

**.. breaking news ... breaking news ... breaking news ...**

## **USM AD Jeff Hammond is Out as Athletic Director**

HATTIESBURG – On the heels of sourced [reports from ESPN](#) that Athletic Director Jeff Hammond would not have his contract extended, Jeff Hammond [confirmed in a text](#) that “he was informed Tuesday that he would not be retained beyond June 30.” According to the Clarion Ledger, Hammond decline further comment. Shortly after the text message from Hammond, a press conference was called for the morning of 19-June-2013 on the campus of USM.

Sources report that the decision not to extend Hammond’s contract, was surrounded by high levels of acrimony. Adding credibility to these reports was Hammond’s noticeable absence from the meeting. When the media and other interested parties arrived, they were met by USM president Rodney Bennett, former Georgia football coach and athletic director Vince Dooley, and Bob Beaudine, CEO of Eastman & Beaudine, a search firm out of Plano, TX.

Sources have pointed out that rather than extend Hammond’s contract until August 31 - the date Bennett plans to “... have a new athletics director selected and on the ground”, Bennett announced Senior Associate Athletic Director Jeremy McClain would serve as interim AD. As [news reports](#) have pointed out, “Bennett said in May that he did not feel bound by the June 30 contract deadline, and that ... he had the authority to extend Hammond on 30-day increments for as long as it took.” However, Bennett in a short statement claimed “[i]t strictly was to have the opportunity to select my own athletics director.”

Many reports have observed that Hammond was a [divisive figure](#). Many fans [have taken](#) to the [blogosphere](#) and the [news media](#) to voice their displeasure at Hammond’s termination. However, many of those following this story seem to believe that two complaints filed against Hammond by [Diane Stark](#) and [Sonya Varnell](#), two [high ranking females](#) in the USMAD weighed heavily in the decision. One claim recounted by [Kim Chaze](#), counsel for Stark, to the Hattiesburg American is exceptionally troubling.

“According to what I am told, [Hammond] allegedly referred to ‘a twin brother who is a killer’ and he would use that to intimidate persons. He would linger in [Stark’s] office, he wouldn’t leave her office. At one point, he was leaning over her desk, yelling and screaming at her. He attacked

her character. He was screaming so loud at one point that others [in the USM athletics facility] had to close their door. Then, he would come back and ask her to be on his team. That was rather an unfortunate approach to a female employee.”

Stay tuned to [usmnews.net](http://usmnews.net) as this situation is likely to develop even further.