

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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Head coach Mel Nash celebrates 25 years

In a quarter century, Nash has turned A&M swimming and diving into a winner

By Jordan Meserole
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M men's head swimming coach Mel Nash is never hard to locate on the pool deck. His booming voice and boisterous laugh resonate throughout the Student Recreation Center Natatorium. His radiant smile can be seen from the other end of the pool, and he readily extends his bear-like hand whenever he sees a new face. Nash can make anyone feel welcome in what he has called his home for the past 25 years.

For a quarter of a century now, Nash has been building an A&M swimming program, that was once considered a joke, into one of the most respected programs in the nation.

When Nash got a phone call from the University 25 years ago, he said he was quite surprised. Nash said he wasn't sure what to think about the opportunity initially, especially based on his first impressions of the school.

"When I had come down the previous year for a dual meet, the pool was nasty, we drove through the bad part of town and all I had ever heard about A&M were the jokes," Nash said. "I was not all that impressed."

After much consideration, Nash accepted the job. It would be a decision that would eventually add many more accomplishments to his resume.

Nash began his swimming career in Monroeville, Pa., a small suburb of Pittsburgh. Before he graduated from high school, Nash had earned a gold medal in the Pan American Games, was named the National High School Swimmer of the Year and had been a high school All-American for four straight years.

Nash went on to attend Indiana University, where he would continue to receive accolades. He won eight conference titles, participated in 15 NCAA

Championship finals, earned a gold medal in the 1973 World Championships and then a bronze medal in the 1975 World Championships.

With diploma fresh in hand, Nash entered the coaching ranks at the University of Texas at Arlington. Nash was 22 years old at the time, making him the youngest head coach of any sport in NCAA Division I history. After two years, the university decided to cut the program, leaving Nash looking for a job. With A&M searching for a new coach, the timing couldn't have been better.

Nash and his wife Carol packed their bags in the summer of 1979 and headed for College Station. It didn't take them long to fall in love with the University and town.

"We were here for about six weeks, had gone to about three or four football games, and we both suddenly realized that we were going to be here a while," Nash said. "I felt like this was the place I was destined to be."

In his tenure at A&M, Nash's teams have achieved 147 wins on the men's side and 81 wins by the women, both school records. Over the previous five years, Nash's dual meet record of 35-8 is one of the top winning percentages in the nation. He has coached 38 All-American men and 23 All-American women, as well as some who have gone on to medal in Pan American Games, Goodwill Games and U.S. national championships.

Assistant coach Jay Holmes, who has been Nash's right-hand man for the past 18 years, said Nash's success comes largely from his coaching style.

"His instincts are maybe one of the best in coaching," Holmes said. "He coaches from his gut a lot."

Nash has had many athletes come to the A&M program with average



ART WRIGHT • THE BATTALION

Texas A&M men's swimming and diving head coach Mel Nash is in his 25th season as head coach at A&M. Nash has a 147-81 dual meet record for his career at A&M.

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