

## Bender, Majerus head Texas' candidate list

Committee hopes to replace Penders on before spring signing period ends

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Utah's Bob Bender and Washington's Bob Majerus are heading a short list of candidates being considered by the University of Texas to replace Tom Penders, according to a high-ranking university source.

Majerus has said that he's happy at Utah after leading the Utes to the national championship game. Bender has yet to take himself out of the running for the Texas job as he did last week with Arizona State, which reportedly offered him just over \$1 million per year.

Majerus, 50, was believed to be somewhat of a longshot for Texas because school officials are unwilling to pay the Longhorns basketball coach more than the \$750,000 that the school coach Mack Brown makes. Bender's stock is high among Texas officials, and he would not be considered a consolation prize because the search committee could not agree to terms with Majerus, the source said Monday.

"The committee is very excited about what Bob Bender," the source said. Bender, 40, who said that he expected to meet with the committee early as Tuesday, told *The News-Observer* of Tacoma that the Texas job was something that he wanted to look into. "They've had success. Tom Penders has done a great job there, and the end of success that gets your attention," Bender said.

"I think it's worth it when you look at what Texas can be and what it has made it. But that's not to say that it's going to be better than where we are at with our program."

Bender was an assistant coach at Utah under coach Mike Krzyzewski from 1983 to 1989 before becoming head coach at Illinois State.

Bender's overall record in four years at Illinois State and in five years at Washington is 128-129, including 68-72 as coach of the

Huskies. But he turned both programs around.

At Washington, his record has improved each year — 5-22 in 1994; 10-17 in 1995; 16-12 in 1996; 17-11 in 1997 and 20-10 this year.

His Huskies have been to the postseason three straight years, including two NIT berths in 1996 and 1997, and this year knocked off Xavier and Richmond in the NCAA tournament before losing on a buzzer beater to Connecticut in the round of 16.

The earliest Texas can name a coach is late Tuesday afternoon because of job posting laws. UT officials hope to wrap up the search quickly because the national spring signing period begins Wednesday.

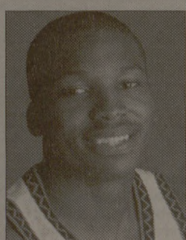
Penders, the winningest coach in Longhorns history, resigned last week after a month of controversy in his program that began when four young players went to Texas athletic director DeLoss Dodds to complain about the coach.

Two of those players, Luke Axtell and Gabe Muoneke, said earlier that they intended to transfer.

But Muoneke told KVUE-TV Monday that he now plans to stay at Texas.

"A lot of people sent e-mail and told me to leave, that I was a baby for wanting to go," Muoneke said. "Well, I'm going to stay, just for all those people who wanted me to leave. I'm staying."

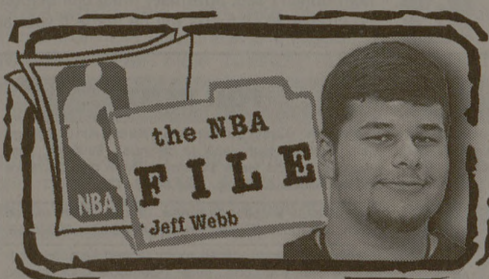
Axtell reportedly has been in contact with Kansas and Texas Tech about a possible transfer. He did not return telephone messages left by The Associated Press Monday.



Muoneke

## San Antonio heads NBA class

Spurs rank as hottest team in West; Houston's defense worrisome towards playoffs



As the National Basketball Association catapults towards the playoffs, many teams like the Rockets are experiencing untimely slumps. Other teams like the Spurs and Bulls are hitting their stride for the stretch championship run.

### Houston Doesn't Get the Point

The Rockets have been on a six-game slide, partly due to the fact that they have no perimeter defense, especially at the point. Forget the fact that Jordan scored 40, as he often does.

The Mookie Blaylocks and Tim Hardaways of the league are the problem. Both Blaylock and Hardaway carried their teams to victory against Houston. Clyde will get a head start on his University of Houston job if the Rockets have to face Seattle's Gary Payton or Utah's John Stockton in the first round.

### San Antonio Heating Up

The hottest team in the league (besides the Bulls, of course) is the San Antonio Spurs. The

Spurs have won five in a row and eight of their last 10. No one has been able to match up with their front line except ... the Suns?

Smallish Phoenix which uses a three-guard lineup, has a 3-1 edge on San Antonio this season which makes a possible first-round matchup very exciting.

### Not in My House

Dikembe Mutombo took his finger-waving trade to Stephon Marbury in the first quarter of the Hawks-Timberwolves game on Sunday and recorded his 2,000th career block. Deke is only the 11th player in NBA history to reach that plateau.

### That's East, not Least

The Western Conference playoff spots are not in doubt. Jockeying for position is all that remains. However, take a look at the parity-laden East. Philadelphia is only better than Toronto in that conference, but the 76ers would be the ninth seed in the West above Sacramento if they were to switch coasts.

### 58-feet Out, Swish!

The fight is getting dirty at the bottom of the Eastern Conference. New Jersey currently holds the last spot, but you've got to figure the Washington Wizards have one last surge left with all of that talent. Washington made their statement with a three-point victory over rival Orlando to push them into the ninth spot. Non-All-Star Rod Strickland recorded a triple-double in that game to help the Wizards.

Who is the man that is fending off the hard-charging Wiz? New Jersey's Sam Cassell, who scored 30 against the Knicks, who are in danger themselves of giving up their playoff spot with recent sloppy play.

### Bad Guy After All?

Before Saturday's contest with the Spurs, Golden State's Jim Jackson took about 15 minutes before going into the locker room to sign autographs for kids stationed around the court.

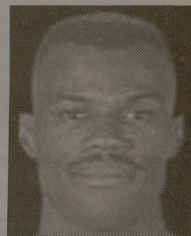
For a guy who gets such a bad reputation and is the only visible star on a horrible team with problems other than basketball, he seemed happy to brighten some young faces. Perhaps no one realizes that even the guys with bad attitudes sacrifice hours of their days to sign their name for the fans.

### Texas Line of the Week

David Robinson  
43 minutes, 6-15 FG, 12-15 FT, 24 points, 18 rebounds and 7 blocks

The undermanned Golden State front line used their fouls to play a "hack-an-Admiral" defense, but unlike his friend to the West, Robinson can come through at the line.

Eric Dampier and Jason Caffey both fouled out trying to guard the better half of the Twin Towers.



Robinson

## Bagwell notches three RBI in Astros victory

HOUSTON (AP) — Jeff Bagwell drove in three runs with a grounder and two-run homer, and the Houston Astros overcame five hits by Dante Bichette to beat the Colorado Rockies 13-4 Monday.

Houston, which outit the Rockies 15-13, won three of four games against Colorado, outscoring the Rockies 37-13 and outhitting them 51-38.

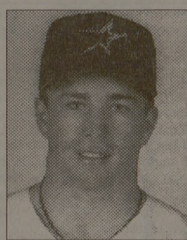
Colorado, 35-45 on the road last season and 47-34 at Coors Field, finished their first road trip 4-3 and play their home opener against St.

Louis on Tuesday night.

Bichette was 5-for-5 with two RBI, matching his career high for hits and raising his average to .531.

It was his first five-hit game since June 30, 1996, against Los Angeles.

Bagwell had an RBI grounder in the first and hit his third homer of



Bagwell

the season in the sixth for a 9-2 lead.

Jack Howell added a two-run, pinch single in a four-run seventh, and Derek Bell went 3-for-5.

Mike Hampton (1-0) improved to 5-1 against Colorado, allowing two runs and nine hits in seven innings.

Justin Thompson (1-1) was pounded for nine runs and 12 hits in six innings.

Craig Biggio and Bell led off the game with singles, and Houston took a 2-0 lead on Bagwell's high-bouncing grounder and Carl

Everett's single.

After Vinny Castilla's RBI single in the second, the Astros made it 3-1 in the third on Brad Ausmus' tripled and Hampton's single. Houston got three more runs in the third on a throwing error by Kirt Manwaring with a runner on third and Richard Hidalgo's two-run homer.

Ellis Burk's third homer of the season made it 6-2 in the fourth. Bell's RBI single and Bagwell's homer increased the margin to 9-2 in the sixth.

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