

NEWS • FOOTBALL

Wildhack cites late season struggles for Babers firing

Babers won just seven games in November during his time as head coach.

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Syracuse athletic director John Wildhack said the reasoning for firing Dino Babers boiled down to poor late-season performance. Jonathan Kinane

After [firing football head coach Dino Babers](#) with one game remaining in the 2023 season, Syracuse athletic director John Wildhack pointed to the program's frequent late-season struggles as the reason for the move.

In a press conference held on Monday, Wildhack told reporters that the team's late-season losses to Boston College and Georgia Tech sealed Babers's fate.

"We win those two, we're not here today having this conversation," Wildhack said.

Wildhack said that the decision was not a "knee-jerk reaction" and cited results from the last two seasons, in which the Orange struggled down the stretch.

In 2021, SU sat at 5-4, needing just one win in its last three games to clinch bowl eligibility. Instead, losses to Louisville, NC State and Pittsburgh condemned the Orange to a 5-7 campaign.

Last year, Syracuse flew to a 6-0 start before struggling with injuries and a lack of depth, ultimately finishing the season with a 7-6 record and a loss in the Pinstripe Bowl.

But it's not a recent problem, Babers compiled a 7-22 in November games since taking over in 2016.

"There's a consistent theme that we've not been successful in November," Wildhack said. "We've played meaningful games in November, and that's what you want, you want to be in position where you play games in November that matter...but we've not had the success that you need and that really is one of the things that stood out to me."

While Wildhack emphasized the importance of making a bowl game — something a 6-6 record would have accomplished — he shared that he met with Babers before the 2023 season and that the benchmark for success was a 7-5 season.

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SYRACUSE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR
John Wildhack

Even after the team's hot start and subsequent swoon, the benchmark remained unchanged. When the loss in Atlanta sent the team's record to 5-6, it meant that Babers failed to meet the goal.

"Once that wasn't attainable, it was time to move," Wildhack said.

In the press conference following Syracuse's win over Pittsburgh at Yankee Stadium, Babers said something that now seems like a campaign to keep his job.

"I hope as coaches and players we can find a way to get (the team) an opportunity to do something that hasn't been done in 20 years around here, and that's back-to-back bowl games with the same head football coach," Babers said.

If Babers had met the benchmark and made a bowl game, it would have been the first time Syracuse made back-to-back bowl appearances under the same coach since Paul Pasqualoni led the program to consecutive postseason appearances in 1998 and 1999.



The search for a replacement is already underway.

Wildhack said that a major reason he decided to fire Babers with one game left in the season is so the program can get a head start in finding its next head coach.

While he said that being an alumni is an "attribute," Wildhack is hoping to hire a candidate with a background in the Northeast.

"I think experience in the Northeast, either as a player, as a coach or as an assistant coach, is important," Wildhack said. "It's really hard to take someone from the East Coast and put them on the West Coast. You don't have those recruiting relationships, those relationships with high school coaches."

Wildhack also highlighted that head coaching or coordinating experience at the Power Five level will be something Syracuse hones in on as part of its search.

Syracuse can still clinch bowl eligibility with a win over Wake Forest on Saturday. Interim head coach Nunzio Campanile will lead the Orange into the final game of the regular season.



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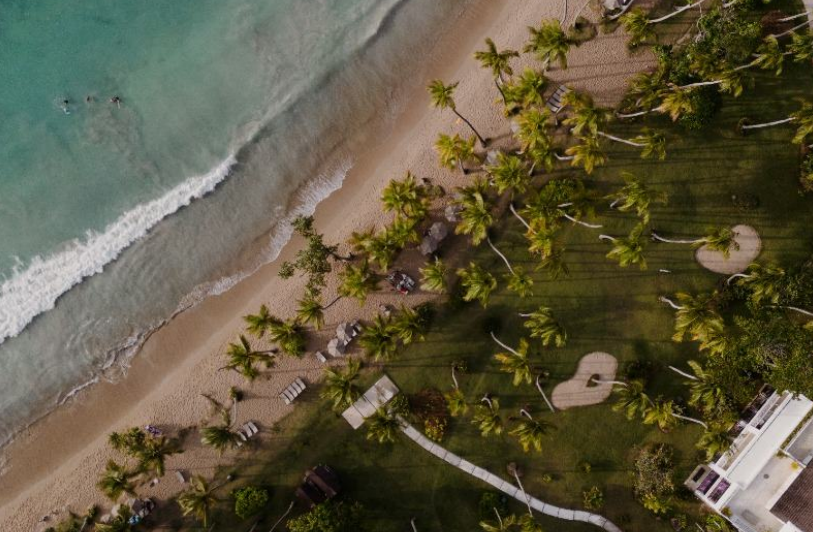


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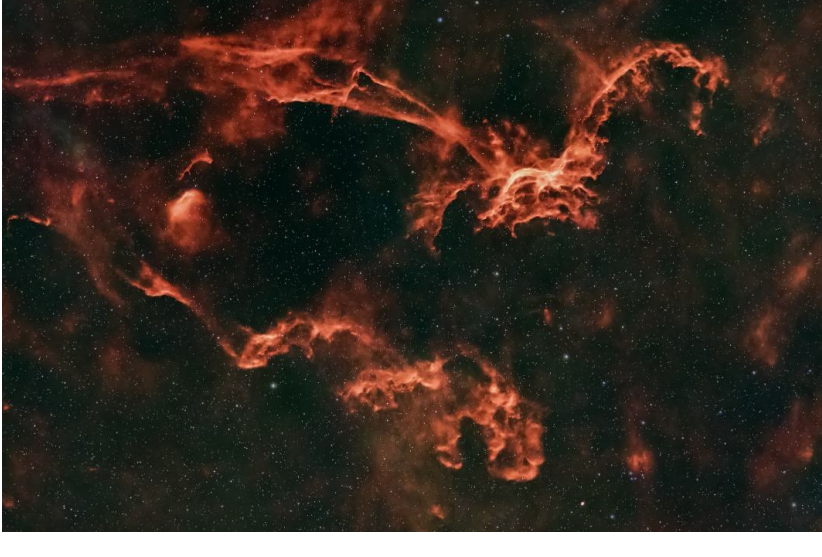


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