

Tuesday, June 20, 1989

Switzer resigns as OU head coach

Leaves game as fourth most successful coach in college football

NORMAN, Okla. (AP) — Oklahoma's Barry Switzer, the fourth most successful coach in the history of college football, resigned today just months after his program was tainted by NCAA probation and criminal charges against some players.

Switzer said at a news conference today that he was stepping down, effective immediately.

A source close to the Oklahoma football program said that Switzer met with the football staff Monday morning and told them of his decision.

The source said that Switzer was "drained by things he's gone through in the last few months," a reference to the NCAA probation imposed on the school's football program in December and three separate criminal incidents that led to charges against Oklahoma players earlier this year.

The source said that Switzer was

Switzer is expected to stay on as a special assistant to athletic director Donnie Duncan through next spring, the source said.

The source said a leading candidate to replace Switzer was defensive coordinator Gary Gibbs and that a replacement could be named as early as today.

A news conference was called for 2 p.m. CDT, but Oklahoma athletic officials declined to say what it was about.

Switzer, 52, has had the top winning percentage among major-college football coaches since 1982. His teams won three national championships and 12 Big Eight Conference championships in his 16 seasons as head coach.

Switzer has been under fire for more than six months, since before the Sooners were placed on a three-

year NCAA probation in December. Switzer was named in four of the 20 violations, but denied knowledge of breaking any NCAA rules. He was not penalized by the university.

The state's largest newspapers called for Switzer's resignation after five of his players were charged with felonies earlier this year.

Switzer became the Sooners' head coach in 1973. His first team went undefeated and he went on to win three national titles and 12 Big Eight Conference titles. He has an .844 winning percentage, with 157 victories, 26 losses and four ties.

Former Texas A&M coach Jackie Sherrill said college football "lost a great friend" when Oklahoma coach Barry Switzer resigned Monday.

Sherrill said Switzer was "a great leader who understood the needs of minorities. He was a great coach."

In announcing his resignation af-

ter 16 seasons at Oklahoma, Switzer said he was frustrated by NCAA rules that do not "recognize the financial needs of young athletes."

Sherrill, who also resigned at Texas A&M under fire from the NCAA, agreed with Switzer's statement that there are too many rules from the organization.

"Those are unreal people who make \$80 million a year off the NCAA basketball tournament then talk about 'student athletes,'" Sherrill said.

Baylor coach Grant Teaff, who opens the season with Oklahoma this year, was stunned.

"I was a little bit shocked by it," Teaff said. "From what I hear he said, concerning the fact that he was pretty tired, I think anybody can understand that. Even when things are going good, we in the coaching business have a lot of hills to climb every day," Teaff said.

Strange looks to potential record-setting tourneys

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (AP) — Now that he's achieved a little bit of golfing history, Curtis Strange has a couple of other potential targets.

"Move over, Ben," an exuberant Strange said after becoming the first man since Ben Hogan in 1950-51 to successfully defend his U.S. Open golf championship.

Strange, who beat Nick Faldo in a playoff last year, made it two in a row Sunday with a one-shot victory at Oak Hill Country Club.

"This is different," he said.

"Last year was such an emotional thing — my first major, the playoff, the whole thing. This is more a feeling of satisfaction, a feeling of accomplishment, a feeling of success."

Strange plans to play at the Canadian Open this week. After that, he is scheduled to play in the Anheuser-Busch Classic in his hometown of Williamsburg, Va.

and the British Open in Troon, Scotland.

If Strange wins in Canada and Scotland, he would join Lee Trevino as the only players to sweep the U.S., Canadian and British Opens in a single season.

And already there is talk about next year's U.S. Open, when Strange will have a chance match Willie Anderson's feat of three straight U.S. titles. Anderson did it way back in 1903-05.

"We'll talk about that later," Strange said.

"You think of all the great players and some have won two Opens, but nobody has won two in a row in 40 years," Strange said. "That's really something."

Strange's first victory of the year and 17th of his pro career made him only the 16th man to win the U.S. Open more than once.

New-found fondness for baseball comes at a convenient time

I grew up loving football. After all, I grew up in Texas, didn't I? The state where the favorite sports are professional, collegiate and high school football?

But more and more these days I find my affections drifting toward America's original favorite pastime.

I was discussing the recent rise in baseball's popularity with my brother the tip during the Southwest Conference tournament at Olsen Field last month. He agreed that the trend is not isolated to Texas, although the immense popularity of football in this region of the country makes the changes more apparent. But from what I've seen and heard, the whole nation is turning back to its old friend.

CBS recently tabled a record bid for the television rights to Major League Baseball, surely not in expectations of losing money. Already the network had landed the College World Series championship, which is looking like a long-term arrangement.

Paul suggested, and he's probably correct, that part of the change that we have experienced is related to our (relative) maturity. As teen-agers it's difficult to sit in one seat and watch a three-to-four-hour

game, consisting almost entirely of dead time — the catcher throws back to the pitcher, the batter readsjusts his grip, the pitcher shakes off three or four signals before finding one he likes, etc. etc., to say nothing of the time between innings. Not much action, when you come right down to it.

But with a mind, a back and two knees that are all approaching 23 years of age, I personally have learned to appreciate a more laid-back form of entertainment. And baseball fits the bill nicely. Still with more than enough action and tension to keep a fan's attention, it also provides time to kick back and enjoy a nice afternoon and some good conversation.

Olsen Field this spring seemed to bear witness that I was not alone in my

transformation. Agreed, a lot of the fans would not have been there had the team not been ranked No. 1 for most of the year. But even before this year, when the team had more potential than actual results, the fan attendance was on a rather rapid upswing.

It just takes college students a while to realize that the hottest competition during the spring semester is not necessarily for the starting quarterback job over at Kyle. But given enough time, most sports fans can learn to appreciate a sport that doesn't involve massive collisions and a score every half-hour or so. They learn they can have fun at a sporting event even without yell leaders. I know I did.

And it looks like my timing was just about perfect; baseball in Texas has never looked better.

I don't need to tell anyone about Aggie baseball. But the best part about it was not almost making the CWS or being ranked at the top of the polls. Much more significant are the signs that it was not a one-time phenomenon. Aggie baseball appears to be here to stay.

Once completely dominated by that ...

other school in baseball, suddenly the Southwest Conference has become the leading conference in the nation. Putting two teams in Omaha every spring for the next 10 years, like it did this year, does not look too unlikely. And Texas might not even always be one of them.

Texas A&M eventually will be — small consolation this year, I know. But the Aggies have established themselves as a national power. The big-name recruits like Ronnie Allen and, this year, Jon Peters are starting to don the maroon instead of the burnt orange. Expect the trend to continue.

Of course, UT will always have a strong program. But its days of dominance are probably over for good.

The collegiate scene would be enough to stimulate my interest in the game in and of itself, but Texans have more than just the 'Horns and Ags to yell about. As impossible as the dream would have been even two months ago, both — that's right, both — of Texas' pro teams are on their way to stellar seasons, and maybe even twin pennants.

Houston Astro fans have become accustomed to flashes of brilliance about once every five years, but this one was

unexpected. The Texas Rangers have been June contenders before — mostly because of the traditionally subpar competition in the American League West — but they have always come down to reality as the season wore on.

But both teams look like legitimate threats in the two toughest divisions in baseball. As of Monday evening, the Rangers were 4½ games behind the Oakland A's. The Astros were a single game out going into a series with division-leading San Francisco. Both would be leading in the NL East.

Both have made deals that have led to improvements. The Rangers picked up Julio Franco and Raphael Palmeiro by way of trades, as well as Nolan "The Ageless Wonder" Ryan from the Astros' garbage pile. The Astros made up for the Ryan goof by picking up the now-red-hot Jim Clancy, and the young prospects like Craig Biggio and Ken Caminiti have finally started to shine.

An all-Texas World Series? Could it be too much to hope for? Probably. But for the first time in, well, ever, the odds of having at least one in there look fairly decent.

Hal Hammons

Guest Columnist

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