

Was Golden State Warriors Coach 'Pastor' Mark Jackson Fired for His Faith in Christ?

The Golden State Warriors just inked a five-year deal with former Chicago Bulls champion Steve Kerr, paying him \$25 million to bring his basketball smarts. Now, I'm not knocking the three-point thriller, but I have to stop and wonder: What was wrong with coach Mark Jackson?

I mean, why did the NBA team really fire Jackson last week? Was it really his fault that the team was knocked out of the NBA playoffs? He's the same guy who led the Warriors to consecutive playoff appearances for the first time in 20 years.

"Mark has accomplished many good things during his three years with the organization, including his role in helping elevate this team into a better position than it was when he arrived nearly 36 months ago," Warriors General Manager Bob Myers said in a statement.

Exactly. So why fire him, then? After all, he took over a team that posted a 26-36 record during the 2010-2011 season and transformed the franchise into a team with 50-plus wins—only the third head coach in the team's history to accomplish that feat.

"We're appreciative of his dedication and commitment since his arrival and are extremely grateful for his contributions," Myers said. "However, as an organization, we simply feel it's best to move in a different direction at this time."

What different direction is that? Away from a leader who is

also an ordained Christian minister and names Jesus as Lord?

"I don't know if Jackson's strong, strong religious beliefs alienated anyone in the building," wrote Ann Killion, a sports columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "I've heard that the team wasn't happy that he made it a priority to get back to his LA-based church to preach as often as possible.

"I've heard that he occasionally referred to individuals he didn't like as 'the devil.' And I found it weird to be sitting in a press conference next to a young woman who kept trying to get Jackson's attention by calling him 'pastor.'"

Killion may have heard this or felt weird, but at least most of Jackson's players didn't seem to mind his faith. *USA Today* recently reported that on Easter Sunday, "eight of his 15 players made the 18-mile trek from their Beverly Hills hotel, through Los Angeles traffic on the team bus, and to Jackson's nondenominational church in Van Nuys, Calif., then on to practice at UCLA. A second bus to the practice site had been arranged for those who didn't want to attend church."

The article says, "Jackson cited the two buses on Easter Sunday as an example of how he always respects others' beliefs, and he said players who don't share his world view need not fear for their playing time or worry about their role on his team. But Jackson clearly sees his spirituality as a way to inspire his co-workers and gets excited when he speaks of having a positive influence on others."

Killion goes on to point out that team president Rick Welts is openly gay, and she wonders how much friction that may have caused. Hmm. I wonder too. Is that the root of his dismissal?

We may never know, but a very classy Jackson is not singing that tune. In fact, he says the Warriors used his faith for positive public relations.

"I think it's unfortunate, because if it was true, you don't

encourage media to come do a piece on my church, on my ministry, the work on my faith," he said in a radio interview with 95.7 The Game. "Don't do it when it's convenient and you're searching for something. I never went around beating people in the head with a Bible."

Did Jackson have to hit people over the head with his Bible? Or was merely naming Christ as Lord enough to get him fired in a society that's increasingly intolerant of Christians? Is this one more example of Christian persercution? Or is it sheer coincidence that the coach who turned the team around was just asked to hit the road? And what does mean for other religious coaches, like Doc Rivers? Are they next?

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