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Duke students and Durham residents gathered outside Cameron with signs asking for Coach G to stay.

Fans rally, implore Coach G to stay

By: Gregory Beaton

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Several hundred Duke students and community members gathered outside the Schwartz-Butters Building Thursday evening to show their support for women's basketball head coach Gail Goestenkors.

Goestenkors returned Thursday from her trip to Texas and said in a statement that she will take "a few days" to decide her future.

The crowd—which included women's basketball players and assistant coaches, men's basketball players, members of the administration and many other fans—held up signs and cheered alongside the Duke pep band imploring Goestenkors to remain in her current position.

Goestenkors did not attend the rally due to exhaustion from her three-day trip to Austin, and she is expected to travel to Cleveland Friday for the start of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association convention, held annually in conjunction with the Final Four. After her trip to Cleveland, the coach only has a small window of time before she is scheduled to leave for Rome, Italy, where the women's U.S. Senior National Team is slated to begin practice April 7.

Although there is no official timetable for a decision, Goestenkors is scheduled to meet with Director of Athletics Joe Alleva before she leaves, a source close to the program told The Chronicle.

"It is in my best interest to talk with the Duke administration, family and staff before making a decision," Goestenkors said in the statement. "I have spent 15 wonderful years at Duke, love the University and what it stands for. It has been very flattering to be considered for the Texas job."

Although Goestenkors was not on campus to address the crowd, seniors Lindsey Harding and Alison Bales, sophomore Abby Waner and assistant coach Gale Valley addressed the crowd.

"Duke fans are the best," said Valley, who urged those in attendance to continue sending messages to Goestenkors to encourage her to stay. "She feels touched and fortunate while she goes through this. We hope she stays for 15 more years."

Valley's final statement spurred a cheer of "15 more, 15 more," from the crowd, in reference to Goestenkors' tenure at Duke. Fans also cheered "Gail is not for sale" and held up signs, including one bearing the message, "It's time 4 Duke to Honor Our Women."

Men's basketball associate head coach Johnny Dawkins walked through the event and into

Schwartz-Butters, stopping to address the crowd. "I want Coach G to stay, too," he said.

Some supporters of the program said they hoped Duke's administration would do everything in its capability to ensure Goestenkers' return. The Dallas Morning News reported Thursday that Texas had offered Goestenkers \$800,000 per year, which is substantially more than her current compensation.

"She's a great asset to the school, she's a great asset to the ACC, and it would be a tremendous loss to lose her," said Kathy Kennedy, Trinity '82 and a front-row season ticket holder, who attended Thursday's rally. "Hopefully the athletic administration will act a little bit more like they really want to keep her.... It's just time for them to recognize her prominence, support her program, support her in every way, the same as they would do if Mike Krzyzewski were in her position, to keep her."

Alleva did not attend the rally and neither did President Richard Brodhead.

Plans for the rally were set in motion Wednesday after news broke that Goestenkers was interviewing on Texas' campus in Austin. Duke Student Government President Elliot Wolf, a junior, reached out to Larry Moneta, vice president for student affairs, and Kristina Johnson, dean of the Pratt School of Engineering, to help build upon the original idea first suggested by a member of the band.

Director of Dining Services Jim Wulforst provided logistical support and helped arrange for dozens of pizza pies and customized water bottles emblazoned with the phrase "The G-Force is with us" on their white labels.

"We wanted a big rally, wanted a lot of people here, so we just threw down to tell people about it," Wolf said. "We decided that it would be good to do something similar to what happened when Coach K was going to go the Lakers."

Members of the team who were made available to the media at the rally said they had not spoken to Goestenkers outside of a few text message exchanges, and Waner said she had been in contact with the three recruits for next year.

"They're just as concerned as we are, they want to see her stay," Waner said. "Right now, we're just concerned about the team."

At the rally, fans discussed whether they thought Goestenkers would stay or go, even though there was no indication Thursday as to which way Goestenkers was leaning.

"She's the spirit of Duke in all respects-such a great coach and a great teacher," Moneta said. "Texas is a football town. No matter what basketball is going to be secondary. Duke is a basketball campus. G is beloved."

A close friend of Goestenkers', Johnson has done more than throw in her two cents for the coach to return-"10 cents," she said-but Johnson said she would respect the decision either way.

"First and foremost I want what's best for her," Johnson said. "If we lose her, it will be a tremendous loss.... I'm hoping it's Duke."

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