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## **Shatel: Strange night for Dana; good one for CU**

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WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Same long-sleeve white shirt. Same liberal use of timeouts. Same familiar walk off the court after a loss: quickly, head down.

Wait a minute. What's that?

A security guard following Dana Altman?

In Omaha?

Really?

Next thing you know, Tom Osborne will need a police escort home from work.

It was a sign of the evening, a very strange evening, one of those nights where all 12,381 fans will have to go home and watch the film to make sure it happened.

Dana Altman lost to Creighton 84-76 in the CBI finals on Monday night, and there's a sentence nobody ever thought they'd read.

It was weird science, from Altman coaching on the opposite end to that security guard trailing him to the visitors' locker room.

Maybe the guard was there to show Altman where to dress.

"I've never been in here before," Altman said afterward.

No guard was necessary Monday night.

That was a good thing.

Altman's return to Omaha, nearly one year after he left the Creighton job he had held for 16 years, went off without a negative vibe.

If there was a "boo" when Altman appeared before tipoff, it was drowned out by the applause as he entered the court.

Or the loud cheer when he was announced to the crowd as the head coach of Oregon.

Afterward, as he made his quick exit to the locker room, Creighton fans above the tunnel stood and clapped and cheered, and the only sound like "boo" was some students yelling "C-U! C-U!"

That doesn't mean everyone was happy. I saw several longtime Creighton fans stand with their arms folded — not cheering — when Altman was introduced.

What's the old saying? If you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything.

Even the dissidents were polite on Altman Homecoming Night.

"It was great," said former CU player and assistant Nick Bahe, the Jays' radio color analyst. "It was perfect."

"I thought the crowd response was great," said Jays assistant Darian DeVries, a holdover from Altman's staff here. "The way it should have been."

"It was what I expected," said Creighton Athletic Director Bruce Rasmussen. "We have an intelligent crowd. People knew this was the time to properly thank Dana for all that he'd done here."

It was perfect. And the response provided the classy ending that this story was missing a year ago, when Altman left without saying goodbye, or anything, even to some of his closest friends.

He had returned last summer to speak to the players and friends he had left behind. But Altman used this trip to get personal again. As the Jays stretched and warmed up early Monday evening, Altman walked out to greet some of his former players.

He had already spent much of Sunday with the inner circle of friends the introverted Altman had for 16 years here.

So all that was left was to meet and greet the 12,000 or so folks Altman lured into buying Creighton season tickets years ago.

"I didn't know what to expect," Altman said. "People were great. They were great to us for 16 years here. It was a great atmosphere."

So now we can turn the page, to bigger and better things.

Like a CBI championship.

That prize was lost in the drama of Monday night, and rightfully so, but now it sits there for the taking if the Jays can win a game in Eugene, Ore.

What's a CBI championship mean? Dunno, but maybe Final Four-bound Virginia Commonwealth can tell us. VCU won last year's CBI.

Creighton is playing like it's on a CBI mission at home. But now the Jays have to hit the road, and do it on the Matisse painting that is the Oregon basketball floor. Let's hope they don't get lost in the woods at midcourt at Matthew Knight Arena.

The Jays know their way around Qwest Center Omaha. And they played with endless energy. Not that they were lacking incentive.

"It was definitely a little weird, seeing him on the other bench," said Antoine Young.

Weird?

"He was calling out plays that I knew from last year," Young said. "I knew what they were running because I ran it here."

Did it help?

"It didn't hurt," Young said.

The thing that was painful was Doug McDermott's left shoulder. Young had his bell rung and had to leave the game. Little Mac knocking someone out is a good sign for next season. Not so good for this game.

Young returned, and he and his teammates gave their former coach some flashbacks — and some moments he hadn't seen in awhile.

Gregory Echenique (15 points, nine rebounds, four blocks), the transfer from Rutgers who was recruited originally by Altman for CU, showed the coach what he missed this year. Young, Josh Jones (11 points) and Kenny Lawson all played like they were trying to impress the old guy. Even Kaleb Korver hit a 3-pointer right in front of Altman.

The one guy Altman didn't recognize was the guy he'll study on film on the trip home: Doug McDermott, who led CU with 21 points and was flashing his multiple skills around the rim with both hands.

It was a terrific game, played at a breathless, racehorse pace at times. Altman's new team looked quicker, but his former team found more energy at all the right times. Wonder why.

"It wasn't for him," Young said. "We really were trying to treat it like another game. We're trying to win. We're trying to win the CBI."

Do they make banners for beating your old coach?

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