Sports THE BATTALION

Page 1B • Thursday, March 25, 2004

Gillispie hired as new men's basketball coach Students react to Aggies' new head coach Byrne's legacy rests on Gillispie's success

By Jordan Meserole THE BATTALION

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

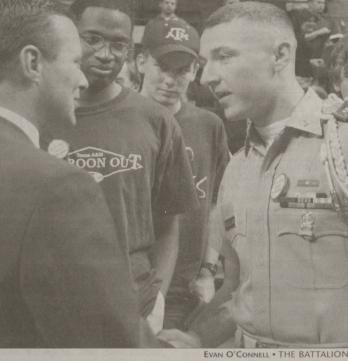
Gillispie received a standing vation from the crowd as he valked under an arch of sabers ormed by the Ross Volunteers. sporting a new maroon blazer, Gillispie acknowledged the rowd with a wide smile and a big thumbs-up "Gig 'em" sign.

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

Gillespie 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. Gillispie's name had recently surfaced as the frontrunner for the job, but Gillespie wouldn't comment in media interviews on whether he was Many considering moving. Aggie fans said they expected Gillispie's hire, however.

"To be honest, I always had a feeling it was going to be him," said sophomore finance major lan 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 Gillispie 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

See Students on page 3B

In his first year as Texas A&M athletic director, Bill Byrne has increased revenue into the Athletic Department. has begun a marketing TROY MILLER 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

as A&M's new men's basketball head coach.

their first years, but with their as head coach at the University 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 Gillispie.

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

of Texas-El Paso. Not exactly eye-popping.

Digging a little deeper, though, it's tough to argue with what Gillispie 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

See Byrne on page 3B



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



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