



UNT out to zap gremlins in new offense

By Brett Vito
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Seth Littrell knew North Texas would experience growing pains in his first season as head coach after he installed a spread offense.

Those issues have cropped up more in the last two weeks than they have at any other point in what has been a successful transition from a run-first system.

UNT managed just 289 yards in a 45-24 loss to Louisiana Tech on Saturday.

North Texas football
Notebook

That outing came a week after the Mean Green turned the ball over four times in a 31-17 loss to Texas-San Antonio.

That slide has dropped UNT into last place among Conference USA schools in total offense with an average of 346.7 yards per game heading into a game at Western Kentucky on Saturday.

"I anticipated being better offensively," Littrell said. "This isn't the standard

any of us have on offense, including the players.

"You have to continue to grow and develop the men you have. They have worked hard."

Littrell has lamented UNT's inconsistency on offense all season and pointed to that as the main issue in the Mean Green's recent slump. UNT put together two of its better outings of the season offensively before its two-week slide.

UNT beat Marshall 38-21 and Army 35-18 before running into two of C-USA's better defenses. UTSA ranks

third in the league with an average of 28.3 points allowed per game, while Louisiana Tech ranks fourth in total defense at 404.2 yards allowed per game.

The Mean Green's path to a turnaround doesn't appear like it will be an easy one, at least not this week. Western Kentucky has won four straight and hasn't given up more than 24 points in its last three games.

The Hilltoppers blasted Florida Atlantic 52-3 on Oct. 29 and lead C-USA in scoring defense with 25.6 points allowed per game.

Littrell said the Hilltoppers' biggest strengths are their overall size and physical approach.

UNT knows it is in for a challenge against the Hilltoppers. The Mean Green says the key to pulling off an upset will be avoiding mistakes.

"We have points in the game where we don't perform to our level," UNT running back Jeffery Wilson said. "In games late in the season, those are the kinds of mistakes you can't have."

See UNT on 4B

Regional return

Argyle punches ticket to tourney semifinals with sweep of Melissa

By Steve Gamel
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AUBREY — Same story, different verse.

Argyle is the defending Class 4A state champion and has not dropped a postseason set in its seemingly all-but-inevitable march back to the state tournament. Although Tuesday's Region II quarterfinal against Melissa was competitive, the Lady Eagles' firepower was on point when it mattered in a 25-17, 25-20, 25-16 sweep.

High school volleyball
Class 4A playoffs: Argyle d. Melissa

Belmont commit Halee Van Poppel finished with 14 kills and eight digs while Allison White, a Texas Tech pledge, poured in eight kills and five blocks to propel Argyle (37-10) to its fourth regional tournament in five seasons.

Argyle will face Paris North Lamar at 8 p.m. Friday in the semifinals at Mesquite Poteet.

"I knew this year might be a different story after we graduated a tremendous class of seniors last year, but I also knew the girls we had back would still be extremely competitive," Argyle coach Clark Oberle said. "It feels really good to be back in this spot."

Argyle has lost only 17 matches dating to the start of last season, and all were to opponents in higher classifications.

Melissa (28-13) lost to Argyle earlier this season with an injury-riddled roster. In Tuesday's rematch, the Lady Cardinals again came up empty despite building slim leads in the first two sets and only trailing by five late in the third. Argyle used runs of 11-2 in the first set and 9-4 in the second to take a 2-0 match lead.

Leading 18-13 in the third, Argyle scored seven of the final 10 points.

"We knew when [Melissa's Susan Blake] was on the back row, we needed to score as much as we could in that



Jeff Woo/DRC

Argyle senior Halee Van Poppel, left, spikes the ball against Melissa on Tuesday in Aubrey. Argyle won the Class 4A Region II quarterfinal 25-17, 25-20, 25-16.

See ARGYLE on 3B

By Jimmy Isbell
Contributing Writer

JUSTIN — Krum coach Lynn Larson called senior Courtnie Roberts out of a class Monday to discuss a slight change to her offensive rotation to prepare for a third meeting with fellow District 9-4A member Decatur.

High school volleyball
Class 4A playoffs: Krum d. Decatur

"[Larson] showed me her ideas and asked what I thought about [the change]," Roberts said. "She came up with a great game plan, and when we tried it out at practice, it was some of the best volleyball we've played all year."

The simple move was to move Roberts — who usually plays on the front row — to the back row. It made a world of difference for the Lady Cats, who defeated the Lady Eagles 25-17, 25-16, 22-25, 25-22 at Justin Northwest on Tuesday.

In the regular-season meetings, the teams split the series with both matches ending in four sets. Larson said Decatur's serves put the Lady Cats in a bind in their loss, so she decided to place Roberts on the back row to receive those difficult serves.

"[Courtne] did a really good job receiving the serve," Larson said. "She's smart and it worked to our advantage."

Krum's offense couldn't be stopped in the first two sets. A trio of Lady Cats led the way, with Rhett Robinson posting eight kills. Roberts added six kills, a block and an ace, and Autumn Finney played stellar defense while adding seven kills.

In the third set, the Lady Cats trailed

See KRUM on 3B

Lady Lions keep rolling in playoffs

By Adam Boedeker
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McKINNEY — After senior Kaylee Buell fired away at Sunnyvale one final time Tuesday night, the four-year starter had some inspirational words for herself as she walked back to the service line.

High school volleyball
Class 3A playoffs: Ponder d. Sunnyvale

For Buell, what Ponder accomplished Tuesday might've seemed like a dream not too long ago, but with the Lady Lions' four-set victory over Sunnyvale at McKinney, Ponder is going to the Class 3A Region II tournament in the program's first playoff appearance.

"I think we were all nervous," Buell said. "This was the furthest we've been. We didn't want to lose."

"It's been unbelievable. It's the best feeling ever."

Ponder (28-13) wrapped up the 18-25, 25-23, 26-24, 25-20 win over Sunnyvale (38-6) and will now face Beckville, the District 16-3A champion, on Friday evening at Midlothian in a 3A Region II semifinal.

"It's amazing," said first-year Ponder coach Stormi Lancaster. "The only word I can think of is amazing. I told them after, their hunger and their fight is beyond anything I've ever seen."

See PONDER on 3B

Argyle star Gray to sign with Fort Lewis

By Steve Gamel
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Argyle's Vivian Gray could have gone anywhere to play college basketball. She just redefined anywhere.

Gray, one of the nation's most coveted high school basketball recruits, whose suitors include Texas, Baylor, Rice, Oklahoma State and others, confirmed Tuesday she will sign this afternoon with Fort Lewis College — a Division II program in Durango, Colorado — on the first day of the early signing period.

Gray said she had narrowed her decision to Fort Lewis and OSU.

"I excel in basketball when I am in my comfort zone," Gray said. "[The Division I offers] are flattering, and I worked hard for them. But it's not my personality to be at a big school. This is the best choice."

Gray said her decision also was family-based. She plans on running track

Women's college basketball
Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference

and will instantly be a marquee player for the same basketball program as former teammates Delaney Sain and big sister Olivia Gray.

The Grays spend considerable time vacationing in that area, and Vivian's mother, Lisa, also went to school at Fort Lewis. Vivian is a small-town girl who wants to play basketball and be with her family.

But it's still a surprise move for an athlete many say could be a game changer at the Division I level. With her senior season still in front of her, the 6-1 forward already has led the Lady Eagles to two Class 4A titles and three state tournament appearances.

Gray is ranked as the No. 7 forward in the nation in her class by ESPN's HoopGurlz.

See GRAY on 4B



Ashley Landis/DMN file photo

UIL executive director Charles Brethaupt presents Argyle forward Vivian Gray with her MVP award after a 46-25 win over Abilene Wylie in the Class 4A state championship game March 7, 2015, in San Antonio. Gray confirmed Tuesday she will sign with Fort Lewis College.

Pioneers control postseason destiny

By Brady Keane

For the Denton Record-Chronicle

The TWU volleyball team knew it needed two wins in three matches last week to have a shot at qualifying for the Lone Star Conference tournament, and the Pioneers posted a sweep over Midwestern State and a four-set win over Western New Mexico.

With two matches left in the regular season, the Pioneers (9-18, 5-13 LSC) are tied with Midwestern (11-19, 5-13) for the eighth and final seed in the tournament. TWU controls its own destiny and can clinch a spot in the postseason with wins over West Texas A&M and Texas-Permian Basin this weekend.

TWU holds a tiebreaker over MSU.

"If we come out with two wins this week, we're in — no

TWU

Notebook

questions asked," UNT interim coach Jessica Beener said. "We just have to go in this week and really focus on each game."

In a do-or-die situation at the end of the season, the Pioneers have started to find a groove and are playing more consistently. TWU benefited tremendously from the return of senior Anna McGee, who missed a month with an injury. McGee was able to take some of the offensive pressure off of senior Sara Oxford, and the two combined for 32 kills in the key win over Western on senior day.

With just two guaranteed matches remaining in their careers, Beener is confident the team's seniors will carry the Pioneers to a postseason berth.

"They are definitely the driving force behind our team right now," Beener said. "The success that we're having is definitely because of them, and they are being really strong leaders now and motivating our team to finish strong."

In order to get to the tournament, the Pioneers likely will have to win at least one of their final two matchups. The team travels to Canyon on Friday to take on West Texas, and hopes to avenge a five-set Oct. 15 home loss to the Lady Buffs. TWU also lost in five sets at home Oct. 14 to UTPB.

The Pioneers feel more confident this time around with McGee back in the lineup. TWU is just 2-7 on the road, but Beener said the structure of this trip shouldn't affect the team.

"We're going to look a little different against them this time," Beener said. "We'd love to be at

home this last week, but luckily this travel won't be too hard on us because we'll be flying."

TWU will get underway at 7:30 p.m. Friday and 2 p.m. Saturday, and the LSC tournament begins Nov. 17 at the first-place school. Angelo State (27-2, 17-1) holds a three-game lead atop the standings.

Soccer Disappointing end

After opening the season with four straight wins and climbing to No. 15 in the country, TWU struggled with consistency before ending its season with a heartbreaking loss on penalty kicks to Angelo State in the LSC tournament quarterfinals.

Despite the disappointing end, coach Babak Abouzar said TWU overcame the adversity of several injuries on a young roster.

"I was pleased, especially with all things considered," Abouzar said. "We beat some top teams, so we know that we can compete with anybody in our region. It's just us being able to get up and play against opponents we should be able to beat. That's what hurt us this year."

The Pioneers will return a lot of young talent, with two first-team all-conference players in sophomore goalkeeper Samantha Jimenez and junior midfielder Chelsea Martin, and an honorable mention recipient in freshman Tivona Tinsley.

Jimenez was named LSC goalkeeper of the year after setting school records with eight shutouts and a save percentage of .857. Martin ranked third in the conference in total goals (seven) and fourth in goals per game (0.41).

"We're in a great place," Abouzar said. "It hurts losing some seniors, but I feel that we're in a great place in addition to some new players we will have coming in. I'm real excited about next season."

Basketball Impressive exhibition

TWU made the short trip to the Super Pit to take on North Texas in an exhibition matchup Sunday, and hung tight with the Division I program in a 59-47 loss. Senior Kenesha Saygo, a 2015 All-LSC first team selection, led all scorers with 15 points and looks primed for another big season.

TWU will kick off the season at Midwestern State's Ashbrook Classic on Friday against Texas A&M International and Saturday against Adams State.

For athletes, voting can take extra effort

By Jon Krawczynski

Associated Press

Toronto Raptors coach Dwane Casey grew up in Kentucky in the 1960s, a child during the civil rights movement who witnessed the efforts of those in power to disenfranchise people of color and slow their push for equality.

So every two years, when election time arrives in the United States, Casey drives home to his players the importance of participating in the voting process.

"I tell my players, 'Get your absentee ballots and vote,'" Casey said. "I remember my grandparents talking about when African-Americans couldn't vote. Or they tried to make it hard for them to vote."

"So that is a privilege a lot of people fought for, you went to jail for. Everyone should vote."

Casey has been particularly insistent since he started coaching the NBA's only Canadian team. The Raptors employ a bunch of American players far removed from their local polling place, and Casey encourages them to think ahead so the grind of the NBA season doesn't cost them their say in the election.

"That's your way of showing power as an individual," Casey said. "We can protest, but the only way you fight stuff like that is through voting. Using your right to vote."

Many athletes have to rely on absentee ballots, either because they reside permanently in a different state from their team or

because they are on the road on Election Day.

Several teams have taken steps to help. The NFL's Minnesota Vikings roll out a voter education program every two years to ensure players, coaches and staff members understand voting practices in Minnesota.

"It's a right, and everybody needs to exercise their rights," said Lester Bagley, Vikings executive vice president of legal affairs and stadium development. "Make it as easy as possible, answer the questions, get them the resources, connect them. It's every two years and it's a direct message to all staff, all players to participate and here's how to do it."

The Vikings also joined with the Minnesota secretary of state's office in a public service announcement to encourage fans to vote, a local campaign similar to the national two put out by the NBA Players' Association.

A PSA featuring LeBron James only encouraged people to exercise their right to vote and didn't advocate for a candidate.

That's the approach the Vikings take. Les Pico, executive director of player development, began the voter education program when he arrived in 2005. This year, the team emailed players three times to encourage them to register, placed forms in their lockers reminding them to get an absentee ballot and offered help in assisting them to register in their home states.

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UNT

Jenkins' status in doubt

UNT could be without one of its top defensive players against WKU.

Cornerback Eric Jenkins went down with an undisclosed injury in the Mean Green's loss to Louisiana Tech and did not return.

Littrell said Tuesday that the junior's status for the Mean Green's game against WKU was in question heading into practice.

"I wish I could give an answer on Jenkins," Littrell said. "As of now, I would say he's doubtful. I will have to see how he moves around today. Until you can get out, practice, move and go full speed, you never truly know how people recover."

Jenkins leads UNT with nine pass breakups and has three interceptions, a total that puts him in a tie with safety Kishawn McClain for the team lead.

Having Jenkins available would give UNT a lift on a day when it will face one of C-USA's elite wide receivers in Taywan Taylor. The senior has 71 catches for 1,174 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Taylor ranks 39th in Football Bowl Subdivision history with 3,678 receiving yards and 33rd in receiving touchdowns with 34.

"Our guys are going to attack the ball in the back end, and we are going to get after the quarterback up front," UNT defensive end Jarrian Roberts said. "We are going to try to make enough plays to come out with a win."

Littrell on McClain ejection: 'It is what it is'

Littrell and his assistant coaches had a chance to take a look at the hit safety Kishawn McClain laid on Louisiana Tech quarterback Ryan Higgins that resulted in the ejection of one of UNT's top players.

Littrell wasn't about to second-guess that call Tuesday.

"Agree or disagree, it doesn't matter," Littrell said. "It is what it is."



Jeff Woo/DRC

North Texas junior running back Willy Ivery (29) scores a touchdown against Louisiana Tech Saturday at Apogee Stadium.

UNT does not have many options on offensive line

UNT gave up five sacks in its loss to Tech and enters the week ranked 127th out of 128 FBS teams with an average of 4.22 sacks allowed per game.

Only San Jose State has given up more with an average of 4.30.

Littrell has said throughout the season that not all of the sacks UNT has allowed have been the fault of its offensive line. There have been times when freshman quarterback Mason Fine has taken sacks when he had the opportunity to get rid of the ball.

Fine has said he can do a better job of avoiding negative plays. UNT will focus on improving

its offensive line with the lineup it has in the hope of reducing the number of sacks it allows.

"The offensive line combination is what we have — right, wrong or indifferent," Littrell said. "They have been getting better every week. [Offensive line coach Brad] Davis does a great job with those guys. They are building chemistry and are a tight group. When you are working as hard as they had to all season and being constantly challenged, you are going to come together."

"I am proud of the way they have worked and am proud of coach Davis and the way he has continued to coach those guys. We will continue to get better."



Stephen Spillman/For the DRC

Argyle's Vivian Gray, left, drives around Liberty Hill's Autumn Lange during a Class 4A semifinal March 4 in San Antonio.

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Gray

As a junior, she averaged 22.1 points, 7.6 rebounds, 3.2 assists and 1.6 steals per game. A year earlier, she scored 36 points and pulled down 13 rebounds in the state semifinals.

In six state tournament games, Gray has averaged 20.3 points and 8.3 rebounds.

"She's had a lot of Division I offers and she could play at that level. But Vivian is a family person," Argyle coach Skip Townsend said. "[Fort Lewis] is where family is at, and that's where she's going to feel most comfortable. That school is very

fortunate to get a player of her caliber."

Gray is one of three Argyle basketball players signing today. Madison Ralston is expected to sign with Emporia State, and Jocelyn Pierce is signing with Texas A&M-Commerce.

"I'm very excited to have this all over with," Gray said. "The recruiting process was very stressful for me. Fort Lewis is like my second home, and there's a comfort level there."

Staff writer Adam Boedeker contributed to this report.

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HEAD COACH SETH LITTRELL

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