

Coach Caccese refutes budget rumors; Calls accusations "...Positively wrong."

by Michael Rose

Recently Penn State Hazleton athletic director Dr. Tom Caccese has been the subject of many rumors concerning the sports budgeting of the athletic teams on campus. In the middle of the controversy is the Hazleton basketball team, which is coached by Caccese. The rumors say that Caccese has a conflict of interest in the budgeting department because he serves as basketball coach as well as athletic director for the campus.

Some individuals felt that Caccese is to blame for any budgeting problems. While others were busy making accusations, no one was getting the facts. I decided to go out and try to get the facts.

I had the chance to hold an informal interview with Dr. Caccese about the rumors in an attempt to clear the sports department of any false accusations. At the start, Caccese told me that coaches get the opportunity to tell him what they need for their teams at the beginning and end of each season.

"Coaches have full responsibility for their programs, especially in terms of equipment and supplies," Caccese stated. According to Caccese, he has never turned down any coach for equipment or supplies for his or her program in his 17 years on campus.

There are seven varsity sports here at the Hazleton campus. Dr. Caccese told me that the budget per sport includes transportation, game officials, meal money, uniforms, and supplies. A popular rumor states that the basketball

team is said to get the best of these five items, or at least more than any other team gets. That, according to Caccese, is "...positively wrong."

Caccese says that the basketball team appears to be getting more money from the budget; however, he claims the basketball team has more money because of fund raisers held throughout the year. Caccese cited a hoagie sale in October and team advertising as some sources of revenue.

Caccese told me that this year's advertising intake paid for half of the cost of black "Air Jordans" sneakers

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for the team. Caccese told me that the basketball team was able to purchase the infamous sneakers for \$80.00 due to a school discount rate at a local business. He stated that advertising covered \$40.00 per pair of sneakers per player, and that each player was required to pay the remaining \$40.00 if they wanted those particular sneakers.

Caccese firmly stated that if advertising was unable to produce enough money for new sneakers, the players would have had to supply their own sneakers, just as other team players must supply their own sneakers and spikes for their sports. Overall, Caccese stated that the black "Air Jordans" worn by the basketball team DID NOT come from the varsity sports budget.

Caccese also informed me that last year's fund raisers provided ankle braces for five of this year's returning players. He stated that freshmen and other newcomers do not possess ankle braces this season because "there was

not enough money to purchase them this year."

Caccese stated, "All teams have the opportunity to run fund raisers to supplement their budget allotment." He also mentioned that some teams have run such fund raisers in the past.

Another area of concern is uniforms. Each team rotates on a 4-5 year cycle for new uniforms. Caccese says "more strenuous sports" such as "basketball, baseball, soccer, and softball" may need replacement uniforms before their turn in the cycle comes up.

Caccese denies any charges that the basketball team is pampered uniform-wise. He states that any team with uniforms in poor condition will receive compensation through replacement uniforms.

"If a coach feels replacement uniforms are needed, they are never turned down," Caccese said.

Rumors are also being spread about the warm-up outfits worn by the basketball team. Caccese states that the soccer and tennis teams also have warm-ups, and he assured me that the basketball team's current warm-ups are three years old. He also told me that warm-ups are not supplied more often because they do not wear out as quickly as regular uniforms.

Dr. Caccese believes that Hazleton runs the finest athletic program in the Commonwealth campus system. He believes that the Hazleton campus possesses the finest sports facilities, and he also reminds readers that the Hazleton sports department is one of the few that holds an annual banquet at the end of each year, as well as other honorable events.

At the end of our interview, Dr. Caccese told me that he wished to stress two points. First, as athletic director, he operates within the budget established by Dr. James Staudenmeier, CEO for our campus. Second, he would like to state that his office is always open to anyone who has questions or concerns regarding the athletic programs on campus.

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