

The Charlotte Observer

'I love my family more than basketball.' Longtime CMS girls basketball coach steps down

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South Mecklenburg girls basketball coach Cristie Mitchell has decided to take some time for her family. Mitchell, who won 281 career games, told her team Wednesday night that she was stepping down as coach after 24 years inside Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Mitchell said she will remain at South Mecklenburg as a teacher.

"I reflected on the countless hours I give to my girls," Mitchell said, "and I wanted to be able to spend more time with my family and be the parent I needed to be." Mitchell's oldest son, Aiden, recently left for college at College of Charleston, and her youngest son, Mason, made the varsity team at Rock Hill's Northwestern High. Mason tore his ACL in November and had surgery Jan. 5. Three days later, both of Mitchell's parents were admitted to the ICU and placed on ventilators with COVID-related pneumonia. Her father died Jan. 15, and her mother is recovering at Mitchell's home.

"I continued coaching and was driving an hour and 20 minutes from Rock Hill to Salisbury daily for a month to be with my parents in the hospital," Mitchell said.

"Like Coach K said after his last (home) game this week, I love my family more than basketball." Through all of that, Mitchell led the Sabres to a SoMECK conference tournament championship, upsetting a Myers Park team that was then

ranked No. 1 in The Charlotte Observer's Sweet 16 poll and No. 1 in North Carolina. South Meck finished 21-4 and made the N.C. 4A playoffs. Mitchell is the co-founder of the Charlotte Hoops Challenge, one of the state's most successful annual high school tournaments. She was one of the first co-hosts of The Observer's Talking Preps high school basketball streaming show, and she is co-founder of the Select 60 Showcase, an annual recruiting event for Charlotte-area girls.

She began her career coaching basketball and volleyball at Olympic High and the old Waddell High, and she has coached basketball at South Mecklenburg since 2010. "This is a really hard decision for me, but I have to put my family first," she said. "I plan on continuing the Charlotte Hoops Challenge and Select 60 showcase. And I may return to coaching one day. But for now, I am excited to have finished my career with a special group of girls and a special season: 21-4 and conference tournament champions."

