

Former A&M coach Sherman named Pack head coach

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — Mike Sherman needed less than five hours to persuade Ron Wolf to risk the Green Bay Packers' future on another untested coach.

Wolf, the Packers' general manager, hired Sherman as the 13th coach in the team's 81-year history on Monday. Sherman replaces Ray Rhodes, who was fired two weeks ago after one 1-8 season.

Sherman, a longtime college assistant with just three years of NFL experience, spoke with Wolf for 4 1/2 hours in Wolf's office at Lambeau Field on Saturday.

By Sunday morning, Wolf had made up his mind.

"I knew that for all intents and purposes, the search was over," Wolf said. "I went home and thought about it that night. I told my wife that if I really and truly had any guts, I would go sign Mike Sherman right on the spot."

Sherman was not the first to be interviewed but quickly made the best impression, Wolf said. In fact, their chat reminded Wolf of a similarly en-

lightening conversation eight years ago with Mike Holmgren, who took the Packers to two Super Bowls in his first head coaching job.

"When he [Sherman] was sitting there, he just blew my socks off," Wolf said.

Sherman was the Packers' tight ends coach for two seasons before following Holmgren to Seattle, where he was offensive coordinator this season. Green Bay was his first NFL stop after 16 seasons as a college assistant, most recently as offensive line coach at Texas A&M and UCLA.

"I realize that this is a huge responsibility and undertaking on my part, but I look forward to continuing the legacy that has been created here," Sherman said. "Many teams in the NFL don't have an identity. We do. I think last year, somehow, we just forgot that a little bit."

Green Bay missed the playoffs for the first time in seven years. Wolf believes the Packers have a roster that can succeed now, but Rhodes' inability to win and his light touch on discipline prompted Wolf to change course.

Sherman's interview might have been im-

pressive, but the rapidly shrinking pool of candidates undoubtedly influenced Wolf's decision. Wolf could not accept the salary demands of former Kansas City coach Marty Schottenheimer, and St. Louis offensive coordinator Mike Martz took a hefty pay raise to stay with the Rams.

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Packers GM

Wolf expects Sherman to curb the lack of discipline that was Rhodes' downfall, but Sherman also was attractive because he adheres to

Holmgren's offensive scheme.

Wolf believes the Packers' players — particularly three-time MVP quarterback Brett Favre — will be better off staying in the same system.

"I consider myself an offensive coach, and I want to be very much a part of the offense," Sherman said. "Certainly, Mike Holmgren's philosophy will be a part of what we do right here. ... We'll tweak it a little bit here and there, but it's pretty much that same philosophy."

Sherman passed his time quietly during his first stay in Green Bay. Wolf said he and Sherman never spoke at length during the two years that Sherman coached the tight ends and supervised the scout team.

Packers players who knew Sherman, particularly the tight ends who played under him, applauded the move.

Sherman and Holmgren "are going to be kind of similar," Tyrone Davis, who caught seven touchdown passes during the best season of his career in 1998, said.

"Mike will bring his own aspect to it, but I

think he will bring that same kind of discipline. Accountability is one of the biggest things we need here."

Mark Chmura, who made the Pro Bowl during both of Sherman's seasons in Green Bay, said: "The team will take to him well."

"He'll demand a lot, which he should. He won't let the little things slip," Chmura said.

In Seattle, Sherman coordinated the team's offense, but Holmgren called the plays, just as he did with offensive coordinator Sherman Lewis during his seven seasons in Green Bay.

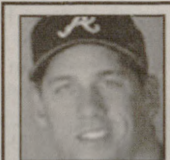
Holmgren touted Sherman as a future coach to friends around the league, praising his organizational skills and capacity for hard work.

"Mike Sherman will be missed," Holmgren said. "He was a very important part of our staff the last three years and our early development in Seattle."

Sherman joins Rhodes, Jon Gruden, Steve Mariucci, Dick Jauron and Andy Reid as former Holmgren assistants in Green Bay who now run their own teams.

Presidential candidates sound off about Braves' pitcher John Rocker

ATLANTA (AP) — Plenty of people have been taking swings at John Rocker. Al Gore and Bill Bradley did not shy away from the batter's box when they had their chance.



JOHN ROCKER

The Democratic presidential candidates criticized Rocker's disparaging remarks about foreigners, minorities and gays during Monday night's Democratic debate in Des Moines, Iowa.

"I don't know John Rocker and I don't want to know John Rocker," Bradley, a former NBA star, said. "But I do know one thing: This would not have happened had an organization and a team (been) attuned to the kind of things that he said."

"When I was on the Knicks, one of my jobs was when there was a white player that came on the team who didn't quite understand — used the wrong words ... I took him over to the side and

said, 'Look, that doesn't work on this team. If you want to be on this team, you respect everybody,'" he said. "If that had happened on the Atlanta Braves, you wouldn't have had John Rocker."

Said Gore: "I, first of all, think what he said was reprehensible and disgusting. And I condemn it without any reservation, of course."

Last week, Texas Gov. George W. Bush said he agreed with baseball commissioner Bud Selig's decision to have the Braves relief pitcher undergo psychological testing.

In a Republican debate, Bush, a former managing general partner of the Texas Rangers, said: "The fellow said some incredibly offensive things. He is a public person. And I appreciate them trying to get the man help."

In an interview in Sports Illustrated last month, Rocker said he would never play for a New York team because he did not want to ride a train "next to some queer with AIDS." He also bashed immigrants, saying "I'm not a very big fan

of foreigners. ... How the hell did they get in this country?"

Rocker later apologized and in a subsequent interview with ESPN said his comments were in retaliation for verbal and physical abuse he said he received from New York Mets fans during the NL Championship Series.

That was not enough to prevent the heavy metal band Twisted Sister to ask the Braves to stop using their song "I Wanna Rock" to introduce Rocker when the reliever enters games.

"We've got Hispanics in this band, Italians in this band, people who are Polish and Russian," guitarist Jay Jay French, the heavy metal band's co-founder, said. "We're all immigrants, all foreigners — quote unquote — and this is our way of saying his comments were not acceptable."

New York-based Twisted Sister is best known for its 1984 hit single "We're Not Gonna Take It." The song's video featured lead singer Dee Snider and other band members wearing garish makeup and wild hairstyles.

Canada's government agrees to bail out country's struggling hockey franchises

OTTAWA (AP) — The Canadian government is bailing out its six NHL teams to protect what it regards as the country's national heritage.

No dollar figure was put on Tuesday's federal aid package, which runs to 2004 when the collective bargaining agreement between the NHL and its players expires.

The federal money, designed to keep the teams competitive and prevent them from moving to the United States, is contingent upon contributions from the league, city and province in which the team plays.

"The federal government's willingness to participate in a shared solution for Canadian NHL teams is not about giving money to rich hockey players and team owners," Industry Minister John Manley said.

"It's about helping these teams get through a difficult period so they will be in a position to emerge from their current financial problems as sustainable Canadian NHL franchises."

Manley acknowledged the plan has its critics, but said many Canadians feel passionately about the game.

"In our hearts, really, I feel that hockey is really part of Canada," Manley said. The decision immediately benefits the Ottawa Senators, who already received such assistance. Senators owner Rod Bryden, a former president of the Liberal party of Canada, led the campaign for federal assistance to NHL teams.

The federal contribution is not to exceed 25 percent of the total of any aid package involving the league, the city and the province involved. It will be reviewed annually and is to be repaid to Ottawa if the team moves.

Manley admitted the British Columbia and Quebec governments have shown little inclination so far to help the Vancouver Canucks and Montreal Canadiens.

The NHL already provides some compensation to Canadian clubs hurt by the low value of the Canadian dollar. Teams get most of their revenues in Canadian dollars and pay most expenses in U.S. dollars.

"The (Canadian) federal government courageously has shown its commitment to addressing a difficult issue in a meaningful way," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said. "The NHL remains committed to maintaining a strong presence in Canada and we will continue to work with our clubs and governments at all levels as this process continues."

Eric Malloff, a lawyer with ties to Prime Minister Jean Chretien, will be the federal negotiator who works with the league and other parties in tailoring a package for each team.

Government polls showed little appetite for subsidizing wealthy team owners and millionaire hockey players, and some lawmakers echoed that line Tuesday.

"Nobody wants to see our teams in trouble, but this is a question of priorities," said Grant Hill, a member of parliament.

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