

• Aggie Basketball 1990-91 •

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Kermit Davis Jr.: New Kid on the Block

Trying to revive Aggie roundball

By DOUGLAS PILS
Of The Battalion Staff

When visiting G. Rollie White this season to watch the men's basketball team, remember: that's not the waterboy strolling the sidelines, screaming for more defense and passing — it's the new head coach.

With the exception of his snazzy suit, Kermit Davis Jr., the new head coach for Texas A&M, looks as if he should be passing out Gatorade. But in actuality, he's the future of Aggie basketball.

A&M Athletic Director John David Crow must think so — he invested a four-year contract into Davis and led the way for development of a \$35-million Special Events Center, which A&M will begin using in 1993.

Davis, 30 and a 1982 graduate of Mississippi State, has seen more comings and goings than he probably would have liked since being hired on March 28 of this year.

To date, the Aggies have lost seven players that were slated to be on the team this year.

Hardin-Simmons transfer Tommy French left for Oklahoma; Marshall transfer Maurice Sanders was denied admission because of past problems; returning center and member of the 1989-90 Southwest Conference Newcomer team David Harris and forward David Peterson failed out of school this summer; incoming freshmen Ed Wheeler, from Seagoville, and Artie Griffin, from San Antonio Lee, became Prop 48 casualties and Wheeler left to go to Paris Junior College. To top off this list, returning senior Freddie Ricks was suspended from the team pending investigation of his alleged burglary of a vehicle.

So to say Davis' transition to A&M has been a smooth one would be erroneous, but the fourth youngest head coach in the NCAA knows this year will be anything but a joyride.

"I think every night is going to be very difficult," Davis said. "But we're excited about the year and I think our guys have approached it well."

Davis started learning how to take that approach and his coaching philosophies at a young age. His father, Davis Sr., was a head coach for 25 years and the younger Davis started hanging out at the gym at age three. Davis said he knew all his life that he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps.

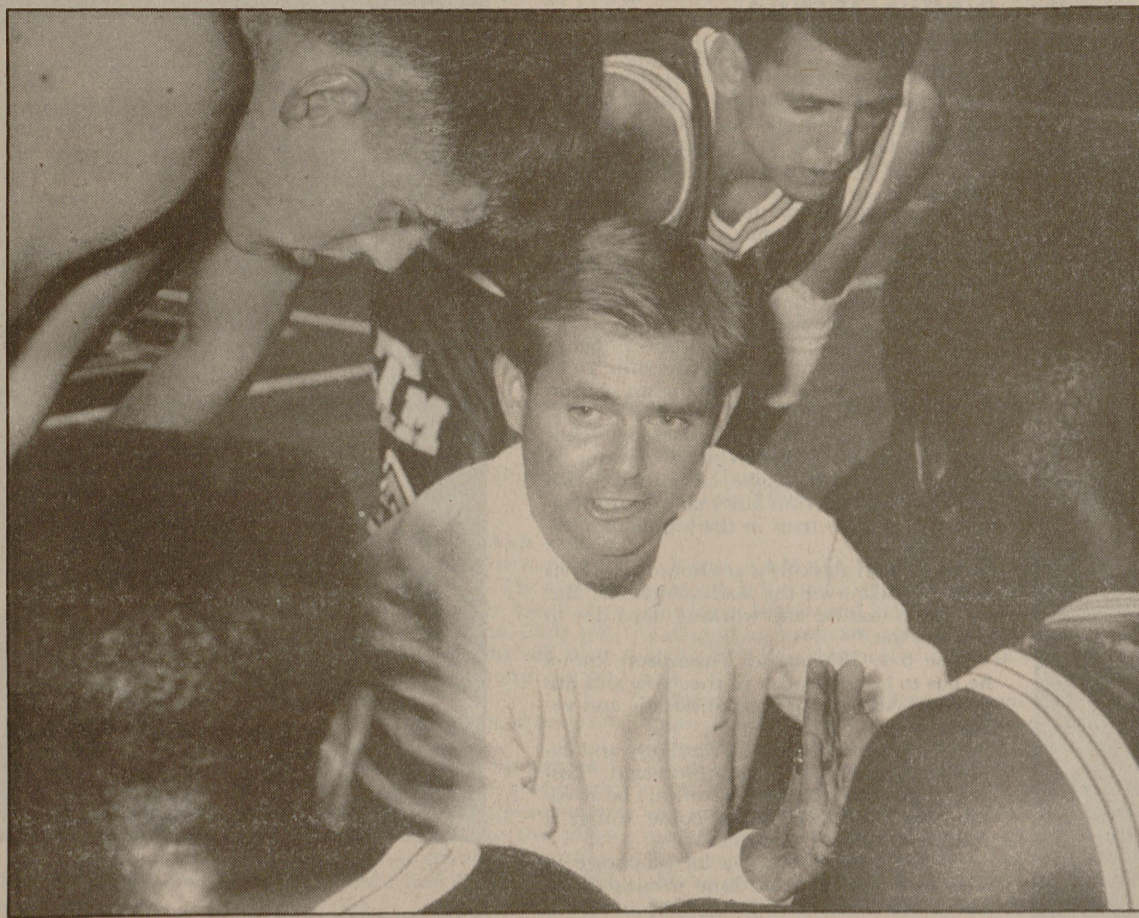
"I was one of those guys who went to the gym everyday and thought that's what I wanted to be," he said. "But I graduated in business just in case it turned out that coaching wasn't what I wanted to do."

"However, I just kind of had it the back of mind that's what I wanted to do for a long time."

Becoming a coach was not something Davis was forced into, and he credits his father with teaching him the ins and outs of the business.

"He never forced me into it," Davis said. "He showed me the negative things about (coaching). Not that there's any negative things about coaching, but the hard things, being away from your family and that kind of stuff."

"He was good at showing me



MIKE C. MULVEY/The Battalion

A&M coach Kermit Davis Jr. is on a mission to breathe life into a sagging program.

"I think the thing that really attracted me to A&M was the academic reputation. I'd never seen former students like the ones at A&M that leave the school and have so much appreciation for it after they leave. It's a great allegiance for the student body — it's tight and close-knit, even though it's 41,000 students."

— Kermit Davis Jr.,
Texas A&M men's basketball head coach

those things and letting me make my own decision."

After being an assistant coach at the University of Idaho for two years, Davis was given full command of the Vandals in 1988. It didn't take long for the honors to start rolling in.

In his two-year stint as head coach, Davis put together consecutive 25-6 seasons, was named the Big-Sky Conference Coach-of-the-Year, won two conference championships and took Idaho to consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances.

Coming to A&M is a situation similar to the one Davis found himself in when he first arrived in Moscow, Idaho.

"Four years ago when I was an assistant and head coach up there," he said, "they'd finished last in the league for three straight years. Then we were 25-6 for two years. It was just one of those fortunate deals."

Davis said the biggest problem was in the lack of support the team had been getting from the student

body. "We went to Idaho and the student body wasn't really involved with basketball," Davis said. "There's only about 10,000 students and they hadn't sold very many season tickets. I think A&M has a lot more resources."

"You talk about Idaho being a smaller school in the Northwest and A&M being a big school, big institution, in the middle of three national networks (Dallas, Houston and San Antonio). There's a lot of potential with this job."

Since being hired, Davis and his staff have spent a lot of time going out and drumming up support, trying to get people interested in the program.

"The thing we try to do is speak at student organizations — Rotaries, Kiwanis, A&M Clubs, former student things, everything — just to try to get people thinking about basketball again," he said. "It's a challenge, but the Aggies love to go to athletic events."

It's not only the challenge to re-

build the program that attracted Davis, but also the University's academic standing and the sense of camaraderie among the student body and former students.

"I think the thing that really attracted me to A&M was the academic reputation," he said. "I'd never seen former students like the ones at A&M that leave the school and have so much appreciation for it after they leave. It's a great allegiance for the student body — it's tight and close-knit, even though it's 41,000 students."

"It's just neat for me to be able see that opportunity and hopefully make something grow over the next four or five years."

Davis, who spent two years at Southwest Mississippi Junior College (39-12) before signing on at Idaho, said getting the A&M job is the job he was waiting for — this isn't a stepping stone to another job.

"I definitely think this was the job I was looking for," he said. "I was fortunate that it happened to me at an earlier age than I expected. My wife and I both love College Station. We just feel like it's a heck of a place. We've really enjoyed it."

Davis brings to College Station a philosophy based on fairness, good attitudes and a swarming defense. A defensive system that says offense will come out of good defense.

"I believe in treating people fairly," Davis said. "But from a strategic standpoint I'm very demanding defensively. I think we're pretty demanding on the floor and we expect a lot out of our guys. We want guys to be able to take constructive criticism to get better. Those kind of things we put a lot of emphasis on."

"I think defensively, we really try to spend a lot of time. I think if you can get guys to guard defensively then they're pretty well disciplined, so they'll play disciplined offensively as well."

Normally, Davis said his defensive system calls for constant pressure on the ball, but with the depth problems brought on the exodus of players from the team may force him to change that somewhat.

"We'd like to do a lot of full court pressing, but I don't know if we'll do as much this year because of our depth," he said. "I think we'll try to pressure the ball, even in our zone, it's really a lot of ball pressure. We've got to be good defensively, and get back defensively if we're going to have a chance to stay competitive."

Being competitive is one thing the Aggies may have problems with this season. With only two players returning with an abundance of Division I experience in Brooks Thompson and Lynn Suber, the situation bears a striking resemblance to when the Southern Methodist football team returned from its NCAA-imposed death penalty.

"Yeah, that could pose a problem," Davis said. "There are some others returning but not as far as guys who've played a lot of minutes. Both of those guys (Brooks and Lynn) are 6-4, 6-2, so we've got to break in a lot of new guys in certain situations and that's going to be difficult."

Staying competitive this year will depend on whether or not the team pays attention to the finer points of the game, Davis said, and not worry about the whole season but just take one game at a time.

"We've got to be able to go and execute the details everyday," he said. "Because if not we have a chance to get beat badly. If we do those little-bitty things — then it'll give us a chance to be competitive night-in and night-out and I think our guys think that we have a good team and our staff does too."

Davis said he realizes this team may be lacking some talent but he added that he thinks the guys will make up for that with hard-nosed play.

"No, we don't have as good a talent or depth as lot of the teams in our league," he said. "But still, with guys that are playing hard and competing you've got a chance to overcome some of that."

One thing Kermit Davis is not about to do is give up on this team before the season gets started.

"Our program will have a lot more depth from the first year to the second year," he said. "Our guys are working hard and we're not writing this year off at all. We're going to go out, compete and play and as long as those guys are working hard, good things are going to happen."

Sixth Man adds new life to old program

By DOUGLAS PILS
Of The Battalion Staff

Texas A&M's men's basketball coach Kermit Davis Jr. is adding a new twist to a popular Aggie tradition.

This year, Davis is taking a page from the famous 12th Man Kickoff Team's success story by introducing his own version — the Sixth Man.

The Sixth Man will be a non-scholarship player, who will start each home game and play until the opponent scores. Davis said he came up with the idea not long after taking over as head coach March 28.

"I had an idea in the off-season," Davis said. "I guess it was the second week I was on the job here with our staff, talking about ways we could get the student body involved with the basketball program."

"I'll compliment the student body's enthusiasm and concept of the 12th Man."

Davis is enthused about the plan and said he wants to assure everyone that it's not just a gimmick, the players making the team will be legitimate athletes.

"In some ways we get people in the stands to come watch the Sixth Man," he said. "That gets the student body tied in. In other ways we've had to find legitimate guys that could play because of the competition we play."

"We're just looked for the best available player, because they're going to be out there against some big-time people. A guy who can defend, maybe a physical guy, just guys who can hold their own defensively."

In addition to playing in front of the home crowd, the members of the Sixth Man are playing another integral part. With only eight scholarship players available and healthy, they're being used a lot more in practice.

"With Carlos Marrero out with the knee injury and Anthony Ware with a bruised calf, we've only had eight guys," Davis said. "So, the Sixth Man has really been good for us, giving us a competitiveness in practice."

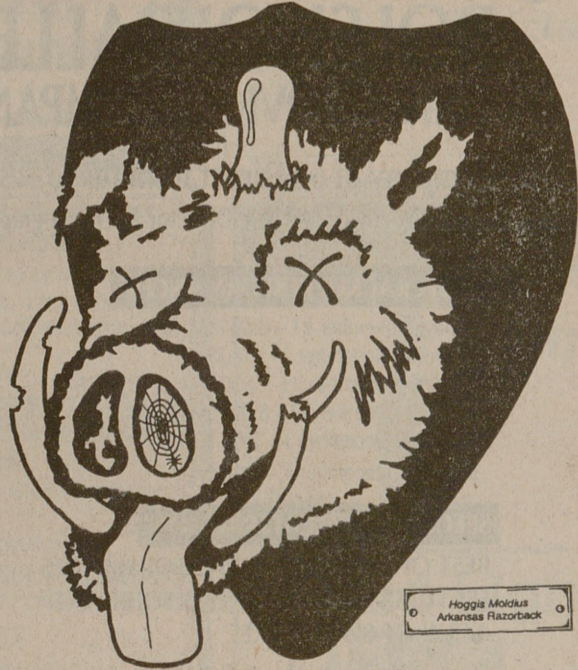
The members of the Sixth Man are: Steve Bartholomew, a 6-8, 220 pounder from Houston; Mac Brink, 6-4, 185 pounds from Richardson; Greg Cook, 6-1, 170 pounds from Dallas; Chuck Henderson, a 6-2, 170 pounder from Houston, who was redshirted from last year's squad; Brian Linder, 6-3, 185 pounds from College Station and David Martin, 5-11, 155 pounds from Tyler, who walked on last year and played in 16 games.

With depth problems and the hard, pressing defense preferred by Davis, some of the Sixth Men might end up with more playing time.

"They might even be given a chance not only to contribute at the start of the game but also in different parts of it," Davis said.

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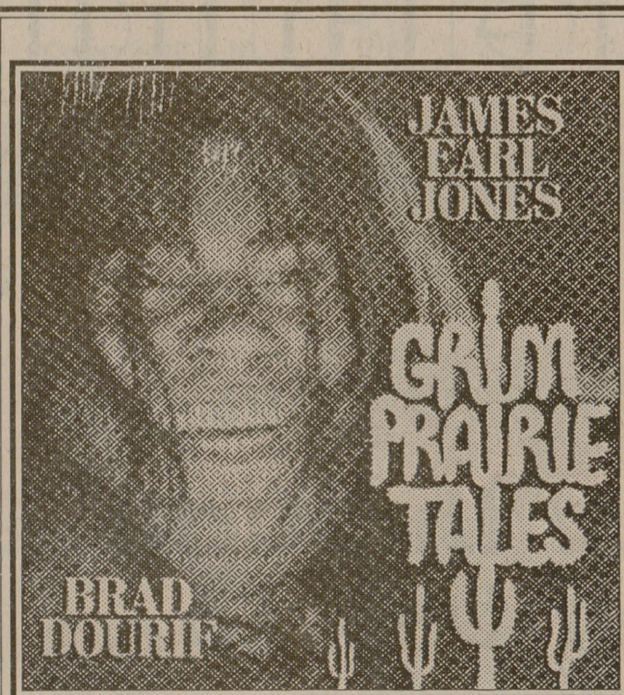
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