

Photo by Jay Janner

John Thornton speaks to the media Monday night shortly after being named A&M interim coach by Athletic Director John David Crow. Former coach Shelby Metcalf was relieved of the job and will be reassigned shortly.

Changing the guard: Thornton takes over

'This is the most awkward position I've been put in in my life,' coach says

By CLAY RASMUSSEN
Of The Battalion Staff

Texas A&M assistant coach John Thornton was named interim head coach of the A&M basketball team Monday after Athletic Director John David Crow relieved Shelby Metcalf of his duties as head coach.

In a brief statement Monday, Thornton expressed his respect for Metcalf but said that it was now his responsibility to see that the Aggies were prepared for their remaining games and the Southwest Conference Tournament in March.

"This is the most awkward position I have been put in in my life," Thornton said. "There is no one I respect more in the coaching profession than Shelby Metcalf. I regret things ended up this way, but the foremost thing in my mind right now is the obligation to the players to prepare them for the next 11 games, plus the Southwest Conference Tournament."

Although players visibly were shaken by the announcement, they said if anyone had to replace Metcalf, they were pleased it was Thornton.

"Nobody was ready for this," junior guard Freddie Ricks said. "If anyone had to take his place though, I was glad it was Thornton."

Junior guard Lynn Suber said team members would support Thornton in his new role.

"Everyone is behind him ... 100 percent," Suber said.

Other members of Metcalf's coaching staff said they also are behind Thornton, and that they believe he can keep the team from suffering from the distractions of Metcalf's reassignment.

"It's a good, positive thing for the team," graduate assistant coach Jimmie Gilbert said. "He'll keep them motivated and hopefully they can move forward from here."

Metcalf had groomed Thornton, an assistant coach for the past nine years, to be his eventual successor after the head coach retired, and had his full support.

In his press conference Saturday after A&M's 100-84 loss to Arkansas, Metcalf said he felt sorry for Thornton because if he was forced out, Thornton and his entire staff also would be left out in the cold.

Instead, Crow decided that Metcalf no longer could coach A&M effectively after his statements to the media, and decided to name Thornton as interim coach.

Thornton's new role as the Aggies' head coach will be a difficult one. A&M is 9-10, 2-3 in the SWC and has dropped its last three consecutive games to Southern Methodist, Texas and Arkansas.

The Aggies are in fifth place and will face a resurgent Rice team this Wednesday night at G. Rollie White Coliseum.

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Hatfield out, Crowe in

Former assistant at Clemson named as Hogs' replacement

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. (AP) — Jack Crowe, named Monday to replace Ken Hatfield as head football coach at the University of Arkansas, thanked Hatfield for bringing him to Arkansas and admitted that he had his bags packed for Clemson when a call came from UA officials.

Crowe, hired away from Clemson a year ago to become offensive coordinator at Arkansas, said he "wasn't fired up" about returning to Clemson but was prepared to follow Hatfield. Only 24 hours earlier, Hatfield left Arkansas to replace Danny Ford at Clemson.

Crowe, 41, has been assistant coach throughout his career except for a couple of years as head coach at Livingston, Ala., more than 10 years ago.

"I always knew I would be a head coach," he said. "It was a big surprise how it happened; where it happened."

UA Athletic Director Frank Broyles said the search committee, formed hastily Saturday night after Chancellor Dan Ferritor was notified of Hatfield's decision, had several options. But, he said, he told the committee

that Crowe was the man he would hire if he had three months to conduct a search.

Broyles called Crowe a "great signal caller."

He noted that Crowe called the plays as the Razorbacks produced a school record 4,926 yards during the recently completed 10-2 season.

"I always thought that Lou Holtz was the No. 1 signal caller in the college game today," Broyles said, but, added that he now believes Crowe "is his equal."

Crowe said he had "not quite had time to grasp what has happened."

He said the UA program is bigger than one person. "There are a lot of people who know this is their program," he said.

Integrity will always be No. 1, he said, followed by academic excellence among athletes and then winning.

He said any of Hatfield's assistants who wanted to stay were welcome to do so, but it appeared that only offensive line coach J.B. Grimes would accept the offer. He said he would attempt to bring in the best coaches in the country.

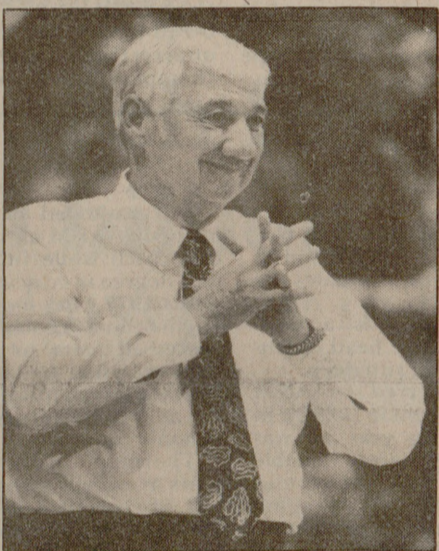


Photo by Jay Janner

Shelby Metcalf leaves a long list of Aggie accomplishments.

The Metcalf Legacy ...

By RICHARD TIJERINA
Of The Battalion Staff

For the first time in 27 years, Texas A&M will have a new head basketball coach stalking the sidelines. Shelby Metcalf, the winningest coach in the Southwest Conference, leaves more behind than his head coaching job.

He leaves his coaching legacy. Considered the "dean of SWC coaches," Metcalf guided the Aggies through both good times and bad. He's stood on the sidelines while other conference coaches have come and gone.

Until Monday, Metcalf, a media darling because of his straight-forward way of answering questions, could be reassigned. He was planning on calling University President William H. Mobley Tuesday morning to discuss it.

Whatever his new position, Metcalf leaves behind some impressive numbers in his 27 years as the Aggies' coach.

- 438-306 overall record.
- 239-158 SWC record.
- Six SWC titles: 1964, 1969, 1975, 1976, 1980, 1986.

- Five NCAA Tournament appearances: 1964, 1969, 1975, 1980, 1986.
- Four NIT appearances: 1979, 1982, 1985, 1986.
- 23 First-team All-SWC citations (17 players).
- Most SWC coaching seasons (27).
- Most SWC coaching games (730).
- Most coaching victories (431).
- Most SWC coaching victories (239).
- Second most SWC Championships (6).

Metcalf ranks as No. 16 in career victories among active NCAA Division I coaches, and No. 1 in SWC history. Under his leadership, the Aggies had 23 winning seasons in his previous 26 years.

"A&M basketball isn't a job for (me and my family), it's a way of life," Metcalf said Saturday after A&M's 100-84 loss to Arkansas. "I love the game. I love A&M. ... Friends come and go. Enemies accumulate."

"I don't think I have to look over my shoulder. I'm proud of the job I've done here."

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