

STANDARD OF SUCCESS

Dallas Baptist Coach Jim Harp has spent the last 25 years building one of college baseball's most consistent programs

By JEREMY FURTICK
Sports editor

It is a tranquil little baseball field on the outskirts of Dallas at the bottom of a hill. The outfield fence is lined with tall oak trees and the sound of country music usually be heard playing over the PA system. Everyone has seen, and probably played on, a field like this. But this one in particular has experienced a more illustrious history than most — it is the field at Dallas Baptist University and the site of Baseball Coach Harp's career of outstanding accomplishments.

Harp has been at the helm of the DBU Patriots baseball team since it was called the DBC Indians baseball team — 25 years. In that time, Harp has amassed an unprecedented 1,005-512 record, which places him second on the list of the NAIA's win-loss record of active coaches. He has won 19 consecutive winning seasons and 10 consecutive top-25 finishes. He has suffered only three losing seasons and never finished more than five games under .500.

Harp has guided his team to seven NAIA World Series titles in the last 10 years, including a national title in 1997. He was inducted into the NAIA Hall of Fame in January of 1997, has been named South Regional Coach of the Year four times since 1984 and named the NAIA National Coach of the Year in 1985.

Last November, Harp was honored as the third college coach to be inducted into the Texas Baseball Hall of Fame, following Tom Chandler and former Texas A&M coach Cliff Gustafson.

A pretty good record for a guy who was hired as an assistant basketball coach while he was finishing his college basketball playing career. Harp took a baseball job in 1973, while still an assistant to the basketball team and also teaching. He inherited a team whose only feature was a backstop, a team of five players and a program on the brink of being dismantled by the institution.

Harp was the basketball assistant and that's what I wanted to do, but the baseball coach quit in January of 1972 and I was a graduating senior, so they asked me if I would just run the team that spring," Harp said. "The next year I had graduated and they asked me if I would take over full-time baseball (coaching) and keep on as the assistant basketball coach and behind his first love, basketball.

"I knew I wanted to coach baseball after about five years," Harp said. "I was the head guy in baseball and just the assistant in basketball. I really enjoyed the responsibility of being the head coach." Harp has used that responsibility to develop a coaching style centered around honesty and hard work, attributes that always seem to be mentioned

whenever anyone speaks about the coach.

"(Coach) Harp was real honest with me when he was recruiting me," said DBU freshman second baseman Steven Berry. "He didn't blow smoke up my tail like other colleges were."

Scott Harp, Jim's oldest son, played for DBU at the end of his college career and served as a student coaching assistant to the team last season. He said his father's success has been a result of hard work.

"There's not going to be any other coach in the country who works harder than him," Scott Harp said. And Coach Harp agrees.

"I think if I had been afraid of hard work I never would have accomplished anything," Coach Harp said.

Players, former and current, say Harp is a players' coach, not just because of his easy-going demeanor, but because of his skill in coaching each individual player.

"He works with you a lot individually," Berry said. "He's good at coaching each individual player and disciplining you when you need disciplining and giving you a pat on the back when you need that. But he's always positive."

"He always points out the negative, and he should, but he makes sure he always points out the positive things also," Scott Harp said. "He'll get on you but he's also the first one to congratulate you when you do well. That gets his players to believe in him."

After 25 years of going to work at the same school and achieving more than

most coaches ever dream of, Harp said there are things he has grown to appreciate about his job.

"The thing that is most gratifying for me is at alumni games," Coach Harp said. "They come back and they all have their degrees and they've married and have their little babies. It's gratifying to see them grow up to be men."

"After 25 years I've seen a lot of them grow up to be men."

But Coach Harp is more than just a baseball man; he has the respect and admiration of his family and peers. That is what truly makes him successful.

"He's a Christian family man," Scott Harp said. "His family comes first and baseball has always been second. He really loves his family."

Texas A&M Coach Mark Johnson said Coach Harp has earned his reputation as a top-notch coach.

"I have always felt Jim Harp was a class guy," Johnson said. "I have a lot of respect for him. I like to play him because he always puts a good team on the field."

Baseball is often referred to as a simple game — you throw the ball, you catch the ball, you hit the ball. But Jim Harp has made it seem simple in other ways — you take a job, you work hard, you respect your players and you achieve success. But for everything to work just right, you have to love your job.

"He never gets tired of it," Scott Harp said. "He still acts like he's 20 years old out there."



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