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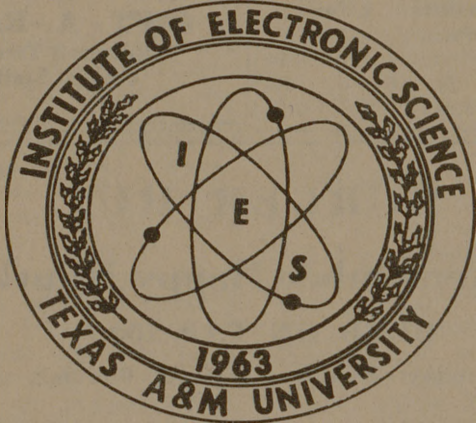


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John Curylo

Anyone can see that Gene Stallings has class

Much has been and will be said about the firing of Texas A&M's athletic director and head football coach, Gene Stallings.

It is easy to second-guess and speculate about the decision. It is hard to weigh the alternatives and take action in a matter that is controversial. Had it not been a hard thing to do, the dismissal would not have taken so much time to discuss and deliberate.

Regardless of the opinion one has on the matter, few will disagree that Stallings has a lot of class.

For the past two seasons, his position at A&M has been questionable, due to the rumors about the status of his job. His squad's record a year ago was 2-9 and several weeks ago it was 1-5. Yet through it all, the man was impressive.

It's not easy for a club to make a complete turnaround, but the 1971 Aggies did just that. During the darker days of this season, the players and coaches stuck it out and stuck together, and they were rewarded.

Through it all, Stallings was willing to take the blame, even though it was not he out on the field fumbling the ball or missing a tackle. He was always complimentary of the players and gave a lot of credit to his assistants.

Last year, he was never afraid to go downstairs to the Lettermen's Lounge to meet with the sports writers each Tuesday.

Week after week it is not the easiest task in the world to explain defeats and answer questions about what happened. Yet, he always came across well.

After home games, there is the usual press conference at the Ramada Inn. Stallings showed up and talked about the game. This was not his most pleasant duty, but he was most gracious during these events.

Outside of relations with the press, Gene was a gentleman in every sense of the word. In Nebraska, eight sophomores from the Aggie Band showed up for the game after having driven the 750 miles without tickets.

Stallings told them to stand on the sidelines with the team, and they all said they had the time of their lives.

Anyone who ever went out to watch the Aggies practice was sure to get a smile and a wink from the congenial coach. He treated everybody with importance and was quite personable in everything he did.

Stallings was a good example of hard work and dedication. He went to work early and stayed late. He was always willing to talk to reporters, administrators, former students, students, parents and fans.

But at no time did the man nicknamed "Bebes" ever show his class more than in the events of last Thursday night. Getting fired has to be the most painful thing in any man's life. Through it all, Stallings has shown what kind of person he is.

Although he knew that the Board of Directors was meeting to pass judgment on him and that he would soon be pleading his case, Gene was at the Aggie

Press Room to talk to the reporters.

"I'm not afraid to talk about it," he said. "I know you guys (the press) have a job to do. Heck, I'm a grown man, and I can face up to the situation."

Attendance was a poor point this season, and there was a lot of pressure on Stallings to come up with a winner. Poor support by Aggie graduates and undergraduates alike showed up, but in Gene's mind, A&M fans were great.

"I'd be awfully disappointed if the alumni didn't care," he explained, "particularly if they didn't get upset when we lose. All they asked was that I win, and I didn't. A&M's been good to me, and I still love it, regardless."

He talked about his contract and showed optimism at the chances of the 1972 version of the Cadets. He had a positive attitude about the outcome of the meeting he would attend later that night, and he wasn't afraid to face the facts.

But if Stallings displayed a great deal of integrity then, it was after the firing that he really showed his poise and maturity. His first thoughts were of the future of the coaching staff and the players.

The next morning, just as he did the morning after every Aggie game, he woke up to catch a 4 o'clock plane for Houston to make his television show. Later that morning he had a staff meeting and taped his radio show for numerous stations around the state.

"Lots of times when you get fired, you want to be critical," he said. "But I don't want to be critical. The people I've worked for have been good to me. I'm not bitter toward A&M."

Stallings will probably stay in football. It was rumored that he was offered a position in the personnel department of the New Orleans Saints, but he denied this. Wherever he goes, the impression he makes on players, fellow coaches and anyone else associated with him is sure to make them better people in the future.

No matter how anyone feels about him, the one thing they will remember is that he has a lot of class.

Good luck, Coach.



ANOTHER TEXAS TOUCHDOWN was the result of this dive play by Longhorn running back Jim Bertelson (35) in Thursday's 34-14 victory over the Aggies. Defending on the play are David Hoot (26), Grady Hoermann (31)

and James Dubcak (81), along with Van Odom and Max Bird. The win gave Texas a fourth straight trip to the Cotton Bowl in Dallas New Year's Day. (Photo by Mike Rice)

Sports Schedule

Thursday
Basketball vs. Texas Wesleyan here at 8

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