

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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Gillispie hired as new men's basketball coach

Students react to Aggies' new head coach

By Jordan Meserole
THE BATTALION

About 175 fans filled seats in Reed Arena Tuesday afternoon to welcome new Texas A&M men's basketball head coach Billy Gillespie.

Gillispie received a standing ovation from the crowd as he walked under an arch of sabers formed by the Ross Volunteers. Sporting a new maroon blazer, Gillespie acknowledged the crowd with a wide smile and a big thumbs-up "Gig 'em" sign.

"I appreciate all the fans that came out today," Gillespie said. "It shows support, hunger, determination, dedication and passion for the University. I think it's great."

Gillispie fills the void left by former head coach Melvin Watkins, who resigned two weeks ago after a dismal season in which the Aggies didn't win a conference game. Since Watkins' resignation, fans have been speculating who would take the reins to the team. Gillespie's name had recently surfaced as the front-runner for the job, but Gillespie wouldn't comment in media interviews on whether he was considering moving. Many Aggie fans said they expected Gillespie's hire, however.

"To be honest, I always had a feeling it was going to be him," said sophomore finance major Ian Rudebusch. "He seemed to be the logical choice."

The fans' excitement was apparent, as many of the students in attendance skipped their afternoon classes to greet the new coach. The one person



Senior Aggie Band B-Battery commanding officer Rob McClelland shakes hands with new Texas A&M men's basketball head coach Billy Gillespie at Reed Arena Wednesday.

who seemed to be smiling more than Gillespie and Athletic Director Bill Byrne was senior business major Scott Blackwell, president of the Reed Rowdies, a student organization that attends every home basketball game and most away games to support the Aggies.

"I was more than happy to hear the news," Blackwell said. "I'm going to miss Melvin, but we definitely needed a new coach."

Senior chemistry major Emily Brock, current co-captain of the Aggie dance team,

has seen many games in her four years at A&M. Brock said she was happy to hear the news, but also felt a little sad about the situation.

"I'm sorry that I'm not going to be here to see the turnaround," Brock said. "But I know he is somebody that everyone here wanted, so it's still good."

Junior business major and yell leader Ryan Bishop said he hopes A&M's defensive problems get solved. A&M ranked

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Byrne's legacy rests on Gillespie's success

In his first year as Texas A&M athletic director, Bill Byrne has increased revenue into the Athletic Department, has begun a marketing campaign that has increased attendance at every A&M sporting event and has put A&M back on the national landscape.

Before Wednesday, Byrne had also made two hires, football head coach Dennis Franchione and women's basketball head coach Gary Blair. Neither had stellar seasons by any stretch of the imagination in



TROY MILLER

their first years, but with their track records, it's evident that a turn-around is near.

Despite all that Byrne has done in such a short time in Aggieland, his legacy will lie with the success, or failure, of his third hire — new men's basketball head coach Billy Gillespie.

Men's basketball is one of two revenue sports, the other being football, and by having a miserable basketball team A&M has lost out on millions of revenue dollars.

Franchione and Blair are two proven winners who have exhibited the ability to turn programs around successfully during their decades of head coaching experience.

Gillispie has a career record of 30-32 from his two seasons

as head coach at the University of Texas—El Paso. Not exactly eye-popping.

Digging a little deeper, though, it's tough to argue with what Gillespie accomplished at UTEP. He took over a team that hadn't had a winning season in 12 years and turned it into Western Athletic Conference co-champions and an NCAA Tournament team in just two seasons.

Gillispie also has ties to Texas high schools, which make up the largest hotbed of basketball talent in the country. University of Texas head coach Rick Barnes has been able to tap into that talent. Former A&M head coach Melvin

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New Texas A&M men's basketball head coach Billy Gillespie shakes hands with Athletic Director Bill Byrne and University President Robert M. Gates at a press conference in Reed Arena Wednesday announcing Gillespie as A&M's new men's basketball head coach.

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