn't even seen his kids awake for days, and finding time to get to the polls wasn't as high on his



priority list as he now says it should have

The resulting criticism via phone and mail illustrates the nature of the love-hate relationship between coaches and the media. Without the media, the team loses its fan base, its visibility and thus its recruiting strength. But living in the constant glare of the media spotlight is definitely no picnic — even in a winning season.

And when the chips are down, it just gets worse.

In a profession where performance is everything, coaches know that winning does matter. Losing coaches have few friends in the media, as about a dozen of them found out when they drew the pink slip at the end of this past football season.

So while Koetter knew he had it pretty easy with local reporters — voting record aside — he also knew that could change in a heartbeat. "If we weren't winning, it definitely wouldn't be this way," he said prior to his departure to Arizona State.

On the flip side, without the media, would Boise State student-athletes be

doing as well as they are? "The team does much better when we draw a crowd," says gymnastics coach Sam Sandmire. And better coverage leads to better crowds. "Without them [the media], we probably would not be as successful."

Can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em.

"It does help the program," says basketball coach Rod Jensen. "Especially recruiting. When we get recruits in, one of the first things they ask is what kind of play we get on TV. They want national, pie-in-the-sky coverage so pro scouts can see them. That kind of coverage gets exposure for both the program and the players."

Maybe so, but it doesn't come without a price. That price is intense scrutiny of a coach's every word and action. "Ours is a visible product and you know that going into it," Jensen says.

And that's not necessarily unfair, coaches say, especially given the amount of money some of them earn in a year.

"For the amount of money they pay, you have to know that you're walking into the

kitchen and be willing to pay the price," Koetter says. "You learn to make certain concessions."

Still, those concessions shouldn't include attacks on a coach's family, Koetter says. "As a coach's son, I can feel that. It hurts my heart."

"Generally speaking, I think the media can be guilty of sensationalism sometimes," admits *Idaho Statesman* sports reporter Mike Prater. "When hard news runs out, some journalists fester on it a little bit and sensationalism kicks in."

Mark Johnson, sports director for Idaho's NewsChannel 7, says society today is less tolerant of coaches who are tough on kids than they were even a generation ago, making "bad boy" coaches fair game for public scrutiny.

"There have been dirty coaches in the past who've bent the rule," he says. "It's really left an earmark on the team as far as what kind of a program it is. We're more sensitive [as a society] now and won't tolerate coaches abusing our kids anymore, or one human being abusing another on any level. So no, I don't think the media has taken things too far.

"I don't think the media's role is that of a watchdog," he continues, "but it is to observe, report and let the community decide if they believe in what the coach is doing ... Tax money is going to pay this coach to perform his duties, so [the public] should know what he's doing and how well he's doing that."

While most reports are fact-based, speculation and conjecture are not totally off-limits, especially on the radio where hosts often have hours of airtime to fill.

"Our job is to discuss, not to report," says Jeff Caves, who hosts a daily talk show for Sports Radio 1350 KTIK. "A lot of it is hypothetical conversation, so we're talking about a lot of different what-if scenarios. Jensen and Koetter are a big part of that. I think most people can discuss individuals much easier than concepts because it's easier to identify what they are doing as good, bad or indifferent."

But Caves does agree that some areas are off-limits. "It's common decency to stay away from personal relationship issues, families and religious beliefs," he says.

Still, freedom of speech gives people the right to ask tough questions and even to raise negative conjectures, he says, even if it's not something the public really needs to know. "It's a double-edged sword. The public doesn't have the right to know as much as the people who are talking have the right to say it."

And while coaches may have a beef with what goes out over the airwaves or ends up in print, it could be worse. Prater says he's never met a story he didn't like for one reason or another, but a lot of those stories don't end up in print.

"Sometimes coaches tell you something, whether off the record or not, that you'd love to put in print but can't. You have to weigh the pros and cons. Do you put it in

PROFILE: STEVE VOGEL BUILDS CHARACTER AT CAPITAL

By Justin Endow

Steve Vogel doesn't measure his success as a coach by the win-loss columns.

That's not to say he couldn't. Vogel, Capital High School's head football coach since 1986, has won 104 of 148 games he's coached, a winning percentage that's a

shade higher than 70 percent.

Vogel measures his success on a different

"The success you have as a coach, you don't see right away," says Vogel, 50. "Obviously, you get some instant gratification from looking at the scoreboard. But if a player comes back 10-15 years down the road and says, 'Thank you, coach,



says, 'Thank you, coach, the things you taught me were correct,' then you know you've succeeded."

Vogel says he was lucky to have had just those kinds of coaches in his stint as an outside linebacker at Boise State. "[Head coach] Tony Knap is one of the best people I've been fortunate enough to have been associated with," he says. "And my position coach, Jim Wagstaff, was both an outstanding person and very knowledgeable coach."

Knap eventually would give Vogel his first opportunity to do what he had wanted to do since high school: coach football. He became a football graduate assistant for the 1973 season after graduating that spring.

In 1974, Vogel was hired by the Boise School District to teach physical education and coach football at Capital. As the Eagles' head coach, Vogel's teams have won five league championships, appeared in three state championship games and won one.

His winning philosophy may surprise people because it focuses less on the team's results and more on mental and emotional growth.

"I encourage my players to never put all their eggs in one basket. I want them to take advantage of the opportunities they have in high school," says Vogel. "Involvement in a variety of activities will help the students build character. They teach the kids to work hard and work through setbacks.

"The victories will get lost in the shuffle. It will be the lessons they learn, the memories they create, that will stick with them when they are older."

the paper to educate your readers and take the chance of burning your sources? You can spend every day for four months with these [coaches] — it's a balancing act."

And in the end, how a coach is treated in the media often starts with him or herself. "Whether a hard news story creates trouble can depend on how the coach handles it," Prater says. "Previous coaches at BSU have tried to cover things up, and that just festers on our side and turns into something that could border on sensationalism, even though it started as a news story. Honesty is the best policy, absolutely."

Prater says there are two things that drive him nuts — one is over-inflated egos, the other is dishonesty.

"I can put up with the egos every now and then. I'll allow Dirk [Koetter] to have an ego as long as he's upfront and honest."

That policy, however, works both ways. Max Corbet, BSU's assistant athletic director for media relations, says nothing irks him more than reporters who aren't honest with him and don't follow the rules. "It bothers me because we're here to help them," he says.

Reporters who insist on calling coaches or players at home, hiding in the bushes to get an interview or insisting on asking "off-limits" questions only jeopardize their relationship with the team.

"If they're straightforward with us, we'll be straightforward with them," Corbet says.

In fact, Corbet says one of the biggest parts of his job is helping coaches and players understand where the media is coming from as a way to maintain working relationships.

"They have a job to do, and I don't think they're out maliciously trying to destroy somebody," he says of media representatives. "They have opinions, but everyone has a right to. Their job is very vital to our department."

PROFILE: SANDY HADDEN LEADS TIMBERLINE ATHLETICS

By Janelle Brown

Sandy Hadden's days are crammed with coaches' meetings, classroom duties, endless hours on the telephone to schedule school games, budget decisions, conferences with students and school competitions.

The athletic director at Timberline High School in Boise and 1991 Boise State

University graduate in physical education/secondary education, loves every fast-paced moment of it.

"This school is only in its third year. It's exciting to be on the front end, helping to make history," says Hadden, who played volleyball at Boise State as Sandy Stewart on a team that won two regular-season Big Sky champi-



onships and placed second at its first-ever National Invitational Tournament in 1989. Hadden is one of only two female athletic directors in Idaho at high schools in the top-tier A-1 division. She oversees 15 school sports from football, soccer and baseball to wrestling and golf. She works with nearly 50 Timberline coaches, manages a \$30,000 budget and also teaches three periods of P.E., working with both student-athletes and developmentally disabled students.

It's a big load. And also a ground-breaking one. But being female in the male-dominated world of athletic directors hasn't felt like an obstacle to Hadden.

"I think the first year, it was an extreme challenge," says Hadden, who took over as athletic director in fall 1999 after a year of coaching volleyball at Timberline and jobs at several other high schools. "You have to prove yourself, but if you're consistent and fair, you gain respect."

Timberline High principal Betsy Story describes Hadden as an extremely hard worker who is a fair decision maker and a problem solver. "She is consistent and works for equity," says Story.

Timberline has won four state championships since 1998, including two in girls' soccer and two in boys' baseball, plus a state academic championship in volleyball. Hadden is particularly proud of her teams' academic standings: last fall's football team averaged a 2.9 GPA, while other fall sports teams had an average 3.5-3.8 GPA.

"Academics have to come first," Hadden says. "But athletics can also teach kids important things. If I didn't believe that, I wouldn't be doing this."

KOETTER SAGA CAPTIVATED MEDIA

It isn't often that Boise's media takes on the characteristics of the Hollywood paparazzi. But in the days prior to football coach Dirk Koetter's departure in December, the Boise media pack swarmed with the enthusiasm of their Hollywood counterparts as they tried to unravel the mystery question: Where is Dirk going to coach next?

The Koetter saga was the lead story for three consecutive nights on most local television stations and twice drew front page coverage in the *Idaho Statesman*.

And as rumors of Koetter's imminent departure flew from Stillwater, Okla. to Tempe, Ariz., the media flocked to the Bronco Football Complex on a daily basis. For added gravitas, most stations sent news as well as sports reporters to cover every possible angle, and then some.

All this for a football coach?

"For a lot of people in Boise, football is not so much a sport ... it's a way of life on the weekends. People see Dirk as a celebrity, a political figure, a community leader," says Mark Johnson, sports director at KTVB in Boise.

"And in this case, the water cooler talk around town was about his salary increase. Everyone I talked to wanted to know about that angle. When you have a story of that magnitude, it goes beyond the bounds of sports."

The media touched an especially sensitive nerve when reporters called his home and asked his children of his whereabouts. At one impromptu interview session his frustration was evident as he repeatedly told the assembled media masses that there was nothing new to report, despite the rumors they were hearing, and reporting, that he was going to Oklahoma State.

"I watched myself on television twice that week, and my frustration and tension was very evident," Koetter says.

"It was like the story developed some entertainment value. You get to the point where you just want to get it over with because of the media. I had to keep telling myself this is the decision of a lifetime," Koetter says.

"I've never really understood why it's such a big deal to be the first one to break the story. But they are awesome at getting information, and they are so close to getting it right it amazes me. By the same token, there are times when they are dead wrong."

And so the saga ended with Koetter making an 11th hour decision to coach at Arizona State rather than Oklahoma State.

At last, the media beast was satisfied.