

Coe, Dubuque penalized for bench-clearing event

Written by Jim Ecker

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Members of the Coe College and University of Dubuque baseball programs have been penalized for their roles in a bench-clearing incident that took place during an Iowa Conference doubleheader April 26 in Dubuque.

Dubuque assistant coach Eric Munson, who played nine years in the Major Leagues, was suspended for four games for shoving Coe head coach Steve Cook. Coe freshman Tom Simon was suspended for four games for shoving a Dubuque player.

Coe assistant coach Jay Whannel was suspended for one game for arguing with an umpire. In addition, Whannel will not be allowed to coach first base when the Kohawks play their first game in the Iowa Conference tournament Thursday at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Chuck Yrigoyen, the commissioner of the Iowa Conference, outlined the disciplinary action Monday in an interview with the Metro Sports Report. He said Munson and Simon were suspended for "fighting," according to NCAA rules, but Yrigoyen said no punches were thrown by anyone in the incident, according to his investigation.

Yrigoyen said it was the first baseball incident like this in his seven years as league commissioner, with the shoving and players leaving both dugouts. "It's an unfortunate situation," he said.

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Tensions between the two teams escalated during the second game of the doubleheader due to "bench jockeying" by both teams, Cook told the Metro Sports Report Monday.

Between innings, Munson approached the Coe dugout on the first-base side of the field on his way to coaching at first base for Dubuque's next at-bat.

"Coach Munson wasn't happy, would be the easiest way to say it and he communicated with our dugout," said Cook. "And from there it just kind of escalated.

"It was a lot more yelling than it was anything else. Once things settled down from the initial confrontation, it was really just a lot of yelling."

Cook said he came up the steps of the dugout to meet Munson after Munson began talking to his players.

"That's where, as the head coach, I jumped in," he said. "Ultimately, his four-game suspension was from pushing me as part of that arguing back and forth.

"He was in close proximity to our dugout and yelling. I presented my argument to get away from our dugout. As I got myself up the steps in his direction, he did push me back."

Munson and Dubuque head coach Paul Wyczawski did not return a phone call Monday from the Metro Sports Report.

Cook said Simon, a freshman outfielder from Morton Grove, Ill., got verbally involved in the incident before shoving a Dubuque player. He was the only player singled out by the umpires on either side, according to Yrigoyen. Cook emphasized that Simon played a relatively minor role in the incident.

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Jeff Frese was the home-plate umpire and Josh Mara was the base umpire for the game.

Simon served his four-game suspension last week and is eligible for the Iowa Conference tournament. Whannel cannot coach at first base in Thursday's game in the conference tournament at 4 p.m., but he can be in uniform and can be in the dugout during the game.

Munson has served his four-game suspension, but Dubuque did not qualify for the league tournament.

Cook said this is the first incident like this during his 19 years as Coe's head coach.

"Things like that, they all kind of happen so fast," he remarked. "It was definitely an unfortunate one. We don't like to see our program involved in that kind of thing. We try to have a higher expectation for ourselves than anybody involved.

"We've been trying to put it behind us," he said.

Cook said there were no on-field incidents during the game that led to the incident. He said nobody had been spiked, nobody brushed back by a pitch and nobody hit by a pitch. He said players on both teams were making comments to each other that led to the hard feelings.

Coe swept the doubleheader from Dubuque that day. The Kohawks returned to Dubuque the next day (April 27) and swept the Spartans again. Cook said there were no further incidents in the second twinbill.

"I thought both teams did a good job on Monday and just played baseball," he said. "We just moved past it."

Munson, 37, played parts of nine seasons in the Major Leagues with Detroit, Tampa Bay, Houston and Oakland from 2000 to 2009 as a catcher, third baseman and first baseman. He

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had a career batting average of .214 in 361 games. Munson was the third overall pick in the first round of the 1999 draft by Detroit and received a \$3.5 million signing bonus.