

# USM Interim AD Outcasts Financial Crisis

*Amidst Controversy Surrounding Saunders' Resignation, AD Goes Public with Some Sordid Details*

Mere minutes after the 27-Apr-2012 announcement from USM president Martha Saunders that [she is resigning](#), effective 30-June-2012, her post as USM president, the Saunders-appointed USM interim athletics director, Jeff Hammond, aired the USM athletics department's [proverbial dirty laundry](#) by providing to *The Hattiesburg American* some of the details of an ongoing financial crisis in his unit. This came as speculation began to swirl indicating that Saunders' was removed as president by the Mississippi IHL out of concern about the current harassment scandal in USM's athletics department. That [scandal involves](#) two separate harassment [complaints filed](#) against Hammond by female associate athletics directors Diane Stark and Sonya Varnell. In what sources believe is an attempt to address concerns that the scandal cost Saunders her presidency, Hammond spoke with *THA's* Patrick Magee about heretofore unknown problems within the USM athletics department.

According to Hammond, a recent internal audit discovered that the athletics department is facing a debt crisis in excess of \$1 million. In Hammond's view, that crisis is "due to a lack of leadership . . . mismanagement . . . a lack of accountability and probably a lack of creative thinking in ways to develop revenue, such as scheduling." Sources tell USMNEWS.net that the "scheduling" issue referenced by Hammond, and later addressed by him in Magee's report, corresponds to the fact that, under Larry Fedora, the USM football team rarely played an SEC school, a practice that was common under former coach Jeff Bower. USM's past practice was to schedule an annual contest against Alabama in Tuscaloosa, a practice that would yield a financial payout to USM in the neighborhood of \$1 million if reinstated today. Bower's teams also added occasional games against Florida, Tennessee, Auburn, Georgia, and LSU, along with matchups against Florida State and other larger schools. Sources add, however, that it was this lack of scheduling attention that helped Fedora's USM teams secure winning records, and even set a new standard, with 12 wins, during 2011. Of course, that accomplishment landed Fedora in Chapel Hill as the new head coach for North Carolina. Hammond explained to Magee that such scheduling practices as occurred under Bower will be reinstated at USM in order to raise large chunks of revenue.

Hammond went much further in outing USM's athletics problems by "lash[ing] out" at a small group of USM athletics boosters that he believes is stirring up trouble for him and Saunders, the USM president Hammond compares to current Central Intelligence Agency director David Petraeus, at least in terms of leadership qualities. As Hammond explained to Magee, "I'm aware there's a small group out there that has tried to create discontent. I'm not immune to any of this. This group, they need to look in the mirror and they should be ashamed of themselves today." Magee reported that Hammond did not name members of this small group, though Magee, possibly through Hammond, noted that the group is determined to make sure that Hammond does not become USM's next permanent athletics director.

Despite all that has happened under him, particularly the two separate harassment complaints, Saunders has remained steadfast in support of Hammond. When informed of Stark's complaint against Hammond, one that lists being yelled at and generally mistreated, Saunders reportedly responded by saying that "[t]hey probably needed to be yelled at." At the 27-Apr-2012 resignation announcement, Saunders also told reports that Hammond is doing a fine job as interim AD, and that USM athletics is in good hands with him during these tumultuous times. Hammond seemed to echo Saunders' sentiment through his final comments to Magee: "We've got to come together. We've all got to look in the mirror. It's time to say, 'what can I do for this university?' It's time to stand shoulder to shoulder, back to back. We have to come together unified. I'm the first one to look in the mirror."