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Pan Am coach enduring losses

EDINBURG, Texas (AP) — Tim Hicks, the first-year coach of the Pan American women's basketball team, is a fiery competitor who hates to lose.

So he was more than a little unhappy in talking about the Lady Broncs, who were 7-17 in 1986-87, 0-27 last year, and 0-7 this season.

Pan American has lost 36 straight women's basketball games, which ties two other schools — Utah State and Coppin State — for the second worst ever, and is only one game behind the current mark of 37 held by Brooklyn College.

Hicks knew some of the consequences of accepting his first head coaching job at a school that had not won a game in 19 months. Hicks had been at Pan American in 1985 as a graduate assistant to men's basketball coach Lon Kruger. Kruger left in 1986 to succeed Jack Hartman at Kansas State, and Hicks went to Coffeyville Community College in Kansas.

"I knew something about the program from the time I spent here. But even though coaches are hired into this type of situation all the time, it was frustrating because I couldn't recruit."

Hicks was hired by Pan American on Sept. 1, only two months before the team traveled to Oklahoma for its first game, and so was unable to recruit the players that would fit his basketball philosophy.

His first problem when he took over was the loss of Pan American's top two players — center Kelley Crouch and forward Cheryl Boyle.

After suffering through the 0-27 season, both Boyle and Crouch decided to transfer to Austin College. Boyle played the last 10 games of last

season with stitches in her right eye and contusions in both legs.

"They both thought it was in their best interest to leave the program, although there is a chance Kelley will be back," Hicks said.

Compounding Hicks' woes was the academic ineligibility of two other players.

At the same time, the Lady Broncs are playing the toughest schedule in school history. Among the opponents are Oklahoma, Alabama, Texas A&M, Texas Christian and Texas-El Paso, as well as conference foes New Orleans and defending national champion Louisiana Tech.

Pan American lost their first six games this season by a combined total of 296 points — an average loss of 49.3 points per contest. That's a slight improvement over last year, when Pan American was outscored by 51 points per contest.

"I'm not sure what the scheduling rationale was," Hicks said. "Not only are we in the American South, which includes the defending national champions, but we have to play teams from the Big Eight and the Southwest Conference before entering conference play."

Hicks said the only way to get Pan American's women basketball program on the winning track "is to do good recruiting and get players who can compete at this level. We can be competitive at this level, but not until we get more scholarship players."

The Lady Broncs have no juniors or seniors and no starters over 6 feet tall.

"We have a good ball-handling club, but we don't have the kids that can shoot from the perimeter," Hicks said. "To us (the coaching staff), getting better is a matter of recruiting four or five more players."

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