

There's little evidence Knight has learned to behave

by Bill Wallace
Knight-Ridder Tribune
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At Texas Tech University, entertainment won out and education lost. The bread-and-circus issue was the hiring of the new basketball coach Bobby Knight, late of the University of Indiana at Bloomington.

Before the recent appointment there was brief belief that the president, David Schmidly, would fend off the importunities of Gerald Myers, his athletic director. Knight, dismissed at Indiana last September 20 following a series of behavioral blunders, had an old pal in Myers, a former basketball coach at Tech.

But no. The campus of 25,000 students, and the city of Lubbock (325 miles west of Dallas, population 175,000), were euphoric about the probable coming of a coach whose teams had won 723 games, 11 Big 10 titles and three national championships in 29 seasons at Indiana.

Nothing like that had ever happened at Tech, a distant third among state universities there after the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M at College Station.

Walter Schaller, an associate professor of philosophy, had written a petition circulated among the faculty that opposed the hiring of Knight. Schaller wrote that the appointment "would bring much negative publicity and damage our reputation."

Madonne Miner, the chairwoman of the English department, told The New York Times, "I want Tech to be seen as an academically solid, ethically based university in which we feel proud of our athletes and proud of our coaches." She didn't think that would happen with Knight on the scene.

Schaller envisaged the famous film clip of Knight in a rage throwing a metal chair across a basketball court being revived on television, which may or may not happen.

However Schaller's ardor switched once the deed was done. "I welcome Bob Knight to Texas Tech," he said. "I

hope the team wins 30 games. But I also hope Bob Knight has realized his behavior must change and that Texas Tech proves to be the second chance he needs."

The petition had attracted 100 signatures from the faculty of 900 at a time when many were away because of spring break. President Schmidly, new to the campus, would have paid it little heed. He had said, "What better thing could happen for Texas Tech? He's one of the best basketball coaches to ever live."

Schmidly had a codicil. Knight had to behave and there's little evidence of that. For the hiring announce-

ment a crowd of 7,500 showed up at the United Spirit Arena and Knight displayed his usual brash self-confidence and biting banter with the media.

He was unapologetic about his alleged choking of a player at Indiana, just as he had been in a television interview with Bob Costas last year. Knight told Costas he had nothing to apologize for, and remained unrepentant on the Larry King TV show even after his new hiring.

Knight did have a charismatic credential for the faculty. The graduation percentages for his players at Indi-

ana were good, in the 1980s. Texas Tech has figures nowhere near that. The dismal graduation rate for African-American student-athletes is just 23 percent compared to 67 percent for white students.

That gap of 44 percent is the third widest among big-time sports programs, exceeded only by Auburn, 50 percent, and Fresno State, 45.

According to the teachings of Allen Sack, it was certain that Knight would find another port of call after being cut loose at last by Myles Brand, the president at Indiana. Sack is a professor of sociology at the University of New Haven in Connecticut and co-author of "College Athletes for Hire."

The latter is one of several recent books calling attention to the dismal state of intercollegiate sports. In a recent essay in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Sack wrote, "All the proposals set forth are problematic for the same reason. The authors assume that a significant constituency truly wants to challenge the collegiate sports juggernaut."

"But, with the exception of a handful of faculty members who think that a college education should mean more than merely staying eligible for sports, it may be that no one really cares if big-time college athletes receive a meaningful education."

This handful of faculty members makes up the Drake Group founded by Jon Erickson, a professor at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. The group's concern is the corruption that college sports bring into the academic realm. Sack is a member, as is Murray Sperber, author of "Beer and Circus: How Big-Time College Sports Is Crippling Undergraduate Education."

Sperber, an Indiana University professor, was publicly critical of Knight and the administration for tolerating his boorishness for so long. After Knight's dismissal, unpopular with the Hoosier yahoos, Sperber felt so threatened in Bloomington that he asked for and received a sabbatical year away.

Knight takes national stage as Texas Tech's new coach

TMS Campus
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Less than a year after being fired from Indiana University, controversial basketball coach Bob Knight celebrated his coming out party as Texas Tech's newest head coach with an hour-long interview on CNN's "Larry King Live."

Knight, accompanied by Texas Tech President David Schmidly, addressed everything from his experience at Indiana to the temper that ultimately led to his dismissal last year by IU president Myles Brand.

"I think that... not only do I have to change some things... I think I have to eliminate a thing or two," Knight said. "Not just change it, but just get rid of it."

Knight said that while the legend of his famous persona has been

"grossly exaggerated" over time, "I also think there are a couple things that I can coach and be better off without."

"Karen's [Knight's wife] favorite saying is, 'If the horse is dead, get off,'" said Knight, referring to some habits of his that have caused more harm than good in recent years.

Schmidly, who made Knight's hiring official last week, defended the choice. He said that he has been a fan of Knight's for years, and that after meeting with him on the matter, the choice to hire him was an easy one.

"We talked to a lot of people that have known Coach Knight for a long time," he said. "Talked to a lot of people that have not, that only read about him. And what I would say is a very consistent pattern there. The people who had known Coach Knight for a long time raved about him, not

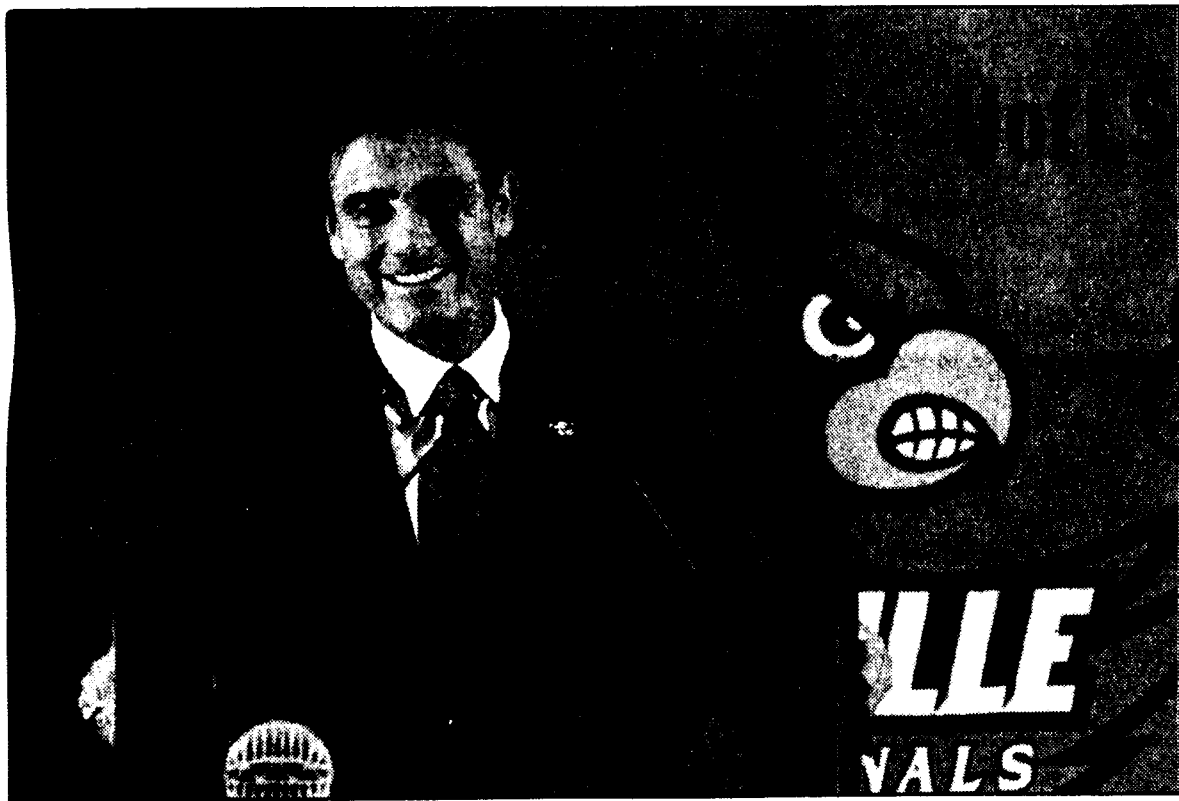
only as a person, but as a coach. And of course, my experience with him in the four or five days I've had the chance to get to know him have been some way."

Schmidly also addressed the criticism brought on by students and more than 100 Texas Tech faculty members about Knight's hiring.

"There was about 100 [faculty members] that signed a petition," he said. "And I met with faculty, we had a very positive meeting. I answered all their questions, and I think all of the faculty are of the mind that we are going to give Coach Knight a chance, a fresh start."

When asked by King whether or not his temper is controllable, Knight replied, "I think so. I don't think I have ever been out of control."

Cardinal Rick's sermon



MARK CORNELISON/LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER

Coach Rick Pitino holds a news conference in Louisville, KY on Wednesday, March 21, 2001 University of Louisville. The University of Louisville has selected him to be its new head basketball coach.

The Sporting News' NFL Executive of the Year: New Orleans Saints' Randy Mueller

by Paul Attner
The Sporting News
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Randy Mueller is one of the nice guys in sports. Low-key, unassuming and quiet, he maintains the most minuscule of profiles possible in a high-profile profession. But don't mistake humility for weakness. In his first year directing the Saints' operation, he displayed a steely decision-making ability which became the foundation of everything good that happened to the franchise.

"I had to install passion," he says. "I had to make this fun again for the franchise. We had to change the attitude everywhere, from front office to coaches to support personnel. We needed to bring some life back to the place. So we had to make changes. But it helped that I didn't know a whole lot about the Saints' past, and I didn't care, quite frankly. I knew I had an owner who was committed to let me do whatever it took to get it

done, and that is all I needed."

So Mueller made changes in off-field personnel, wiped out a large chunk of the roster, hired Jim Haslett to coach the team and brought in significant free agents such as quarterback Jeff Blake, wide receiver Joe Horn and defensive tackle Norman Hand. Mueller was hired on January 27; a month later, this already was no longer Mike Ditka's Saints. The result was a 10-6 season and, ultimately, the Saints' first playoff victory, a 31-28 home triumph over the Rams.

For his efforts, Mueller, 39, was selected by his peers - general managers, presidents and owners of other NFL franchises - as The Sporting News' 2000 NFL Executive of the Year. Mueller was a runaway winner, receiving 16 votes. Ravens vice president of player personnel Ozzie Newsome and Eagles director of football operations Tom Modrak tied for second with four votes.

Mueller thought he might

spend his entire football career in Seattle, where he began a front-office ascent as a scouting assistant with duties that included acting as ball boy and washing cars. He signed a three-year contract in November 1999 to remain as the club's vice president of football operations under Mike Holmgren. He had run the Seahawks' front office before Holmgren was hired as coach in 1999. "I was looking forward to spending 20 years with the same organization," Mueller says.

But Saints Owner Tom Benson convinced Mueller he would receive the necessary financial support to compete with the league's aggressive teams. Mueller signed on, and thus far the results have been gratifying. "It is a great honor, obviously, to have your name put up there with some of the great executives of all time," he says.

"This is a tribute to the whole organization. But we are still a work in progress."

Final Four could produce couple of classics

by Steve Richardson
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The Atlantic Coast Conference is back in the national spotlight. Michigan State is back for a third straight Final Four and hopes to successfully defend its crown. And Arizona is back to playing at the high level many expected before this season was interrupted by turmoil and tragedy.

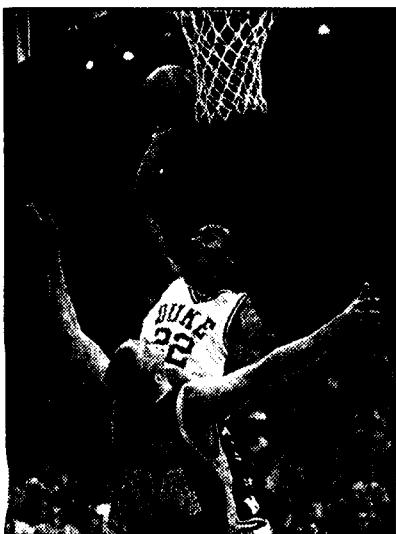
One Final Four semifinal on Saturday will be a repeat of the 2001 ACC Tournament semifinals: Duke vs. Maryland. The other will be clash of two powerhouse programs of the 1990s, Michigan State and Arizona, which are well-known Final Four fixtures.

The No. 1-ranked Blue Devils have battled Maryland in three scintillating games this season. Two of the games between the Blue Devils and Terrapins already have made ESPN's Instant Classics.

In the first game, the Blue Devils overcame a 10-point deficit in the final 54 seconds to win in overtime, 98-96, at Maryland in January. The Terrapins then stunned the Blue Devils in Durham in the return match, 91-80, in late February. Then Duke won the third game in Atlanta, which was decided by a last second shot, 84-82.

Instead of a Wrestlemania semifinal such as the one between Wisconsin-Michigan State last season, which pitted two teams from the same conference for the fourth time in season, the Duke-Maryland could be another for the Classic Channel.

"Our game in Atlanta in the tournament semifinal was truly a memorable game," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "Some of the kids even said to each other, 'We'll see you at the Final Four.' We are happy to have two teams from our conference in the



PATRICK SCHNEIDER/CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

Duke's Jason Williams goes up for a shot over USC's Brian Scalabrine in Duke's 79-69 victory in the NCAA Tournament Saturday. Duke advanced to the Final Four.

Final Four. That's terrific."

The advancement of Duke and Maryland to one national semifinal officially returns the Atlantic Coast Conference to prominence. The previous two seasons the league qualified only three teams each year to the entire field. And there were whispers that the ACC was on the decline. But this season, the ACC stormed back with six teams in the NCAA Tournament and now has two teams in the Final Four for the first time since 1991.

This will be the 13th time at least two teams from the same conference have made

the field. One year, in 1985, there were three teams from the Big East Conference. This is the fourth time two teams from the ACC have made the Final Four. The other seasons were 1981 (North Carolina-Virginia) and 1990 (Duke, Georgia Tech) and 1991. But only in 1981 did the two ACC teams actually play each other, with North Carolina beating Virginia in the semifinals before losing to Indiana in the NCAA final.

In the other 2001 national semifinal, Arizona, The Dallas Morning News' preseason No. 1 team, and Michigan State will not have as much familiarity with each other. The two teams played last season in Tucson, with the Wildcats winning on their home-court, 79-68. But Michigan State eventually claimed the NCAA title, while Arizona was upset in the second round by Wisconsin.

This season Arizona players have dedicated the season to Bobbi Olson, coach Lute Olson's wife, who passed away during the season. Olson, who is in his fourth Final Four at Arizona (1988, 1994, 1997, 2001) also had to coach the first six games of the season without center Loren Woods, who was suspended for violation of the NCAA extra benefits rule. But Arizona has won 19 of its last 21 games, losing only at UCLA and at Oregon during that span.

The Wildcats have shown they can compete against a rugged Big Ten team such as Michigan State. After beating the Illini in the Midwest Region final for a second time in three meetings this season, Woods predicted that the national semifinal against Michigan State would be "the same kind of war."

With Masters a week away, Woods continues hot streak

by Randall Mell
Knight-Ridder Tribune
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PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. - With his ball falling out of a blue sky over the No. 17 island green, Tiger Woods offered his closest pursuers hope during Monday's conclusion of The Players Championship.

"It's in the water!" a fan behind the tee screamed. The ball, fading fast to the right, found the green, spun back and nestled in the thin collar of rough against the bulkhead a few inches from the pond. That's as close as Woods came to making this ending dramatic. He saved par there and played the suspended final nine holes like a man who's rounding into major championship form.

Woods, who safely played for bogey at the 18th to beat Vijay Singh by a shot, is back on his game with The Masters a week away.

The world's No. 1 player seems poised to make a run at history and winning golf's Grand Slam.

Or will it be Grand Slam? If Woods wins The Masters, he will have claimed all four major championships in less than a year. But, it won't be the same calendar year. Whether holding all four majors at the same time constitutes a Grand Slam will be the subject of heated debate when Woods steps onto Augusta National's lush landscape. Woods believes it ought to be a Grand Slam.

There's no doubt Woods will be favored to win his second green jacket. Two weeks ago, he was hounded with questions about his "slump," the inability to win in his first six events this year. Now, with Monday's \$1,080,000 first-place check in his pocket, he has reclaimed his spot as the PGA Tour's leading money winner.

"Some of the writers suggested I was in a slump," Woods said. "Obviously, they don't really understand the game that well. I wasn't playing that badly. It wasn't

like I was missing cuts every week. I was right there with a chance to win in virtually every tournament I teed it up in, and I think that's pretty good."

If not for a double-bogey at the finishing hole at the Dubai Desert Classic three weeks ago, Woods could be headed to The Masters with three victories in a row.

Woods will be trying to break The Players Championship jinx heading to Augusta National. None of the previous 27 winners of this event has been able to win The Masters in the same year.

With Sunday's finish incomplete because of rain, Woods played his final nine holes Monday in 2-under 34, giving him a final-round 67. Nobody shot a better final-round score. Woods' 72-hole total was 274.

Bernhard Langer also shot 67 to finish third two shots back. Third-round leader Jerry Kelly (73) made double bogey on the final hole to finish fourth.

Singh, the defending Masters champ, made a valiant run at Woods, moving within a shot of him with a birdie at the 13th hole. At the 14th tee, Singh promptly hooked his drive into a pond and made triple-bogey 7.

"It was just a straight pull," Singh said. "I was too aggressive, too anxious."

Still, Singh rebounded, pulling to within a shot again with an eagle at the 16th and birdie at the 17th, but that only fired up Woods.

Woods was looking over a 45-foot eagle putt at the 16th green when Singh made his 6-foot birdie putt at the 17th. Woods could see Singh make the putt from across the pond separating those holes.

"It would have been nice to make eagle on top of Vijay there, where Vijay makes birdie and still loses a shot," Woods said.

Woods lipped out his eagle putt but his tap-in birdie restored his two-shot cushion and gave him momentum heading to The Masters.