

Hammond Fires Shot at Giannini, then Calls for Civility

by Duane Cobb

"This university athletics department is going to deal with this [more than \$1 million financial crisis] not only this year, but in the years ahead. It was due to a lack of leadership. It was due to mismanagement. It was due to a lack of accountability . . . Let's honor ([outgoing USM president Martha] Saunders). Let's quit it, knock it off. Let's all kind of look in the mirror. It's not what the university can do for me. It's 'What can I do for this university?' The answer is simple - unite." Interim USM athletics director Jeff Hammond, [27-April-2012](#).

USM interim athletics director Jeff Hammond's 27-April-2012 call for a return to civility in the USM family seems a bit hollow coming directly after he publicly rebuked his predecessor, former USM athletics director Richard Giannini, for creating what is being referred to as a financial crisis in excess of \$1 million in that USM division. According to Hammond, the \$1 million hole that became public yesterday, amid the sudden resignation of USM president Martha Saunders, was created by mismanagement and a lack of accountability under Giannini. Now, Hammond is referencing the need to schedule road contests against national powerhouses in football and basketball in order to make up the difference. In doing so, Hammond is also asking the USM family – many of whom were scratched in the eye by what they believe was Giannini's ouster in late 2011 at the hands of Saunders, and perhaps Saunders' ally, Hammond, who was serving as an associate AD at the time Giannini departed USM – to move toward peace and harmony in the wake of Saunders' resignation.

It doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out what episodes I'll be perusing in late Nov-2012 and early Dec-2012 as I work on my annual ranking of the top news stories involving USM in 2012. Saunders' sudden resignation – or what most now believe was a firing – and Hammond's department's financial troubles will be easily among the top stories of the year. Thanks to Saunders, there are plenty of others, including the remnants of the Tabletgate scandal that has plagued USM since early-to-mid fall of 2011. Yes, the leader who Hammond likens to General David Patraeus, the current director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, and the same outgoing USM chief who Hammond asks that we "honor" over the coming weeks, was the very picture of scandal. There have been so many scandals during Saunders' administration that, although Joe Bailey has taken enough photos since 2007 to illustrate her history as president, "USM historian" Bo Morgan is going to have to take many literary liberties, and ask readers to suspend their disbelief, in order to swallow what some believe is the history of Saunders' presidency that he was brought to USM from Delta State in order to pen.

It's not surprising, given Hammond's recent tactics, that Giannini has responded publicly to allegations of mismanagement of USM athletics during his tenure.

Granted, Giannini [hasn't been a saint](#) sitting atop of USM athletics – the [national scandal](#) involving bowl committees attests to that – but he has publicly defended himself, [telling media outlets](#) that not one NCAA-mandated audit of both the USM athletics operating budget or the USM Athletics Foundation ever turned up even a single irregularity during his 13-year tenure over sports at USM. Not only that, Giannini added that at the time he left USM in Jan-2012, he encouraged the Saunders administration to conduct a final, six-month audit covering the 1-July-2012 through 31-Dec-2012 budget period. According to Giannini, USM never acted on that encouragement. At the same time, Hammond also appears to be short on saintliness, having recently been twice accused of harassment by high-ranking female administrators in the USM athletics department. Both of these complaints have been lodged with the Mississippi Equal Opportunity Commission, and both of the female executives – one formerly employed by USM and the other currently employed by USM – have retained legal counsel. One of these lawyers, Kim Chaze, has informed local media that his client's filing with the MEEOC is a prelude to legal action, one that [could have](#) Saunders [once again sitting](#) at the defendant's [table](#) in a [federal](#) courtroom. In one of the times she was there, a U.S. District Court judge [admonished her](#) to work toward cleansing the USM campus of acrimony and mistreatment of its employees. Of course, that never happened. Instead, Saunders offered up nearly 50 tenured and tenure-track faculty to handle budget cuts that fell in 2009 and 2010, and later, in 2011, she suspended multiple USM faculty for representing "a danger" to the USM community. Mobbing of USM faculty, in one way or another, seems to have been a staple activity at USM since 2002, when former president Shelby Thames took office. When Saunders took over in 2007, not much seemed to change in that regard.

Hammond has applied for, and is seeking – at least at one time – the permanent directorship of USM athletics. Given the way he has handled the current crises there, and how he is alleged to have mistreated high-ranking females under his supervision, that candidacy is melting away by the minute. At this point, Hammond's reputation is sinking like a stone, to the point that he may even regret ever joining USM. At this point, he should probably be given his own walking papers by the Mississippi IHL.