

A Time to Heal

With a new coach and a new attitude, Baylor is rebounding from a scandal. By Gene Menze



BAYLOR COACH Scott Drew is a 35-year-old bundle of encouragement, a glass-half-full guy who could set a record for long-distance smiling. But when asked what positives can be taken from this season, Drew hesitates. "I'm an optimistic person," he says, "but I don't know if even I can come up with positives from this."

Drew (above) can be forgiven if he can't look past the Bears' record, which fell to 2-8 when they lost to Oklahoma 80-52 last Saturday, and the fact that Baylor will play only 16 games this season because NCAA sanctions banned it from facing teams from outside the Big 12. But there are signs that the program, which nearly collapsed after the 2003 murder of Patrick Dennehy and the subsequent uncovering of NCAA violations by former coach Dave Bliss, is moving on.

Drew, who have been coaching at Valparaiso, replaced Bliss six weeks after Dennehy was killed by teammate Carlton Dotson, who is now serving a 35-year prison sentence. The coach immediately began to disinfect the scandal-ridden program. (The NCAA also placed it on a five-year probation.) He instituted a no-swearing rule for players and banned them from wearing jewellery. He starts and ends practices with prayer and had Biblical verse painted on the locker-room wall. "Coach Drew doesn't do this because he thinks people are watching us," say sophomore guard Aaron Bruce. "he actually says the prayers and puts the things on...walls because that's how he lives his life."



BEARING FRUIT Drew's recruiting has turned up gems like sophomore Bruce (left).

Drew also isn't afraid to employ unusual coaching methods. Last year, just before a game at Oklahoma State, Drew made his players run the bleaches at OSU's football stadium because he thought they lacked energy. In December, Drew got his players accustomed to playing on the road by organizing a practice trip to Dallas – complete with hotel stay, game-plan meetings and cell phone confiscations – followed by an intrasquad scrimmage at the American Airlines Center.

The results have not yet shown up in the standings – the Bears are 19-48 overall and 6-36 in the Big 12 in Drew's three seasons – but Drew is selling the rebuilt program to high school seniors. His last two recruiting classes each ranked in the top 25. This year's team is young; Bruce, a freshman All-America last season, is the leader, and the Bears are getting more than half of their scoring, rebounding and assists from four freshman. With potential like that, there's reason for Drew to be his usual upbeat self. "I can see him turning this program around," Bruce says. "If not be the time I leave, then very, very soon."