Introduction

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Darrell Royal brought class and pride to the University of Texas football program and, because he was so successful, changed the perception that people had of the university itself.

Coach Royal was an energetic leader. During the 1960s he coached the Texas quarterbacks and was the driving force behind the Longhorn special-teams play. While I was at the university as a freshman in 1959, as a varsity player in 1960–1962, and as an assistant coach in 1963–1964, practices started during the season with Head Coach Royal tutoring the quarterbacks, backs, and receivers against the linebackers and secondary. He rehearsed the key plays he thought would make a difference in the upcoming game.

Coach Royal was a hands-on coach during those practices, but he did not baby his players. He came from a background where you pulled your own load. His desire to play football drove him to hitchhike back from California to his home in Hollis, Oklahoma, where he knew he would get his chance on the field. His inability to speak before large groups held him back as an assistant coach, so he memorized poems and turned his natural gift for observing human nature into a knack for saying the right thing at the right time, usually in a short and witty sentence.

Coach Royal cultivated a close friendship with the media and instituted informal post-game sessions at the Villa Capri Motel next to 1-35, where food, drink, and conversation forged a strong bond between the coach and the writers from far and wide who had come to report on the games. Royal didn't make excuses when the Longhorns lost, and he was gracious in victory. He could have named the scores of countless games over his twenty-year stay at Texas, but that wasn't his style.

After cracking the strong hold his alma mater, Oklahoma, had over the Longhorns, Coach Royal not only brought the university three national championships, he also developed a football program at Texas without a hint of recruit-

ing violations. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Texas footballers, unlike those at other Southwest Conference schools, were required to take the SAT during their recruiting visits. In addition, professors from the Ivy League were being hired to change the academic environment on campus. Coach Royal met these challenges by hiring a “brain coach,” requiring his athletes to attend every class, and inviting professors to pre-game preparations so that they could appreciate the efforts made by the Longhorn football program. Many of them became admirers of Royal’s organization and his ability to communicate.

If you played football for Darrell Royal, you knew the kicking rules, you knew better than to draw stupid penalties, you understood the concept of playing as a team, and you were treated with respect by the coaching staff. When I became an assistant coach myself, I watched Royal go against Alabama's great Bear Bryant and pull off a 21-17 Orange Bowl victory in 1964. (Coach Royal continued to help me advance my career by calling administrators, time and time again, to help me get coaching jobs; through his influence, I secured my first head coaching job in a high school in Midland, Texas.)

I saw Coach Royal take time to give his pocket change to shoeshine boys in Dallas because he had worked at the same job as a youngster in Oklahoma City. And on a cold day in Amarillo, Texas, while I was with him on a recruiting trip, he told me, "It's how you treat the people who can't help you that counts." But in his years at Texas there would be friendships with the rich and famous as well, from President Lyndon Johnson to country singer Willie Nelson. Royal got a privileged view of the workings of America's highest office, and he also got to play chess with an outlaw singer.

Whatever the University of Texas football program is today is a direct result of Darrell Royal's insistence on doing things the right way. His story is important to understand because it is the very foundation for change at the University of Texas. His legacy became the standard to match for every football coach who followed his twenty-year tenure.

Nowadays Coach Royal is available to his ex-players and never forgets their contributions, and they, in turn, never forget the pride he took in them and showed them on a daily basis. His friends are better for their association with him. Coach Royal is a Texas treasure. He taught us how to win with class and how to get back to work when we lost. His generation experienced despair and hardship, saw the times change with desegregation, and witnessed the advent of illegal recruiting on a large scale in the 1970s. But Coach Royal never wavered in his principles. He was first my coach, then my friend, and I love him for who he is.