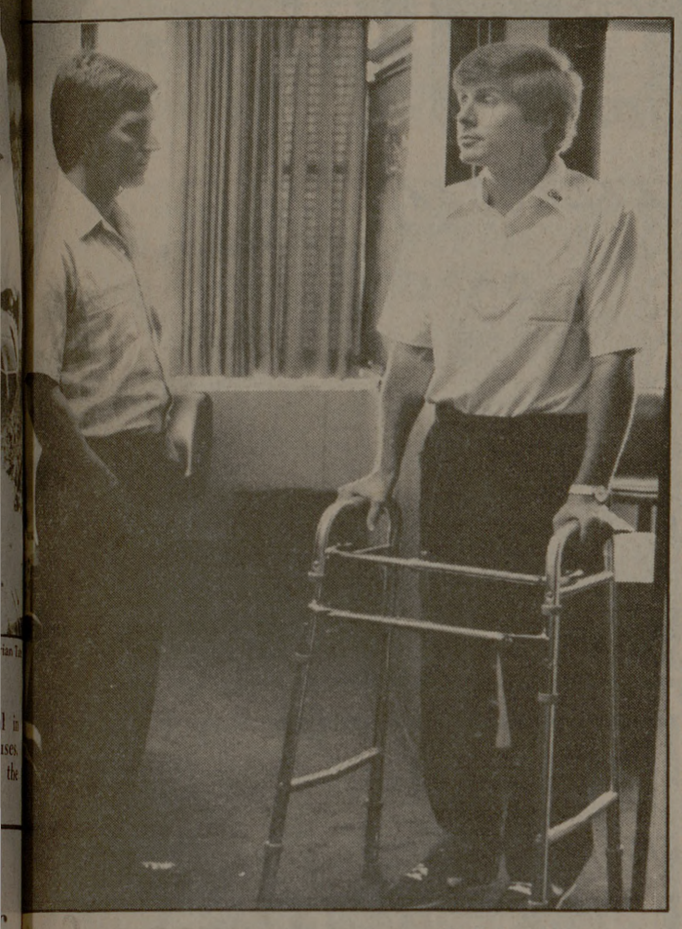
# Sports

# Rader sets example for football team while fighting back from rare disease



Staff photo by Brian Tate

Head recruiting coordinator Dick Rader visits with former Texas A&M quarterback David Beal. Rader is battling back from a rare disease that crippled him several months ago. Doctors say Rader should be back coaching by December.

By GAYE DENLEY
Battalion Staff

Texas A&M Recruiting Coordinator Dick Rader believes that the foundation of coaching, its goal as well as its reward, lies in motivating an athlete to push beyond what he thinks are his physical limits.

"Tom Landry has made the statement that coaching is getting people to perform past the level where it's comfortable for them," Rader, 37, said. "Everybody can catch the easy pass, and everybody can go out and do easy things. But when you make somebody perform on a level they don't think they can reach, to me that's what coaching is."

If ever a coach set an example for his players, it has been Rader, who has battled his way back from a rare syndrome that rendered him physically powerless for more than six months.

Rader was hospitalized Feb. 8 for symptoms the Texas A&M team physician had diagnosed as either a spinal tumor, multiple sclerosis or, as it turned out, a mysterious condition known as the Guillain-Barre syndrome.

"They don't know what causes it. It's a reaction to a virus — generally you've had a cold. They've even linked it to the swine flu vaccination," Rader said.

"Back when polio was prevalent, they couldn't tell the difference whether it was polio or this. Everybody kind of hoped they had this, because you can recover from this."

Rader returned from a recruiting trip on a Friday afternoon exhausted from the pressures of a changing offense and a recent turnover in the coaching staff. The next day, his toes felt numb. By the following Saturday, he was a physical wreck.

"The disease takes over so fast — you're so healthy at first but four days later I couldn't move. When I started therapy, I was lifting a one-pound weight. That's all I could pick up."

Although the syndrome often involves pain and is fatal to between 10 and 20 percent of its victims — Dallas Cowboy running back Tony Dorsett's girlfriend died from it — the effects are not permanent. Hospitalized for weeks, and confined to a wheelchair for months, Rader now drives himself to work and gets around with the help of a walker.

In the meantime, however, Rader said it was often hard to fight the urge just to give up. "You go through a lot of depression. At times, I just sat in my room and threw things that I could pick up. You can't do anything for yourself. I couldn't even turn the page in a book or pick up a newspaper.

"I went back home to West Virginia in the summer. We went swimming and they just put a life jacket on me and threw me in the pool, which is probably one of the best things they could have done as far as getting me back."

By August, Rader was far enough along in his recovery to return to work, with a little bit of position-shuffling in the coaching department. Rader came to Texas A&M in March 1980 as an offensive coach, working with the running backs and receivers. In order to include him in the coaching staff when he was unable to be on the field, Head Coach Tom Wilson made him the recruiting coordinator.

"Coach Wilson and the people here at A&M were just great the whole time," he said. "They did everything possible to help me."

A native West Virginian, Rader was a running back for the University of West Virginia in the mid-1960's, and coached at Texas Tech and South Carolina before returning to work for his alma mater in 1978.

"I was a coach at Texas Tech in '72, '73 and '74 with Coach Wilson. I had always enjoyed living in Texas, and I wanted to get back," Rader said. "So I joined West Virginia's staff and then I had a chance to come back to here, so I took a job at Rice for about five weeks. Then Tom called me and offered me a job here.

"I came because I think A&M is probably one of the 15 or 20 schools in the country that has everything it takes to have a good program — money, alumni, facilities — everything."

Those three assets, Rader said, are three of the biggest reasons athletes choose to play for the Aggies. Other considerations are the academic plans of the individual — for many, Texas A&M is the only place that offers a player's degree — and the almost certainty of playing time.

"Kids want a chance to play early, so they'll go to some place where they think they've got a chance to play early and a place where they'll fit in socially," he said.

"When the kids come here, they generally feel that they'll enjoy the type of atmosphere we have. If we can get a kid to come visit the campus here, we have a pretty good shot at getting him."

Though he enjoys working with the athletes at any level, Rader said he misses the on-the-field element of coaching.

"The best part about coaching at all is the kids. Whether you're coaching at Texas A&M of whether you're coaching at Spring Branch High School, the most enjoyable part is actually working with the players.

"The hardest thing to do is sit around and watch practice. I remember the first time I went back to practice — I would see something and I'd almost stand up and try to say something from the sidelines."

By next fall, Rader should be back on the field, an example for his players of realizing the potential of their physical abilities.

# Landry praises Vermeil's efforts

United Press International

DALLAS — Last week it was Don Shula and this week it is Dick Vermeil. It seems that Tom Landry spends more time these days talking about the opposing coach when he does the teams his club must face on Sunday.

But Vermeil, who has built the Philadelphia Eagles into as good a bet to win the Super Bowl as any, is a popular topic around Dallas this week.

The Cowboys, who rallied from 21 points behind to nip Shula's Miami Dolphins last Sunday, take on Philadelphia next weekend on the road and Landry fielded more than a few questions about his counterpart with the Eagles during his weekly meeting with the media Tuesday.

"He is a good football coach," Landry said, starting out. "He believes in the fundamentals which make good teams — good defense, strong kicking game, a strong running game."

Vermeil's "workaholic" habits have been given widespread publicity since the Eagles' became a winning team. Among the stories most widely circulated about Vermeil's work ethic is the one involving his periodic overnight stays in his office.

Landry was asked Tuesday if, when he first began coaching, he worked 16-18 hours a day.

"I still work 16-18 hours a day," Landry said. Every coach that has success does. Of course, I don't stay in the stadium all night. I go home for dinner."

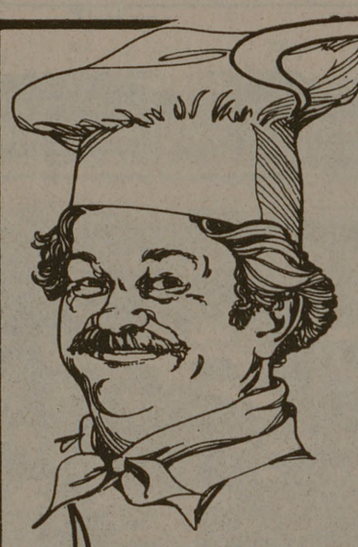
The psychological approach to Sunday's game will get more attention than usual this week because of the aftermath from last season's NFC title game. Following the Eagles win in that one Philadelphia quarterback Ron Jaworski said Vermeil had "set up" Dallas with a week-long tribute to the Cowboys.

But Landry said that it was quite possible that his team was psychologicaly unprepared to play Philadelphia in that game.

"We were coming off two emotional highs last year — the Rams and the Atlanta game, which was much like the game we played last Sunday.

"We just weren't ready (for the Eagles). We wanted to play hard, but emotionally we weren't ready to play well. So if that's the way they pulled the wool over our eyes, I guess they did."

But Landry admitted members of his team had probably been anxious to get to the Philadelphia game.

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