Northern Illinois today ended the speculation about its next head football coach by hiring Wisconsin defensive coordinator Dave Doeren to replace Jerry Kill, who left the Huskies for Minnesota, as its new head football coach. But three coaching vacancies remain in the MAC, Kent State, Ball State and Temple.

The Kent State position has been vacant the longest, and quite a few names have been attached to it. Most are currently coordinators at big-time programs, so you would assume Kent is opening the checkbook a little bit for this hire. As of today Kent has not offered the position to any of its candidates.

Kent's out-going coach, Doug Martin, had a base salary in the neighborhood of $200,000 that could increase if certain incentives were met. This is not enough to get a coordinator with a big-time program, so if Kent hopes to remain in that ballpark it will have to narrow its search to position coaches. However, with the names that have come out, it appears like Kent is going to spend some money.

West Virginia offensive coordinator Jeff Mullen is one name that has come out, and he is very familiar with Kent State athletic director Joel Nielsen and executive associate athletic director Tom Kleinlein, who are handling the search for the Golden Flashes' next coach on their own. Mullen was a coach at Wake Forest when Nielsen and Kleinlein were there, and he currently recruits Ohio for the Mountaineers. Mullen has been reported to have already interviewed for the position.

Another name that has surfaced in numerous reports is someone football fans in Ohio are very familiar with, Ohio State assistant head coach and wide receivers coach Darrell Hazell. Hazell is a fiery, no-nonsense kind of coach that has done wonders with the Buckeyes' receiving corps over the last few years. But is he going to leave his high-profile position at a national powerhouse like Ohio State to join Kent for $200,000 or so? I highly doubt it. Hazell is also fantastic with recruits. He has ties to Kleinlein…he was an assistant at Rutgers when Kleinlein was there. He has been at Ohio State since 2004.

Alabama wide receivers coach Curt Cignetti is also a candidate, and his name is gaining quite a bit of momentum. Cignetti was recommended by Kent State alumn, Nick Saban, who was one of the people Nielsen reached out to after Martin's resignation.

Another prominent name that has been mentioned is Texas wide receivers coach Bobby Kennedy, who also worked as an assistant at Wake when Nielsen was there. Kennedy was the receivers coach for the Deamon Deacons and has quite a resume, including stops at Washington, Arizona, Wyoming, Penn State and Illinois and is a strong recruiter as well. In fact, he is Mack Brown's recruiting coordinator at Texas.

Finally, Kent is said to have also interviewed current Golden Flashes defensive coordinator Pete Rekstis, who expressed interest in the position after Martin resigned in November.

It is this writer's opinion that Hazell would be the best man for the job, but if forced to say who Kent would hire would tell you they will go with Cignetti.

It looks like Ball State will take a different route than Kent in finding its next coach…especially if the Star Press in Muncie has anything to say about it. The paper is urging Ball State athletic director Tom Collins to take his time and do a lot of homework, as well as urging him to form a search committee made up of people from within the athletic department as well as non-university and non-athletic representatives.

One of the early names connected to the Cardinals came courtesy of Super Bowl-winning coach Sean Payton of the New Orleans Saints, who stated that former Ball State quarterback

Mike Neu would be a good fit to run the program. Another name that has been thrown around is Oregon offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mike Helfrich, who would cost a good chunk of change and is expected to receive interest from higher-profile programs once the Bowl Season is complete. Helfrich is one of those “hot coordinators” who turn up every year and is usually ticketed for a bigger program than can be found in the MAC.

The Cardinals are also rumored to be interested in two members of the Indiana State coaching staff, linebackers coach Rick Minter and head coach Trent Miles. Minter is a stronger possibility than Miles, who would probably consider the move from Indiana State to Ball State as a lateral move despite the step up in divisions.

Akron defensive coordinator Curt Mallory has already interviewed for the position, but one would assume he is not at the top of the Cardinals’ wish list. Former Ball State running back Bernie Parmalee, one of the best backs in BSU history and currently the tight ends coach for the Kansas City Chiefs, is a strong possibility. Michigan State offensive coordinator Dan Treadwell has also been mentioned, but, again, he is one of the hot names on the national scene and is probably headed to a higher-profile program.

Finally, current Ball State offensive coordinator Eddie Faulkner, the current interim head coach, has expressed interest in taking the job permanently. On the heels of giving up close to 60 points in the season finale he probably is a dark horse at this point.

One thing is for sure, when Brady Hoke left for San Diego State and the Cardinals brought Parrish in it was a big mistake. He never really fit in, and it showed on the field. My guess is that Ball State is going to bring in a name that will create some buzz around Muncie…and that would be Parmalee.

Temple just lost Golden to Miami, so it is very, very early in its coaching search. Although one name out there is New Hampshire head coach Sean McDonnell.

There is also interesting news involving a former MAC head coach. JD Brookhart, who formerly was the head coach at Akron, has been hired at the University of Colorado as the tight ends/passing game coordinator/special teams coordinator for the Buffaloes.