

Luke DeCock

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If LeVelle Moton were white, would he be an ACC coach?

If you can't see why LeVelle Moton hasn't gotten an ACC coaching job, take another look

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There are a lot of reasons why this successful basketball coach hasn't gotten a better job at a big ACC school. Some are shouted. Some are only whispered.

How he builds his program, for one thing. People are open about that. Lots of transfers. Lots of kids from junior colleges. ACC programs recruit blue-chip freshmen. This coach has found success — has been forced to find success — by working the margins for talent. That's not going to work at an ACC school with high academic standards.

Certainly, there have been small-college coaches who couldn't hack it when they made the jump to the ACC, coming from schools much bigger than this one. Steve Donahue went to Boston College from Cornell. Brian Gregory went to Georgia Tech from Dayton. Danny Manning went to Wake Forest from Tulsa. Jim Christian went to BC from Ohio. (Obviously, there are broad exceptions, but they're never mentioned when assessing the prospects of the coach in question.)

And then there's the part no one wants to say out loud: This coach doesn't talk like a private-school professor. The way he speaks reflects his background, where he came from, how he grew up. It's not "proper," not for such a prestigious institution, even if he's no less effective of a communicator for it.

His basketball credentials are impeccable, able to win 20-plus games repeatedly with the scantest of resources, building one of the dominant programs in his league. As a coach, as a "leader of men," his Xs and Os are unquestioned. It's all the other stuff that has led Power 5 athletic directors to look the other way.

We're talking, of course, about Steve Forbes.

Oh, did you think it was someone else?

Almost every criticism, spoken or whispered, about N.C. Central's LeVelle Moton also applies to Forbes, newly hired at Wake Forest. One is 55, white and has a Power 5 job. The other is 45, African American and does not.

There are a lot of people who never had to confront the idea of systemic racism before who are now finding it unable to avoid, and for some it is a difficult concept to absorb. If you're willing to look for it, and some are now willing who would not have before, its pernicious influence can be found almost everywhere.

The examples of Forbes and Moton offer a stark and bracing test case. With the aforementioned caveats, both are excellent basketball coaches who have achieved tremendous success already and have the potential for tremendous success in the ACC.

Only one has been given that opportunity.

Forbes built his East Tennessee State program with junior-college and Division I transfers, his only other head-coaching experience is at the JUCO level and he talks like he just walked out of the small Iowa town in which he was raised. If you want to judge coaches on their elocution, a fool's game in every way but one nevertheless often played at elite academies like Wake Forest, Manning was head and shoulders above Forbes.

But Wake Forest was willing to look past all that and hire Forbes — who has an NCAA show-cause order on his curriculum vitae after being entangled in the Bruce Pearl scandal at Tennessee! — because athletic director John Currie and Wake's powerful boosters identified him as the best coach for the job. And that was over another candidate in Wes Miller whose ties to the school were much stronger.

It was a great hire, in no small part because Wake Forest was willing to look past everything that might have argued against hiring Forbes.

So why won't athletic directors or schools look past all of that with Moton?

(That's a rhetorical question.)

What Moton has done in Durham — at a much higher degree of difficulty, at an HBCU with limited resources, albeit with an amazing, historic gym — is arguably more impressive. In a conference that has pulled more than its share of 15-2 NCAA tournament upsets, Moton has gone to the NCAA tournament in four of the past six years with an NIT bid thrown in. And his best team, the one that lost to Iowa State in the first round in 2014, was built around players he recruited, mentored and developed into stars.

Unlike Forbes, Moton is a man of tremendous influence in the game and community who commands a national audience. Players from the area, even those who merely come here to play at Duke or UNC, trust him implicitly. When Moton shared his story of being harassed by police, it's not a coincidence Raymond Felton was in the car with him. John Wall and Rodney Purvis both made sure to include NCCU among their finalists.

When Moton speaks, people listen. Everywhere. As they should.

Short of winning an NCAA tournament game — that feels inevitable, and might have come this March under different circumstances — there's not much more Moton can do to polish his resume.

After 11 years at his alma mater, Moton has earned the right to move up if he wants it, every bit as much as Forbes did. Maybe now people will stop to ask why he hasn't.