

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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WATKINS RESIGNS

Big 12 tourney is Watkins' last dance

By Jordan Meserole
THE BATTALION

Many people contemplate situations in their lives that they would do differently if given the opportunity: buy that lottery ticket, stop at that yellow light or ask that person out.

There are many things Texas A&M head coach Melvin Watkins, who resigned Wednesday afternoon, would have done differently during his tenure if given the opportunity.

"I wish we would have been 20-7 instead of 7-20," Watkins said. "Or how about winning a conference game? But you can't go back so that's how it is."

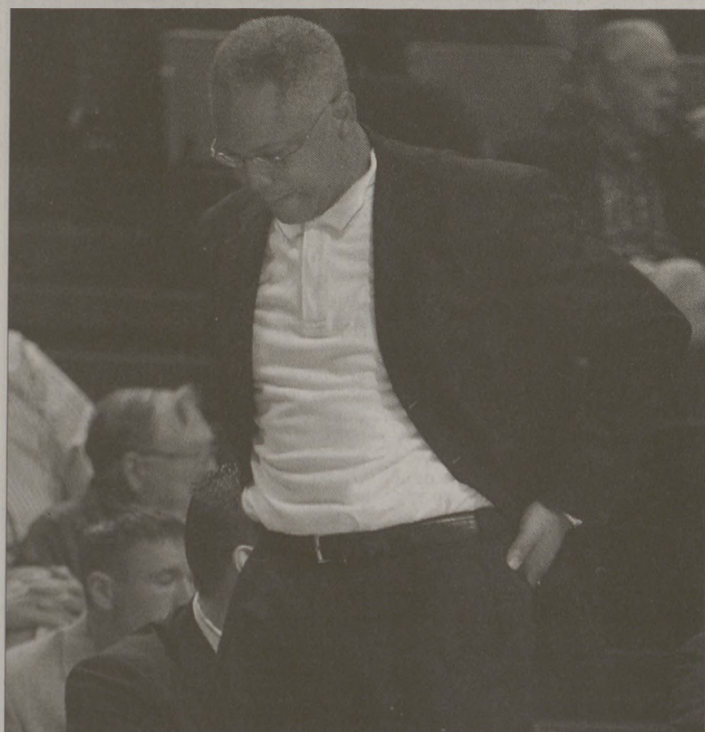
The A&M men's basketball team (7-20, 0-16 Big 12) is getting one last opportunity to end the season on a high note Thursday in the Big 12 Tournament.

For Watkins, who will continue to coach A&M during the tournament, it will be one last opportunity to end his A&M career on a high note.

The Aggies are only the second team in Big 12 history to finish winless in conference play, and this is only the second time in almost 60 years that A&M has gone winless in conference play. But if they win the Big 12 tournament, they can still earn a berth to the NCAA tournament.

"Who knows — maybe we'll go out and win the national championship," Watkins said jokingly.

To win the Big 12 trophy and advance to the NCAA tourna-



JP BEATO III • THE BATTALION

A&M head coach Melvin Watkins paces the sideline during A&M's 76-70 loss to Colorado Feb. 28 at Reed Arena. Watkins resigned as head coach Wednesday in Dallas, a day before A&M plays Missouri in the first round of the Big 12 Tournament.

ment, though, the Aggies would have to win four consecutive games, three of which would most likely be against nationally-ranked teams.

Enter the University of Missouri basketball team.

Missouri (15-12, 9-7) is A&M's first-round opponent in the conference tournament. Missouri handed the Aggies a 82-77 loss Jan. 10, A&M's first conference loss of the season, the first of 16 consecutive losses.

Watkins said the Aggies will

face a very different Missouri team than the one they faced in the beginning of the season.

"Missouri is playing better — much better — than during our first meeting," Watkins said. "We're going to have our hands much fuller trying to defend them."

Missouri has won six of its last eight games and is led by senior center Arthur Johnson.

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Why every Aggie should be a UTEP fan

With the resignation of Texas A&M men's basketball head coach Melvin Watkins, it's time to look at possible replacements. First of all, you should stop the delusions of grandeur in thinking Louisville head coach Rick Pitino or former Arkansas head coach Nolan Richardson are going to come to Aggieland.

That's not going to happen.

Former Illinois and University of Texas-Pan American head coach Lon Kruger is another prominent person who, after he was released from the New York Knicks coaching staff, has put his name in the hat for possible college coaching positions.

Kruger was last seen house shopping in Las Vegas as the probable next head coach at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

The rumor mill is also swirling around Texas Tech head coach Bobby Knight. After his spat with Tech chancellor David Smith in a grocery store, many believe Knight may leave Tech.

If Knight does leave Lubbock, it's to go to Ohio State University, Knight's alma mater, not A&M.

So with all the "big names" scattering from A&M like it's cancer, who wants the A&M job?

The underlying question, though, shouldn't be who will want the A&M job, but rather, what kind of head coach does A&M need?

A coach who can recruit in A&M's own back yard, the state of Texas, is a good place to start.

With Houston and Dallas being the two largest hotbeds of basketball talent in the country, A&M should be able to entice some of the best basketball players in the nation to stay in Texas.

Watkins, despite being a good recruiter, couldn't do it. He had a staff from all over the nation, but no one from Texas.

His recruits came from around the nation with the pinnacle recruit being Antoine Wright from San Bernardino, Calif. Watkins didn't sign a blue chip recruit until he recruited and signed Acie Law IV from Dallas Kimball High School in 2003.

"You have to protect your home base," said



TROY MILLER

A&M Athletic Director Bill Byrne. "I hope that whoever we hire will get the best players in Texas to College Station."

Byrne's actions speak louder than his words, though. Two weeks ago, Byrne was seen in Dallas at a game between Southern Methodist University and the University of Texas—El Paso.

His reason for being there: UTEP head coach Billy Gillispie.

Gillispie is a Texas native who began his coaching career in Texas coaching high school teams for eight years. After his final two seasons in high school coaching at Killeen Ellison, Gillispie became an assistant coach and the recruiting coordinator at Baylor University.

If you need a coach with recruiting experience in Texas, Gillispie fits the bill.

And then there is Gillispie's coaching resume. After Baylor, Gillispie was hired as an assistant head coach at the University of Tulsa by current Kansas head coach Bill Self. Gillispie followed Self to the University of Illinois, where he stayed for two years before taking the head coaching job at UTEP.

In the last four of the five seasons Gillispie coached with Self, their teams made the NCAA Tournament.

At UTEP, Gillispie's first season ended in a 6-24 record. In 2003-04, his second season at UTEP, Gillispie has led the Miners to a 22-6 record and a first place tie in the Western Athletic Conference. Barring a major disaster in the WAC Tournament, Gillispie's team will be playing in the NCAA's.

Gillispie, who recruited a nationally top 25-ranked recruiting class in his only off-season at UTEP, is the perfect combination of recruiting and coaching for Aggieland.

The bottom line is that the relatively unknown Gillispie is the best hire A&M could make. That's why Byrne should hire Gillispie as soon as UTEP's run through the NCAA tournament ends to give him the chance to do what Watkins could not do: make A&M a winner.

And for all of the Aggie fans that are set on getting a big-time name as new head coach — go back to sleep, because you're dreaming.

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