

Bender replaces Don

New women's cage coach hates losing

By PAUL McGRATH
Battalion Sports Editor

Wanda Bender has a strong dislike for losing. She always has, and she always will.

The newly appointed Texas A&M women's basketball coach has built a record of triumphs in the sport on the high school level. Losing seasons occurred about as often as hard Nixon plays golf with Leon Parks.

"I really do hate to lose," Bender said in her first week on the job. "I have been very fortunate so far that I've never had a losing season."

She has been listed as one of the nation's winningest girls' coaches in Texas. Her teams have combined for 455 wins and 148 losses, a winning percentage (.755) that would place her in Las Vegas sweat.

Bender takes over for Kay Don, who coached the A&M women for 10 years and will now serve as Director of Women's Athletics.

Bender obtained her bachelor's degree in Health and Physical Education from Trinity and earned her master's in Education from Our Lady of the Lake.

Her first coaching position was at West High School in 1958, a respectable experience Bender says.

It was a mistake. I went back to hometown where I had a lot of fans who were just getting into high school.

"They made my life miserable. I want calling me night and day," she said.

Bender soon left for Jourdanton where her team went to state during her second season there. Her teams at Jourdanton were to go to the state two more times, winning the state once.

After a brief stay at Tomball, she coached at Victoria High, gaining a state and state crown in 1971.

She traveled to Alpine High for a year stay and then went to another two years before coaching the Texas A&M job.

Before the A&M offer, collegiate coaching never entered Bender's mind.

Once I got close to Texas A&M, I was real interested in their program. I had even influenced one girl to go there.

"I got to know Kay Don real well. Our coaching philosophies are very close. We try to accomplish the same things in what we are doing."

"Kay had told me that her duties as athletic director were very pressing. She needed to devote all of her attention to those and that was the reason she decided to quit coaching. So when the offer came I was very excited about it," Bender said.

A devout Christian, Bender attempts to instill other qualities in her players other than those gained on the practice court. One of her favorite slogans is "A true athlete should have character, not be a character." She later hopes to teach a course in basketball coaching while at A&M.

While Bender tries to maintain winning standards, she feels the learning the girls receive is more important than putting marks in the won column.

For this reason she is against changing the six-player game of the high school level. It allows more girls to play, keeping fewer on the bench.

Some argue that the six-player game does not sufficiently ready girls for the five-player game found at the collegiate level. To counter, Bender points to a 1975 poll which showed that only two per cent of the girls went on to play college basketball.

"My opinion may change now that I'm a college coach," she said concerning the six-player game. "But I do feel that it is not the role of high schools to train kids (athletes) for college. They should be trying to help them get ready for life."

Bender has not yet had an opportunity to talk with all of her present players, but she already has developed some respect for them.

"I'm really looking forward to working with these girls. I fell in love with them the minute I first met them. They all have good attitudes and are willing to work," she said.

Bender has already started recruiting on her first problem — recruiting. She has contacted many girls herself, with other prospects being brought to her attention by high school coaches. Undoubtedly, her large number of friends in the high school coaching ranks will prove a benefit in future recruiting as will the building of the new women's dorm expected to house 100 athletes.

Bender feels she has the material to have the Aggies rebound from their 15-17 season last year, despite having a comparatively harder schedule. For her, win is spelled NOW.

"I have never had a losing season," she said. "I just don't know what I'd do if I did."



New Texas A&M women's basketball coach Wanda Bender, right, goes over some forms with former women's coach Kay Don. Don will now devote her full time to her post of Women's Athletic Director.

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United Press International
RAYETTE, La. — The University of Southwestern Louisiana removed from probation by the NCAA yesterday.

School officials said the end of the probation period means the school will accept bowl game invitations and its games can be televised.

SL, a member of the Southland Conference, was placed on probation four years ago for recruiting violations. The NCAA also barred it from basketball competition for two years.

"I am pleased and happy that we regained this status," said Dr. R. L. Authement, USL president.

The Ragin' Cajuns are the Southland Conference basketball and football champions. They also won the conference all-sports trophy last year.

"We're pleased that we now have a chance for a bowl game," said ball coach Augie Tammarillo. "It takes that black cloud away from us."

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