

rw16-----

r s AM-FBC--CoachingCarousel 02-21 0672

^AM-FBC--Coaching Carousel , 0671<

^College FB Focus<

^By RICK WARNER=

^AP Football Writer=

Unemployment fell to a four-year low last month, but that's little comfort to college football coaches who are losing their jobs at a rapid rate.

Four Division I-A coaches have resigned, been fired or forced out in the past two weeks. Many more, including coaches of some of the nation's most prominent programs, are expected to get pink slips at the end of the season.

This month's casualty list already includes Michigan State's George Perles, Georgia Tech's Bill Lewis and Iowa State's Jim Walden. Ohio University's Tom Lichtenberg got the boot on Oct. 31.

Other coaches whose jobs may be in jeopardy include Georgia's Ray Goff, LSU's Curley Hallman, Texas' John Mackovic, Oklahoma's Gary Gibbs and Ohio State's John Cooper. All those schools have won national championships, so expectations are always high and patience is often in short supply.

"There's pressure, but when you're making \$300,000 to \$500,000 a year, there better be pressure," said ESPN commentator Beano Cook. "If they don't want the pressure, they should work at Wendy's."

ESPN colleague Lee Corso thinks it's just a coincidence so many top jobs may change hands in such a short period.

"Every situation is different," said Corso, who coached Louisville and Indiana. "The only similarity is that they're not winning enough to please their fans and alumni."

There's nothing new about major college coaches getting fired or being forced to quit: It happened eight times last season and 10 times the year before that. What's unusual is the number of traditionally stable programs that have made or are likely to make coaching changes in the same year.

Woody Hayes coached 28 years at Ohio State and Vince Dooley 25 at Georgia. Bobby Dodd spent 22 years at Georgia Tech, Darrell Royal 20 at Texas, Duffy Daugherty 19 at Michigan State and Charlie McClendon 18 at LSU. Bennie Owen, Bud Wilkinson and Barry Switzer coached Oklahoma for a total of 55 years.

Yet there's a possibility all those schools could have new coaches next season.

In today's win-or-else climate, long tenures at the same school are becoming a rarity. At the start of the season, only 13 of 107 Division I-A schools had coaches who had been there 10 years or more. And one was Perles, whose long-rumored dismissal became a fact Tuesday.

"To say this was a surprise, you'd have to believe in the Easter Bunny," said Perles, whose 4-5 Spartans must win their final two games to avoid a fourth straight non-winning season.

Lewis resigned under pressure after Tech lost seven of its first eight games. Walden stepped down and Lichtenberg was pushed out in the midst of winless seasons.

Hallman is in trouble because LSU is 2-6, but Gibbs, Goff, Mackovic and Cooper are on the hot seat even though their teams currently have winning records. Oklahoma, Georgia and Texas are all 5-4 \_ good enough at some places, but not at schools that are among the top 11 in all-time victories.

"In Texas and Oklahoma, they care about three things \_ sex, oil and football," Cook said. "And not necessarily in that order."

Ohio State is 7-3, but the Buckeyes' 63-14 debacle at Penn State was the Buckeyes' worst loss in 48 years and Cooper may have to snap his 0-5-1 slump against arch-rival Michigan to stay in Columbus.

"You can't go seven years without beating Michigan and expect to keep your job at Ohio State," Cook said.

Several other big-name coaches are having disappointing seasons, but their jobs appear to be safe. They include Hayden Fry at Iowa (3-5-1), Bill Walsh at Stanford (3-5-1), Terry Donahue at UCLA (3-6), Lou Holtz at Notre Dame (5-3) and Gary Moeller at Michigan (6-3).

Corso said sagging attendance is the best way to tell if a coach is on his way out.

"If attendance is going down, you're in big trouble," he said.

AP-NY-02-22-98 1644EST<