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UK HIRES FIFTH BASKETBALL COACH SINCE RUPP

IT'S BILLY G.

Former Texas A&M coach agrees to 7-year deal for \$2.3 million a season



Former Texas A&M coach Billy Gillispie waves to fans as he walks to the stage during a pep rally in Memorial Coliseum yesterday. Fans interrupted Gillispie several times during the pep rally by applauding and chanting his name. ALLIE GARZA | STAFF

INSIDE

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Players talk about Tubby's departure, transfer rumors and their new coach

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After flying into Lexington Thursday night, Gillispie and Barnhart talked well into Friday morning

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Gillispie is eager to get started recruiting in-state talent for UK



WADE BARKER | THE BATTALION

Former high school coach never thought he would be here

By Jonathan Smith
jsmith@kykernel.com

Since he was 7 years old, all Billy Gillispie ever wanted to do was coach basketball.

He accomplished his goal, starting out at the high school level and eventually making a jump to the junior college and college ranks, most recently at Texas A&M.

Now, after more than 20 years of jumping to different jobs all over the country, he is in charge of the winningest program in college basketball history.

Gillispie, known to be an ace recruiter, was named the 21st head coach at UK yesterday, agreeing to a seven-year deal that will pay him \$2.3 million per season.

Smiling throughout his introductory news conference, Gillispie talked about his path from the small town of Graford, Texas — population 578 — to taking over one of the nation's most storied programs.

"When you talk about wanting to be a basketball coach, you never even think a situation such as this is possible," Gillispie said. "Through hard work, dedication, luck and those kind of things, I'm sitting here today as the head coach at the best position you can ever have in college basketball."

Gillispie seemed to be in awe of his new job.

Sporting a UK pullover at a pep rally to in-



KEITH SMILEY | STAFF

New head basketball coach Billy Gillispie spoke to the media at a news conference yesterday afternoon. Gillispie won his last game as the Texas A&M head coach in Rupp Arena during the second round of the NCAA Tournament last month.

introduce him to fans at Memorial Coliseum, Gillispie used the word "honor" at least seven times when describing how he felt about taking over at UK. He even got choked up once.

"I'm a baby," he said. "I'll start crying."

Gillispie is known for his obsession for the game. Former A&M player Marlon Pompey said in an e-mail to the Kernel that Gillispie is "married to basketball."

"We wanted someone that would match the passion and the love for basketball that Ken-

See **Coach** on page 4

Barnhart used the right process to get the right guy

As UK Athletic Director Mitch Barnhart talked late into Thursday night with Billy Gillispie, he thought he had the right guy to take over the UK basketball program.

But it wasn't until they started talking about sending text messages to recruits that Barnhart knew for sure.

"How many do you send each month?" Barnhart asked.

"Eight thousand," Gillispie said.

"Eight thousand a month?" Barnhart said. "I haven't done 8,000 in my life!"

At that point, Barnhart had to feel about 8,000 times better about the successful completion of his exhaustive coaching search. The work ethic exhibited by Gillispie's manic text messaging is exactly what Barnhart was looking for in his basketball coach.

And if you believe in first impressions, you probably feel just as good as Barnhart does, because Gillispie, who won back-to-back NCAA Tournament games last month at Rupp Arena, won the news conference yesterday. He charmed fans and reporters with his self-deprecating attitude, and gave impressive answers to nearly every question.

And that's about all the analysis you're going to get of Gillispie here, because all we know is what we saw. We can, however, analyze the process.

It worked.

Little has been seen or heard of Barnhart since Tubby Smith left 16 days ago. While false rumors circulated about the athletic director entertaining Billy Donovan's family or criss-crossing the country in search of a coach, Barnhart quietly did things his own way.

"I apologize for being bunkered in, but I feel that was the

See **DeLottell** on page 4



CHRIS DELOTTELL
Kernel columnist



COACH'S FILE

Name: Billy Clyde Gillispie
Age: 47
Born: Nov. 7, 1959, in Abilene, Texas
Hometown: Graford, Texas

Education: Graduated with an education degree from Texas State in 1983

Coaching Honors:

- Big 12 Coach of the Year in 2005 and 2007
- Two-time National Coach of the Year finalist
- Part of the only coaching staff to lead two schools to the Elite Eight in consecutive seasons (1999-2000, Tulsa, 2000-01, Illinois)

Overall Record: 100-58 (.632)

Fun Facts: Former UK football coach Hal Mumme was the athletic director while Gillispie coached at Copperas Cove High School in 1987. Also, in an exhibition game before the 2003-04 season, Gillispie's UTEP team defeated the Harlem Globetrotters. It was the Globetrotters' first defeat in 288 games.

GILLISPIE'S BASKETBALL CAREER

- 1978**
Plays basketball at Ranger College
- 1980**
Transfers to Sam Houston State to become a student assistant for the basketball team
- 1985**
Becomes assistant coach at Killeen (Texas) High School
- 1988**
Becomes head coach at New Braunfels (Texas) Canyon High School
- 1993**
Becomes assistant coach and recruiting coordinator at South Plains Junior College
- 1996**
Gillispie's recruiting class ranks as high as sixth in the nation
- 2000**
Follows Self to Illinois where the Illini won back-to-back Big Ten titles for the first time in 50 years
- 2004**
Leads UTEP to a Western Athletic Conference Championship, the school's first in 12 years. He is named a National Coach of the Year finalist
- 2005**
Leads A&M to a 21-10 and 8-8 record in the Big 12. He is again named a National Coach of the Year finalist
- 2007**
A&M makes it to the Sweet Sixteen, defeating Louisville and Rick Pitino in the second round
- APRIL 6, 2007**
Gillispie is named the 21st head basketball coach at UK

FAN REACTION



KEITH SMILEY | STAFF

Despite having only four hours notice, about a thousand UK fans gathered in Memorial Coliseum yesterday afternoon to welcome new head basketball coach Billy Gillispie.

Into the Blue: Fans embrace Gillispie

By Eric Lindsey
 elindsey@kykernet.com

Jim and Juanita Hammond had seen the UK basketball program struggle long enough.

After 10 years as season ticket holders, the couple recently decided not to renew their tickets.

But after UK hired Billy Gillispie, the Hammonds made an hour-long drive to join more than a thousand UK fans at a pep rally at Memorial Coliseum, hoping the former Texas A&M coach could restore their faith in UK basketball.

Gillispie was the second Billy considered for the job after Florida head coach Billy Donovan turned down a chance to interview for it.

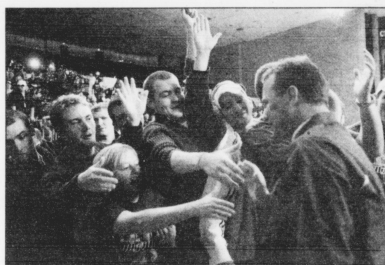
"We tried to get Billy the Kid," Jim Hammond said, referencing Donovan's nickname. "But we ended up with Billy the Man."

Although UK didn't hire its top choice, the Wildcat faithful were still pleased with Gillispie's hiring.

"Billy Gillispie is a really good coach, a really good recruiter," said Justin Neuhart, a business sophomore. "I'm excited to see what he's going to do here."

Harry Smith, whose family has had season tickets since 1951, thinks Gillispie might be the answer to UK's recent tournament troubles.

"I think he's a very intense coach," Harry Smith said. "He has very organized practices and he's a



KEITH SMILEY | STAFF

Gillispie greets fans in Memorial Coliseum yesterday following the 12:15 p.m. pep rally. Fans started filling the arena when doors opened at 11.

defensive-minded coach. That'll blend well with the players next year who are already well trained in defensive techniques."

In just three years, Gillispie turned around an A&M program that was 0-16 in Big 12 Conference play to one that was 27-7 this year and had a Sweet Sixteen run.

But it wasn't his first program makeover. Gillispie also earned a 24-8 record during his second season as head coach at the University of Texas-El Paso, after the team went 6-24 during his first.

typical Barnhart hire, the Barnhart type of coach. It may turn out to be a blessing in disguise."

Smith was pleased with the exhaustive search Barnhart conducted despite the pressure from fans and alumni.

"I know the athletic department has worked very hard to get the best person for the job," Smith said. "I know they put a lot of time into researching the backgrounds of the candidates."

While Gillispie might be facing new surroundings, he can expect to see the traditional pressure from holding one of the most storied jobs in college basketball.

By yesterday afternoon, Facebook.com fan groups were already forming, a testament to the pressure Gillispie could face. The group profile for "Gillispie Better Take UK to the Final Four" said, "If new Kentucky coach Billy Gillispie doesn't take UK to the Final Four this year, he will be hated for the following six years."

Walter Smith, a journalism senior, expects the team to struggle the next few seasons but thinks Gillispie will have the program back on track.

"We need to give him a couple of years to build the program back up," he said. "We need to let him recruit his own players before we start hoping for some more Final Fours."

PLAYER REACTION

Returning Cats look forward to fresh start

By Travis Waldron
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It took Billy Gillispie less than an hour to convince the returning players that it doesn't matter who recruited them.

"People always talk about 'those are your guys, those aren't your guys, you didn't recruit these guys,'" Gillispie said. "Those guys are my guys."

And UK's players are ready to embrace Gillispie as their new coach.

"I'm sure everyone was sad to see Tabby go because that's what we came here for," said junior guard Joe Crawford. "But everyone is excited about the change. (Gillispie) seems like a genuine guy and he seems like he's going to be behind us."

UK's search for a new coach ended yesterday when Gillispie was hired, closing what junior guard Ramel Bradley called a hectic process for the players. With the athletic department remaining silent on coaching candidates, the fans soaked up every rumor about the search. After a while, so did the players.



Crawford

"It's kind of funny," Crawford said. "We started listening more to the rumors and started believing some of them. We wanted to know what was going on... We were informed that they were looking out for our best interests, looking out for returning players and getting this show on the road."

But coaching rumors weren't the only ones surrounding the team.

After Tabby Smith left two weeks ago, rumors about players transferring or leaving for the pros also circulated around campus and the Bluegrass area. But yesterday, Crawford laid the rumors on his future to rest.

"I haven't been thinking about leaving for the pros," Crawford said. "I really want to finish my career here at UK. I feel like I can make a lot of improvements next year, especially with a new coach that's going to teach me new things. I'm excited about that."

Freshman guard Derrick Jasper said he explored his opportunities, but ultimately ruled against it.

"When Coach Smith left, I think people assumed I would really like to play for him, so they thought I would leave," Jasper said. "But I'm just

excited to be here now and I'm working on getting better."

Part of Gillispie's appeal to fans is his offense, a more up-tempo style than Smith's, as Crawford described it. As much as fans are looking forward to the change, so are the players.

"It definitely excites me," Jasper said. "I'm the type of player that likes an up-tempo type of play, and we definitely have the players on the team that like to play an up-tempo type of game."

The coaching search was also up-tempo on Thursday after stalling for two weeks. It picked up drastically when UK's top choice, Florida head coach Billy Donovan, announced he was staying in Gainesville at 4 p.m. Twelve hours later, Gillispie was the Cats' new coach.

"It still doesn't feel real," Bradley said. "I'm very excited. It just kind of feels weird right now. It just feels crazy."

Now that UK has named a coach, Jasper is looking forward to the start of a new era in UK basketball.

"I definitely think it's a fresh start," Jasper said. "I'm sure the fans feel it's a fresh start, and I think everyone feels it's a fresh start, to try something new. Everyone's really excited for it."

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Billy Gillispie walks to the stage in Memorial Coliseum after Athletic Director Mitch Barnhart introduced him as UK's new head basketball coach.

KEITH SMILEY | STAFF

OUTSIDE REACTION

Former player, Kansas coach wish Gillispie well at UK

By Matthew George
mgeorge@kynews.com

While fans in the Bluegrass celebrated early yesterday morning, 1,000 miles southwest, 14 basketball players woke up coach-less.

"I was kind of shocked," said Texas A&M forward Slade Weishuhn. The sophomore learned about coach Billy Gillispie's departure around 8:30 a.m. yesterday, and although the decision caught him off guard, Weishuhn said he understood it.

"I really couldn't blame him," Weishuhn said. "Kentucky is a great school and he must have had a great offer."

Weishuhn believes Gillispie can handle UK fans' high expectations and he thinks he will succeed.

"I think he'll do great," he said. "He's done great things everywhere he's been. Coach G, I'm sure he's going in there thinking he's got big shoes to fill and he'll do his best to do that."

Weishuhn, who was recruited by Gillispie, said his ability to snag top prospects helps make him a good coach.

"He tells everybody the truth and he basically tells you

that if you want to work hard, you'll have a chance to play here," he said. "He's just a great all-around coach."

Weishuhn said he will miss playing for Gillispie. "I've only had one coach in college, but it'd be hard to see myself playing for someone else because he does everything the right way," he said. "He's a great guy to play for."

Kansas head coach Bill Self, a long-time friend, was happy for Gillispie and his opportunity to coach the Cats.

"I know it was a tough decision because he had a great stay at Texas A&M," Self said in a statement yesterday. "Obviously, he felt this was a chance of a lifetime to go to Kentucky."

Gillispie worked on Self's coaching staff at Tulsa and Illinois. Self hired Gillispie as an assistant at Tulsa in 1997. In the 1999-2000 season, the two helped lead Tulsa to the Elite Eight.

When Self was hired as the head coach at Illinois in 2000, Gillispie followed. Gillispie worked as both an assistant coach and the recruiting coordinator for an Illini team that won back-to-back Big Ten championships.

"I think the people in Kentucky are getting a great coach, a great person, a tireless worker and they will enjoy watching his style of play," Self said.



Former Texas A&M head coach Billy Gillispie speaks to fans after his Aggies' 94-78 victory over Missouri at Reed Arena in College Station, Texas, on March 3.

WADE BARKER
THE BATTALION

THE LAST

5

Billy Gillispie is the fifth head coach since Adolph Rupp. Gillispie's five predecessors made UK one of college basketball's most storied programs, combining for seven national championships and 13 Final Fours.



ADOLPH RUPP

Tenure: 1931-1972 (41 years)
Record at UK: 876-190 (82.2 percent)

Major Accomplishments:
Four NCAA National Championships (1948, '49, '51, '58), 1946 NIT Championship, 27 Southeastern Conference Championships, 1948 Olympic Gold Medal



JOE B. HALL

Tenure: 1972-1985 (13 years)
Record at UK: 297-100 (74.8 percent)

Major Accomplishments:
1976 NCAA National Championship, 1976 NIT Championship, three Final Fours (1975, '78, '84), 1978 National Coach of the Year, four SEC Coach of the Year awards



EDDIE SUTTON

Tenure: 1985-1989 (four years)
Record at UK: 88-39 (69.3 percent)

Major Accomplishments:
1986 SEC Championship (the school's 38th), 1986 National Coach of the Year, 1986 SEC Coach of the Year



RICK PITINO

Tenure: 1989-1997 (eight years)
Record at UK: 219-50 (81.4 percent)

Major Accomplishments:
1995 National Championship, three Final Fours (1993, '96, '97), five SEC Tournament Championships

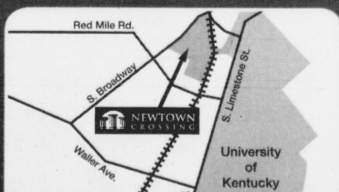


TUBBY SMITH

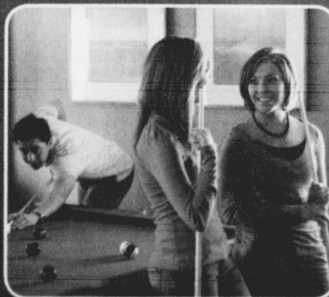
Tenure: 1997-2007 (10 years)
Record at UK: 263-83 (76 percent)

Major Accomplishments:
1999 National Championship, five SEC Tournament Championships, three National Coach of the Year Awards

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KEITH SMILEY | STAFF

Long-time equipment manager Bill Keightley chats with new head coach Billy Gillispie after yesterday's news conference in the Joe Craft Center. Keightley — also known as "Mr. Wildcat" — started working with the Cats under legendary coach Adolph Rupp in 1962.

COACH

Continued from page 1

tucky fans have." UK Athletic Director Mitch Barnhart said. "And we got one. We got one."

That passion from fans will be new to Gillispie.

Foothall is the major sport at Texas A&M. Before this season, the basketball team hadn't reached the Sweet Sixteen since 1980.

At UK, the team is expected to be in the Final Four every season. But Gillispie doesn't see that as pressure. He sees that as an advantage.

"When you talk about tough, I don't see 24,000 fans every single game being tough," Gillispie said. "I see the opponent (who is) having to play in front of them having a tough assignment."

Florida coach Billy Donovan — widely considered UK's top choice — and Texas coach Rick Barnes both said yesterday they weren't interested in taking the job that opened 16 days ago. But — in a sign of how excited Gillispie was — he wasn't bothered by not being the top choice.

"Was I the second choice?" Gillispie said. "If I was anywhere before seven and eight, then I'd be happy."

Gillispie left a Texas A&M program that he had completely rebuilt in three seasons. A&M finished 0-16 in the Big 12 the season before he arrived. Gillispie led the Aggies to a 27-7 record this season, which ended with a one-point loss to Memphis in the Sweet Sixteen.

His three-year turnaround was enough to convince Barnhart. The two met Thursday night and talked to into the early morning hours.

"We're thrilled to have him as our basketball coach," Barnhart said.

Gillispie's last win as A&M's coach was against Louisville in the NCAA Tournament at Rupp Arena.

"We started the process with the premier coaches in the country on our list," UK President Lee Todd said. "And we think we found the very best one to match what we need at this institution at this time."

"We started the process with the premier coaches in the country on our list. And we think we found the very best one to match what we need at this institution at this time."

One thing Gillispie said he will consider is the team's style of play. Although Gillispie said his "perfect style would be to play pressure, full-court man-to-man defense," the team will play a style that best suits its talent.

"We are going to play the style that gives us the best chance to win," he said. "Players like to play fast, players like to play aggressively, and it has always been our style to play as aggressively as possible."

At the end of his speech at Memorial Coliseum, Gillispie had one last message for the fans.

"I can't wait until seven months and three days when we play our first game at Rupp Arena," he said.

On that day he will be standing in front of 24,000 fans and far from the Texas towns where he got his start.

"I never thought I would be anything more than a high school coach," he said. "To be able to be sitting here today is just a great honor."

DELOTELL

Continued from page 1

best way to do it," he said.

In the end, it clearly was. While Barnhart patiently waited for Billy D, he kept finding out more things to like about Billy G. Those things were evident on Friday, as Gillispie first spoke to a rabid crowd of fans in Memorial Coliseum before entertaining the media in the Joe Craft Center.

"Was I the second choice?" Gillispie coyly asked a reporter who questioned how it felt to be selected after Donovan turned down an interview for the job. "If I was anywhere before seven or eight, I'd be happy."

While we don't know much about Gillispie, we do know this: he won't be outworked, and he'll be married to the job. The divorced 47-year-old has earned a reputation as a relentless recruiter, and that was a major part of what attracted Barnhart to him.

Barnhart said: "If you look at the hires we've made, they're people who are tireless workers, they're great recruiters, they're well-organized, they're passionate about their craft, they're dedicated to making Kentucky better and they're concerned about their student-athletes. Those were the core elements we looked for, sought and went after. We found the guy that connects with all things I mentioned in Billy Gillispie."

It's anybody's guess if Billy Gillispie will be successful on the court at Rupp Arena. His history and his credentials suggest that he will, but the same could have been said for just about any coach UK hired.

Barnhart was asked if he felt better about hiring Gillispie after watching his coach win the news conference yesterday.

"That's for you guys to decide," Barnhart said. "What you see is what you get with Billy."

If what we get from Billy is as good as what we saw from him yesterday, it won't be long until everyone knows what Mitch Barnhart already does.

That he got the right guy.

UK President Lee Todd, Athletic Director Mitch Barnhart and new men's basketball coach Billy Gillispie address the media at a news conference yesterday afternoon.

KEITH SMILEY | STAFF



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THE SEARCH PROCESS



New head basketball coach Billy Gillispie, left, follows UK Athletic Director Mitch Barnhart into the Joe Craft Center to start yesterday's news conference. KEITH SMILEY / STAFF

Barnhart opens his home to close the deal with Gillispie

New coach flew to Lexington Thursday night

Chris Miles
cmiles@kykernel.com

At 4 p.m. on Thursday, Billy Donovan — the popular first choice to be the next head coach of UK — said he would stay at Florida.

Two hours later, Texas A&M's Billy Gillispie was hired.

After hammering out a late night contract in UK Athletic Director Mitch Barnhart's house yesterday, Gillispie filled the 15-day vacancy left by former head coach Tubby Smith.

"The way these things happen, it usually happens within a 24-hour period or so," Gillispie said.

Thursday evening, A&M Athletic Director Bill Byrne gave Barnhart permission to talk to Gillispie. From there the process became "fast and furious," Gillispie said.

He was introduced as Smith's successor hours later. "Was I waiting?" Gillispie said. "I was trying to get my (A&M) team ready to play. You can't worry about those things."

After Byrne granted UK permission to speak to Gillispie, Barnhart called and asked if the coach could meet with him in Lexington.

"Absolutely," Gillispie told Barnhart. The two stayed up late Thursday night and well into Friday morning working "some things" out, Gillispie said.

Barnhart himself said he only got about half an hour of sleep because he could hear Gillispie shuffling around his basement, where he was spending the night.

"And here we are today," Gillispie said. Gillispie's contract with UK is worth \$2.3 million per year for seven years. Gillispie had agreed in principle to a \$1.75 million contract extension with A&M two weeks ago, which was a \$500,000 raise from his old contract. Smith

made over \$2 million before he left UK. Gillispie, who took over at A&M a year after the team had gone 0-16 in Big 12 Conference play, led the Aggies to three consecutive 20-win seasons and a postseason tournament bid in each of those. Gillispie's first head coaching position was at the University of Texas-El Paso, where he went 24-8 in his second season after going 6-24 in his first.

Barnhart said all of the head coaching hires he has made for UK since 2002 have had tireless work ethic, passion and dedication.

"These were the qualities we sought," Barnhart said. "These were the things that were important to us. Having said that, we've found those things in (Gillispie)."

Barnhart used Parker Executive Search, a search firm based in Atlanta that specializes in helping college athletic departments fill vacant coaching positions. The company handled the logistics of the search and provided complete profiles on all prospects, Barnhart said.

"With them, the list gets a little shorter," Barnhart said.

Representatives from Parker Executive Search could not be reached for comment.

Gillispie said at no point did he have representatives speaking with

UK. "I don't have representatives," he said. "I'm an old country boy, handshake man. I like to speak for myself."

Gillispie categorized the dialogue between him and UK during the search process as "very, very limited," adding that he was recruiting high school sophomores and juniors and preparing for the next season at A&M when Barnhart contacted him on Thursday.

"I will say I am very impressed with him and as I look at his record more and more, I'm more impressed," said former UK head coach Joe B. Hall. "The coaches that have been successful have been (like him)."

Gillispie said he wants to follow coaches like Hall and "cut down some nets and hang more banners."

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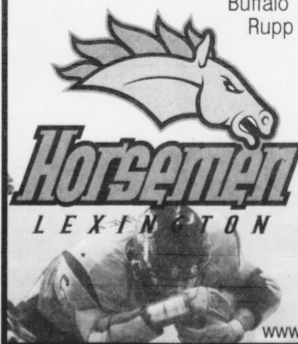
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RECRUITING

Gillispie looking to attract more in-state talent

New UK coach promises to spend time with all state high school coaches

By J.D. Williams
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Billy Gillispie spent the first nine years of his coaching career at four high schools in Texas.

Now, as the leader of the winningest college program in NCAA history, he's promised coaches at high schools across the Bluegrass that he's ready to start recruiting their players.

"I can't wait to meet every single one of the high school coaches in Kentucky," Gillispie said. "That's been very important to us everywhere we've been."

He will have his chance over the next few weeks with the start of the off-season and the fall 2007 signing period.

Three of the top 50 recruits in the 2008 class as ranked by Rivals.com are from Kentucky: No. 10 Scotty Hopson of University Heights in Hopkinsville, No. 38 Darius Miller of Mason County and No. 48 Bud Mackey of Scott County.

Although Hopson and Mackey have already verbally committed to schools — Hopson to Mississippi State and Mackey to Indiana — they may still be swayed to join UK's 2008 recruiting class because neither has signed a letter of intent.

"I don't think anyone would be shocked to see new interest (in Mackey)," said Billy Hicks, Mackey's high school coach.

Kentucky's high school coaches would welcome the in-state interest from Gillispie.

"Kentucky's people want to see Kentucky players at UK," said James Haire, the coach at Elizabethtown High School.

High school senior Steffphon Pettigrew, one of Haire's players and a frontrunner for Mr. Basketball, has said he is still interested in UK, though he wasn't heavily recruited by former head coach Tubby Smith.

In Smith's 10 seasons, he was



KEITH SMILEY | STAFF

Hundreds of fans cheer for new UK head coach Billy Gillispie after he was introduced at a pep rally in Memorial Coliseum yesterday afternoon. Gillispie started his career as a high school coach and has promised more recruitment from Kentucky high schools.



KEITH SMILEY | STAFF

Billy Gillispie answers questions from the media yesterday along with UK President Lee Todd, left, Athletic Director Mitch Barnhart and spokesman Scott Stricklin, right, during a news conference at the Joe Craft Center.

criticized for his inability to acquire highly regarded recruits, especially those from within the state.

Xs and Os, but if you don't recruit good players, you're not going to be successful," said Allen Cannon, the associate athletic director at Texas



WADE BARKER | THE BATTALION

Gillispie disputes a call in the second half of Texas A&M's 73-49 win over Iowa State on Jan. 31 at Reed Arena in College Station, Texas. All but two players on this year's A&M team hailed from Texas. Gillispie wants to see similar hometown talent at UK.

A&M.

"To be a good coach, you have to have the full package of being able to coach and being a good recruiter,"

Cannon said. "Gillispie is a good coach."

Gillispie's first head coaching job came in 1987 at Copperas Cove High School in Copperas Cove, Texas. Over the next six years, he held three different head coaching positions at the high school level before moving into the junior college ranks and then on to Baylor University.

In 1997, Gillispie became an assistant coach at the University of Tulsa under Bill Self, and when Self left for the University of Illinois, he took Gillispie with him.

At Illinois he was responsible for snatching Dee Brown from Michigan State University, along with bringing in James Augustine and Texas native Deron Williams in 2002 before leaving to coach at the University of Texas-El Paso. All three were drafted into the NBA, with Williams going third overall in 2005.

On his last team at Texas A&M, all but two players were from Texas. Establishing the same types of relationships in Kentucky could be a key to his recruiting success at UK.

"They produce great players here," Gillispie said. "I want to get as many homegrown players that we can that can compete for a national championship and cut down some nets, and you can only do that through establishing those relationships with the high school coaches."

Still, Gillispie's Texas ties may help UK land big recruits from the state. While still at A&M, Gillispie signed DeAndre Jordan, a 6-foot-10 center from Christian Life Center in Humble, Texas, who is ranked No. 8 nationally by Rivals.com. There has been some speculation that Jordan will follow Gillispie to UK.

Undecided seniors Patrick Patterson, of Huntington, W.Va., and Jai Lucas, from Houston, have said they are still considering UK. Neither could be reached for comment yesterday.

UK commit A.J. Stewart of Jacksonville, Fla., has said he is still planning to come to Lexington.

"I was sure whoever they hired would be a good coach," said Stewart, who is ranked as a top-150 recruit by Rivals.com. "I don't know too much about his style. I know Texas A&M did really good last year."

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