

# UW football coach

Not since Ishtar has there been more hype about what is likely to be little box office success.

You'd think UW copped a real head coach, not a career assistant from what has been a second-rate program at Missouri. Tom Burman rushed out right after he fired the star that he'll never be and hired the first assistant coach who would take a cut in pay to come to Laramie.

Dave Christensen has played second fiddle to Gary Pinkel longer than Vicki Lawrence did for Carol Burnett. Actually, for many of those years at Toledo and Missouri with Pinkel, Christensen was more like Floyd the Barber to Andy Griffith than Lawrence to Burnett.

Christensen worked his way up, during the 17 years of tagging along with Pinkel, to being offensive coordinator and had the great good fortune of having a couple quarterbacks named Brad Smith and Chase Daniel.

Until the ascendancy of Smith, the coveted career assistant coach (to UW) was about to lose his job. Mizzou fans were not happy with three losing seasons in a row that greeted Pinkel and Christensen. In contradiction to what he's promised UW fans, and the unproven AD Burman, Christensen said, "We didn't come in with the idea this was going to be a quick fix," after Missouri's program became somewhat successful in 2006. After success.

It will take a win at the Alamo Bowl against the woeful Northwestern team for the Missouri Tigers to notch ten wins in a season two years in a row. Not much of a football tradition there either.

When Tom Burman was talking about being able to sign a new head coach, he referred to UW having a great football "tradition," while San Diego State did not. That's just not so. Even Channel 5 ran a story wherein they provided comparisons in winning seasons, etc., that made San Diego State, of all places, look like a better football program over time than UW.

Wyoming fans have to go back to the 1960's to claim a football "tradition." Since, only during the Paul Roach years did UW win many more games than they lost. Football fans who idolize Joe Tiller because of his success at Purdue seem to forget that he had but one really good season in Laramie, the year before he left for West Lafayette and the Purdue job.

Missouri's record has looked better than it should because of down times at Nebraska, Kansas, Kansas State and Colorado. They played in the Big 12 championship game for the second year in a row on the strength of a 5-3 record. Missouri's 2007 season was one for the memories but 2008 was a great disappointment to diehard Mizzou fans. Losing to Oklahoma for the second year in the a row in the Big 12 championship game won't do much to ease their disappointment.

The recent UM offense of Christensen is nothing to brag about. Perhaps his interviewing for the UW job and accepting it while his employer was still playing crucial games created the problem.

Many years ago, Bill Frieder was coach of the Michigan basketball team and accepted the head coaching job at Arizona State before the NCAA tournament. He intended to complete the year with his team but Michigan AD Bo Schembechler sent him away immediately, saying, "a Michigan man will coach Michigan, not an Arizona State man." Steve Fisher coached Michigan through the NCAA tournament, winning all six games and the national championship.

Missouri probably should have sent Dave Christensen packing when he accepted the University of Wyoming head football coaching job. Mizzou lost the final two games of the season, games that could have taken them to a BCS Bowl game instead of a rinky-dink matchup with the thespians of Northwestern.

Christensen has been trying hard to land a head coaching position for the past several years. In spite of his short-term success at Missouri as offensive coordination and assistant head coach, no other football program hired him. Until Wyoming. Tom Burman must have liked something about the lifelong assistant that he didn't in the other coaches he supposedly considered.

In just the past couple years, Christensen interviewed for the head coaching position at Central Michigan, Akron and Washington State. None offered him the job. He was also "interested" in vacant head coaching jobs at Houston, Arkansas and New Mexico. He wasn't even offered an interview at any of those schools.

Then Wyoming came to his rescue.

For the past 17 years, Christensen has

been second fiddle or less to Gary Pinkel - first at Toledo, then at Missouri.

In keeping with what has been a Wyoming tradition, the current athletic director hired an inexperienced man to become head football coach. Only Joe Glenn had previous head coaching success (or even experience) when hired to lead the UW program. Sometimes, It has paid off to hire a novice - Dana Dimel and Joe Tiller. Paul Roach himself had never been a head coach before leading UW during a time of emergency. Vic Koenning had no head coaching experience except the three disastrous years at Wyoming.

Christensen's stock has dropped dramatically since being introduced as the next UW head coach. Missouri lost to Kansas and then to Oklahoma in their last two games of the season - by a combined score of 102-58. Missouri played Oklahoma for the Big 12 championship even though tying for the Big 12-North regular season championship with Nebraska at 5-3. The other four teams in the North had a regular season conference record of 8-24 and Mizzou's wins came against five teams with a combined 11-29 record. Had Missouri played in the South Division of the Big 12, they would have finished in a tie for 4th and 5th place. The top four teams in the South Division had a combined won-loss record of 26-6, with three of them in the top 7 of the BCS final rankings.

Before genuflecting at the altar of Dave Christensen, Cowboys football fans should be reminded that Missouri had two good seasons in a row, after several less than stellar seasons. But their 2008 season was built on beating the inferior teams of the Big 12.

Could Missouri lose to Northwestern? And what the hell is Northwestern doing playing in a major bowl game anyway? Granted, they went through the 2008 season with a 9-3 record (5-3 in the Big Ten). But, of the three Big Ten teams to finish above them this season, Northwestern lost to two of them and didn't play the third. They also did not play Wisconsin. Their other conference loss was to Indiana - the Hoosiers only Big Ten win during the '08 season. The only Big Ten team with a winning conference record that Northwestern defeated this season was Iowa. They had only one non-conference win over a team with a winning record.

Northwestern had a mediocre season.

Back to Dave Christensen.

Tom Burman chose to interview and offer the position to a career assistant coach. The other two names mentioned as possibilities were not serious candidates. Salary was the problem with one - the other had previous ties to UW and Burman was not about to risk that. He could have considered Randy Welniak had he wanted a UW man without head coaching experience. Remember, his first promise after dismissing Joe Glenn with time remaining on his contract was that

he was going to hire a coach with experience at the big time level. He didn't.

A name floated early on was Turner Gill. Ironic that he was not even interviewed, because on the last weekend of the football season, his University of Buffalo team knocked Ball State from the undefeated ranks with a decisive victory.

Burman chose to hire a man who would be little threat to his own standing, which is negligible. And Christensen, so desperate to become a head coach after having been rejected so often, chose to accept a position as a lower salary than he was receiving at Missouri and in a lesser conference. His head coach, the man he had been content to shadow for 17 years, just signed a new contract for \$2.5 million a year. Christensen, had he been as critical to the future of the Missouri program as Burman wants UW fans to believe he was, could have negotiated a much higher salary at Missouri.

UM's star quarterback is a senior and will not be back. Twenty-three players on the Missouri roster are seniors and the best receiver (a soph) will likely go to the NFL in the next draft. Christensen is leaving an empty cupboard. And he has tried so hard to land a head coaching job. Paul Roach was older than DC when he first became a head coach but Roach had accomplished much more in his coaching career than has Christensen.

Dave Christensen has said, "Oh, I definitely want to be a head coach and run my own program someday. But it's getting more and more difficult because the opportunities to do that are few and far between with the type of job that would get me to leave Missouri."

Will he bring any other Missouri assistant coaches to Wyoming? That is highly unlikely. The other top assistant is looking to become a head coach himself so he is unlikely to want to come to Laramie with one he has never served under.

Another interesting thing about this search for the next head football coach at the University of Wyoming is that there was no real consideration given to an African-American candidate. Turner Gill was probably the best choice and he was given no consideration. He was an assistant coach at Nebraska when they won three national championships. The Equality State? Wyoming? Not so.

There were six African-American head football coaches in the 119 NCAA Division 1 Football Bowl Division schools. Two were fired recently, at Washington State and Mississippi State, and now there are four. Turner Gill will move up from Buffalo. Perhaps he didn't consider Wyoming a step up. He may make too much money for Wyoming to be able to attract him. Instead, an unproven career assistant coach will take over the UW football program. He will be given a two year honeymoon while he dismantles the existing program and tries to reform it in the image of Gary Pinkel. Will he? Doubtful.

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