

Lincoln Park's Elijah Minnie talks departure from Robert Morris

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Elijah Minnie agreed with Andy Toole's words after Robert Morris' loss to Central Connecticut State on Thursday night.

Well, partially.

Minnie said on Friday he agreed that players who don't work hard or buy into the program shouldn't be on the team. He just didn't agree that he fit that description, although he did admit his work ethic probably didn't live up to Toole's standards.

Minnie also said he asked to leave the program.

"I walked into his office and I had a meeting with him," Minnie said on Friday. "I asked if I could leave the team. I asked him if I could be done with the team. I was not kicked off the team. It could have been avoided. The coaches and players just bumped heads too much. There was a lack of respect from both ends."

"Elijah was (first) suspended indefinitely from the team," Toole said Friday. "I met with him and then he said he didn't want to be a part of the team."

Toole added that even before Minnie asked to leave the program, there was little or no chance of him returning from his suspension. Kavon Stewart also sat out the Central Connecticut State game with a suspension, but he's still with the team.

Following an announcement after Thursday's game that Minnie wouldn't be returning, Toole said, "If you don't want to work, if you don't want to be a part of this program, if you don't want to be about what this program stands for, you can't be here."

Minnie started 15 games this season for the Colonials, averaging 12 points and six rebounds. Last year, he was a key piece to a team that won the Northeast Conference tournament championship and advanced to the NCAA Tournament.

An argument with Toole at practice led up to Minnie's original suspension. Toole called it "the straw that broke the camel's back," adding that there were "numerous (past) incidents that I don't think need to be reported or discussed." Minnie had served several suspensions during his time with the program.

"You get worn of the antics," Toole said, "and that's kind of what happened."

According to Minnie, Toole told him during the meeting that he "doesn't think (he's) a team player" and that he has "to be the center of attention."

Minnie was hurt by Toole's words and said he didn't want to be a part of the team anymore if that's how the coach felt. He was disappointed, too, not only in Toole's assessment, but also in himself. He admitted he had his fair share of regrets from his two seasons with Robert Morris and took some of the blame.

"I'd definitely work a little bit harder," Minnie said. "According to him, I didn't work hard enough. The respect level between me and the coaches, coach to player, was pretty much arguments constantly. I wish I could change that.

"There's a little bit of immaturity on both ends between players and coaches, including myself. I wish things could change a lot. I hate that I have regrets, but that's fair."

Despite how his time with the Colonials ended, Minnie said he learned a lot from Toole and his time in the program.

"I won't take anything away from Toole," he said. "He's a good coach. He's going to have a great career in the future."

The two had a strong connection in the beginning, Minnie said, but it started crumbling during his freshman season. They often butted heads, but a conversation just before the Colonials' run through the end of last season and the NEC tournament smoothed the waters.

Minnie called the relationship breakdown a "slow process of not understanding each other." In some instances, he admitted, he should have kept his mouth shut.

"I can't go back and change that," Minnie said.

As for the future, Minnie said he's looking into other programs and having his coaches from high school help him. He said he wants to go straight to a school to stay for the next two years and not attend a junior college.

"I know it's not going to be easy," he said of dealing with coaches' questions about his departure from Robert Morris. "I know it's probably my fault. Going forward, I want to better myself and prove everything that happened here and things done here weren't really me."