

SPORTS

Jazz Brass Now Facing The Music



NEW ORLEANS (UPI) — Mugging Al Hirt or closing Bourbon Street would have been a more popular decision than firing Butch van Breda Kolff as head coach of the New Orleans Jazz.

"We knew Butch was a folk hero," said Larry G. Hatfield, majority owner of the Jazz. "We knew it would be an unpopular decision, but we had to make it."

Hatfield and his fellow owners voted this week to fire van Breda Kolff, the hot-tempered Dutchman who brought New Orleans from a 1-13 record at the start of its expansion season two years ago to the most improved club in professional basketball in 1976.

"Butch got the axe because we couldn't communicate with him," Hatfield said Wednesday. "We could not get the proper feedback from our coach."

The owners may not have gotten any feedback from van Breda Kolff, but they got more than their share of feedback from disgruntled fans.

The smallest crowd of the year went to the Louisiana Superdome Tuesday night to see the Jazz defeat Kansas City in their first game under Elgin Baylor, van Breda Kolff's former assistant who will handle the job pro tem. One of the 6,129 disgruntled fans tossed an egg at Barry Mendelson, the Jazz vice president who has feuded with van Breda Kolff since last season.

"We knew Barry would be crucified," said Hatfield, "but we had to make a decision before it was too late."

One local survey showed 83 per cent of those polled objected to van Breda Kolff's firing.

"We didn't get that strong a response on a poll we took once on whether people opposed rape," said one survey coordinator.

Hatfield blamed the dismissal on a number of prob-

lems, including van Breda Kolff's one-line answers to owners' questions.

Second Fiddle

Elgin Baylor, one of the great players of all time who had been playing second fiddle as assistant to New Orleans Jazz head coach Butch van Breda Kolff, found himself on the hot seat as the new boss at

Tuesday night's game after Van Breda Kolff was fired. The dismissal did not set too well with New Orleans basketball fans.

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