

Acting Miami AD Blake James embracing challenge

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CORAL GABLES, Fla.

(AP) _ Blake James will move into his new office Monday morning, and the title on his University of Miami business cards is changing.

The Hurricanes' new acting athletic director said in a telephone interview Saturday night that he's eager to try to lead Miami through what will likely be a difficult few months, especially with NCAA sanctions looming as the result of a lengthy investigation that has examined, among other things, claims by a former booster that he provided dozens of athletes and recruits with impermissible benefits over an eight-year span.

``There's challenges in every one of these jobs," James said from Chicago, where he was watching the Miami-Notre Dame football game. ``I wouldn't look at this job any differently than any other one in the country. Everyone has challenges; you just address things and you move forward. ... I know I'm ready for the challenge and I was honored to take it on and I'll continue to carry the baton as long as they want me to be that person doing it."

James is expected to be a serious candidate to assume the role on a full-time basis. The university has not revealed any timetable for hiring a replacement for Shawn Eichorst, whose hiring to be the athletic director at Nebraska was announced on Thursday.

James was on his way to the airport on Thursday, ready for his trip to Chicago, when he said university president Donna Shalala contacted him with the news that he would be the acting director.

``I'm very honored and very excited, and I'm looking forward to moving forward," James said.

Eichorst was hired in April 2011, not long before the news broke that Miami was under NCAA investigation, a probe that originally revolved around allegations made by convicted Ponzi scheme architect Nevin Shapiro, who piled athletes and recruits with cash, dinners, nightclub visits, yacht rides and other gifts. Shapiro is serving a 20-year prison sentence for masterminding the Ponzi scheme.

It's unclear when the sanctions will come, though it's now most unlikely that the probe is settled before the start of 2013.

Speaking with reporters at Soldier Field on Saturday night, James said that in his previous role, he "wasn't involved with the NCAA issues."

It was believed very few Miami senior staff members were directly involved with developments related to the joint NCAA-university inquiry, with Eichorst being among them.

"That's something I know as an institution we're on top of and we'll continue to move forward as a program," James said.

While the unknown _ how severe the sanctions will be _ is a cloud over Miami, James said there also is much that the department can point to in a positive sense these days as well.

"Whirlwind, that's a term I've used to describe the last few days," James said. "It's been a great weekend to walk around Chicago and just see the Hurricane faithful here. I don't know the exact number of Hurricane fans, I know we sold 20,000 seats and I would say as many as I've ever seen in all my years around the program were used by Miami Hurricane fans. We have a great showing here. The last few days, it's been hard to keep up with everything."

James had been Miami's Senior Associate Athletic Director for Development and Ticket Operations before the promotion, also overseeing some Hurricane sport programs. This is his second stint at Miami; he spent about eight years there starting in the early 1990s, and returned

to the Hurricanes in 2010 after serving as Maine's athletic director for five years.

``Monday morning, I'll switch offices and look at what we have on our list of things to accomplish and we'll continue to move forward," James said. ``The only difference for me is the involvement I have in that list is much greater. I'm not going to make a bunch of changes on Monday. We're going to stick to the plan we have."