



The community has met the needs and desires of the athletes that have represented it. It's an attractive place to live and it's convenient. Temple has made for the success of the college athletics.

– Danny Scott

Chapter 13

Athletics: Location and Local Talent Lead to Successful Teams

From the start of its century-long existence, Temple College has always provided an opportunity for sports competition.

While some sports dipped on and off the school's radar, athletics have been a priority since the earliest manifestations of the institution.

It's little surprise that sports were a focal point from the outset. L.G. Procter, who became the school's second president, was a coach at Temple High School and knew that having forms of competitive recreation would be a draw to the fledgling junior college.

What has been a pleasant surprise is that despite working under the constraints of a tight athletic budget from its origin until now, Temple College has enjoyed consistent, competitive success throughout the decades. The Leopards have seldom been also-rans or doormats in their sporting endeavors.

It hasn't been about amassing national titles, though Temple College has seven to boast. Rather, it's more about bringing in the best

athletes possible while providing a stable atmosphere for them under leadership that has proven it will be there for the long haul.

The one offering that has survived continuously from the start – other than a two-year hiatus during World War II – is men's basketball. While other athletic teams have enjoyed success on a variety of scales, none has had the staying power quite like men's basketball.

While some sports dipped on and off the school's radar, athletics have been a priority since the earliest manifestations of the institution.

Although national titles and tournament appearances have occurred in other sports, men's basketball has been the sporting face of Leopards' athletics since the first game they played on January 15, 1927, against the Southwestern University freshmen at the Temple High School gym.

The softball team won the NJCAA national championship in 2018. (NJCAA photo)



Danny Scott was one of three long-term head coaches the men's basketball team had between 1959 and 2020. He also served as a track coach and athletic director. (Courtesy of Rose Anne Brasher Special Collections, Temple College Libraries)



The college fielded a football team from 1928-30. (Courtesy of Rose Anne Brasher Special Collections, Temple College Libraries)

That game, which the college lost 29-15, was a fundraiser for the team to buy new uniforms — gold jerseys with black trunks which still serves as the school's color combination to this day. In fact, the Leopard mascot was chosen the following year to best coincide with the color scheme. The college, initially coached by YMCA volunteers Marvin Fenn

and T.H. Browne, recorded its first win a week later by beating the Santa Fe Railroad shop team 21-18.

Men's basketball eventually served as the prototype for perhaps the best reason the Leopards have had a viable overall athletic program for so long – stability. Between 1959 and 2020, only three men served as the Leopards' head coach – Jim Brown, Danny Scott and Kirby Johnson.

Scott, who spent the last 48 years of his career at Temple College as a track and basketball coach and as its athletic director, was instrumental in providing a comfortable atmosphere for coaches to stay for unusually long periods of time as he did.

"We've had some amazing coaches," said Scott, who was bestowed the honor of having the baseball/softball complex named for him upon his retirement in 2013. "When I was hiring coaches as an athletic director, I would try to hire as locally as possible."

The names of the head coaches brought in on Scott's watch are a testament to that philosophy. Virtually all were natives of Temple or Bell County or had already settled locally. Johnson, baseball coach Craig McMurtry, women's basketball coach Kim Sebek, softball coaches Larry Hennig and Kristen Zaleski, volleyball coach Mary Reese, golf coach Bill Willis and tennis coach Dick King were all locals. While never having a full array of scholarships to hand

out, athletes and their parents could rest assured that it was unlikely their coach would cut and run before they moved onto campus.

The long tenures of the Leopards' head coaches flies against the conventional wisdom regarding the nomadic nature of the coaching profession. Indeed, Johnson, who succeeded Scott as basketball coach in 1987 after a stint as the varsity coach at his alma mater Temple High, would roam the Leopards' sidelines for the next 33 years before retiring after the 2019-20 season.

"For me it was an attitude that if you do your job, hopefully well, we won't bother you," Johnson said. "It was a comforting thing that you could do your job and that the administration didn't want to hinder you. The pressure you had was self-pressure."

Johnson responded by winning 713 games, routinely battled for conference supremacy and an annual trip to the regional tournament though never breaking through to the national tournament against teams with far deeper resources.

The fact that he never had more than six or eight full scholarships to hand out while most of his competitors had a full complement likely hampered the Leopards' attempts to make longer postseason runs. However, it was just viewed as the guidelines the Leopards played under rather than an all-encompassing burden.

For the vast majority of his long stint, Johnson didn't have an assistant and never personally recruited outside of Texas. Most of those years were before the current onset of online videos so Johnson primarily combed Interstate 35 between Dallas and San Antonio in search of players. The reason he concentrated on that corridor is simply because he could get to a high school game after his own team's practice to see a player. Summer traveling ball in Texas wasn't nearly as developed as it is now so there were logistical limitations to get from one place to another.

Nevertheless, the Leopards garnered the kind of talent to average more than 20 wins per season – his 2004-05 team went 30-0 in the regular season – and put together an impressive string of national scoring titles. The uptempo, high-scoring style was attractive to potential recruits, many of whom went on to play for four-year programs. The most notable of these was early 1990's star David Wesley who later played for Baylor and had a long and prominent NBA career.

Johnson considers his term with the Leopards as the "modern era" because he came in when the 3-point line was installed, and his teams utilized it from the beginning. Still, a precedent of good, entertaining Leopard basketball teams had been set before Johnson's arrival.



Kirby Johnson coached the men's basketball team to more than 700 wins during his 33 years with the team. (Steve Lemmons/Temple College)

Brown led the Leopards for most of the tumultuous 1960s, integrating the team despite much pushback. Temple native Charles Dudley became the college's first African American athlete in 1962, competing as a standout in basketball and track.

By the 1966-67 season, several African American players were on the Leopards' roster. It was also that season that the Leopards posted a national record unlikely to be broken. The Leopards scored 4,204 points in 39 games in an era without a 3-point line or a shot clock. There also weren't the scheduling limitations then and a 39-game season today would be about the maximum for a team that wins the national championship.

Scott followed Brown two years later and remained in that position for 20 years,



Charles Dudley (#42) became the college's first African American athlete in 1962. (1963 Templar)

fielding high-quality teams that did battle in a conference that included the perennial powerhouse, San Jacinto. Scott's teams took down those San Jacinto teams on occasion.

FRAN GARMON PUTS WOMEN'S BASKETBALL ON THE MAP

Even though men's basketball maintained its strong consistency, it was women's basketball that earned itself a significant place in the college's history.

In 1963, the ladies game still hadn't gained a great deal of traction as a sport on a statewide or national scale. The Wayland Baptist Flying Queens of Plainview, Texas, was perhaps the most famous team anywhere. But a determined and diminutive young lady from Moody set out to put Temple and women's basketball on the map.

Frances Garmon, fresh off a master's degree from Baylor following degrees from Temple Junior College and UMHB, pestered Brown, the then-athletic director and president Hubert Dawson, to let her start and coach a women's basketball team. She took the inch she was given and ultimately went around the world.

With few scheduling restrictions, Garmon's Leopardettes played as many games as they physically could. One year they competed in 11 tournaments. They took on anyone from high school teams to the likes of Texas and Baylor, both whom they often beat.



Fran Garmon (back row, at right) coached the 1975 women's basketball team to victory in the first NJCAA women's basketball national tournament. (Courtesy of Rose Anne Brasher Special Collections, Temple College Libraries)

In one national invitational tournament, the Leopardettes defeated UCLA which prompted a mandate disallowing junior colleges from playing against senior colleges.

The NJCAA instituted a national tournament for women's teams in 1975. The Leopardettes won that first title by edging Northern Iowa Community College 59-58.

"They were incredible," Garmon once said of that team. "We beat every AAU team. We beat every senior college team that was considered the best in the country. And they let me travel all over creation."

Garmon won 383 games for Temple Junior

College before moving on to Delta State in 1979 and later for a decade at TCU while in the meantime becoming a fixture on the international stage. She is now enshrined in the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame and the NJCAA Hall of Fame.

While the Leopardettes haven't seriously challenged for a national title since the Garmon era, women's basketball has been an integral part of the school's athletic program and another example of a long-term coaching presence. Until she stepped away after the 2020 season, Kim Sebek coached the team for 23 seasons.

CRAIG MCMURTRY RESURRECTS BASEBALL

Baseball, more than any other sport, has taken its second life and made the most of it. The first life wasn't bad, either.

The college essentially replaced track and field with baseball in the late 1960s and savored a short, but successful run. Charley Lodes, an Oklahoman, coached the Leopards for five years and routinely had them in the national rankings. His Leopard teams went 163-89. The sport was dropped in 1976 only to be resurrected 22 years later with Craig McMurtry, a Troy native and former Major League pitcher, taking over.

McMurtry has guided the Leopards to three NJCAA World Series appearances (2006, 2010 and 2018) with multiple top 10 national rankings. The Leopards have churned out dozens to the senior college level as well as numerous players who have gone on to play professionally. McMurtry, who also succeeded Scott as athletic director, crossed the 700-win barrier in 2021 and his teams are routinely playing for Northern Texas Junior College Athletic Conference supremacy.

"Like anything, it's a matter of having good athletes," McMurtry said. "That's the name of the game. You find a way to recruit kids and compete at a high level. We've been able to overcome any budget 'obstacles' going against teams with a maximum number of scholarships."

SOFTBALL TEAM WINS A NATIONAL TITLE

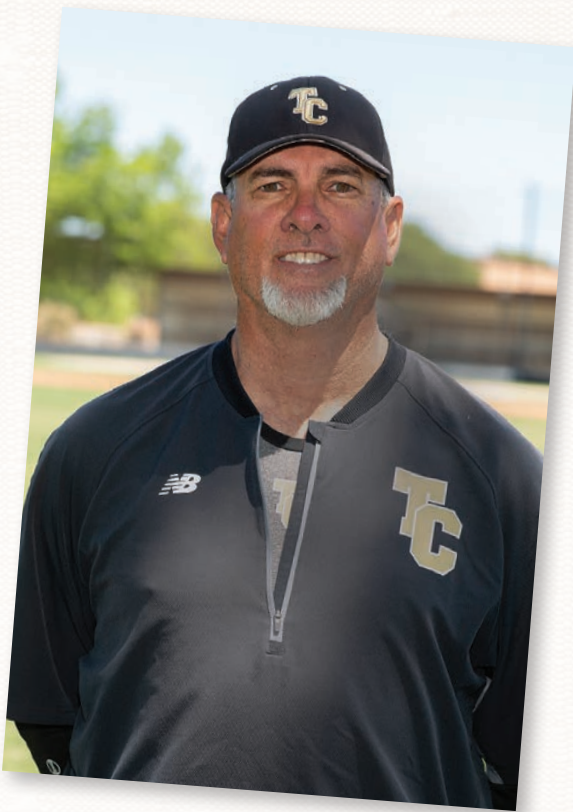
To comply with Title IX obligations, not to mention a means to tap into the burgeoning softball talent in the state, the college added softball the same year it resurrected baseball. Success quickly followed, just like it did with baseball.

Scott hired Larry Hennig, who had been a baseball coach at Temple High in the 1980s before moving into school administration in Troy. In 12 years, Hennig compiled a 519-203 record with eight conference titles and three NJCAA national tournament appearances.

Hennig left for UMHB, and Scott went to the local well again for his replacement. Kristen Zaleski, a multi-sport standout at Temple High before going on to an All-American softball career at Texas State as well as playing professionally, took over in 2010. The Lady Leopards' accomplishments only grew.

In nine years, Zaleski guided her teams to a 413-127 record with five conference titles, four national tournament appearances and a national title in 2018. It was the first national championship for the athletic program in 14 years and the first one in a sport the school still offered since the 1975 women's basketball crown.

Zaleski left Temple College after the 2019 season to become the head softball coach at an NCAA Division I school, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.



Troy native and former Major League pitcher Craig McMurtry resurrected the baseball program in 1998. He also took over as athletic director after Danny Scott retired. (Steve Lemmons/Temple College)



Temple native Kristen Zaleski guided the softball team to four national tournament appearances and a national title in 2018. (NJCAA photo)



The women's tennis team won three straight Division II titles from 2002-04. Shown here is the 2003 team.

Volleyball also began to find its footing during the same time frame and gave the school a sport offering during the fall season. When Temple native Mary Reese Malone came on the scene in 2005, she made sure Lady Leopards volleyball would be significant. In her eight seasons, Malone compiled a 175-141 record with seven straight national tournament appearances before leaving in 2013.

At the time of her departure, Malone described Temple College as a “family.” Malone, who had played volleyball at the college in 2000-01, was the first athlete to return to the school to coach. One of her former players and another Temple High alum, Jordan Pickett, would later come back to coach Lady Leopard volleyball. The same can be said of former men's basketball

star Clifton Ellis who succeeded Johnson, his college coach. “I don't think I'll ever be around another group of coaches so willing to help each other,” Malone said.

GOLF, TENNIS ALSO EARN NATIONAL TITLES

Other sports have come and gone, but none as notable as golf and tennis. Of the seven national titles that the Temple College athletic program has produced, a combined five came from those two sports, which are no longer offered. Both sports were part of the college's early history. Tennis was added in 1929 and golf in 1934.

Just as the women's basketball team won the first title NJCAA championship, so too did women's golf the following year.

Patti Johnson was the low medalist at that inaugural tournament, propelling the entire team to the title. Women's golf was later dropped in 1983.

Men's golf, though, was still viable at the turn of the century with Hall of Fame coach Bill Willis at the helm. Copperas Cove's Justin Schulze won the individual title in 2000 and was part of the team that won the national crown in 2001 at the Division II level, which primarily allots partial scholarships.

Women's tennis joined the ranks of the national title list with another Hall of Fame coach, Dick King, guiding the team. King's teams won three straight Division II titles from 2002-04 and, like golf, routinely had a presence at the national tournament.

Although there was a minor economic component in dissolving those sports, it had more to do with the dwindling emphasis placed on them at the junior college level. The college preferred to compete at the Division II level, but fewer schools who maintained a golf team were bothering to do so. When Willis retired, the school also retired golf.

It was a similar story with tennis, though the vast majority of junior colleges fielding the sport were involved at the Division II level. The NJCAA, rather than allowing tennis programs to compete at their preferred levels, forced the majority to join the very few in Division I.

“Tennis was the one that really upset me when they forced 90 Division II teams to join with four Division I teams,” Scott said. Tennis was dropped upon King's retirement.

Track and field also had a similar fate, though decades before. Junior colleges offering the sport dried up largely with the dominance of Blinn Junior College on both a state and national level. Junior colleges, including Temple Junior College, determined it wasn't a cost-effective option to keep going.

Football, on the other hand, was discontinued for purely budgetary reasons. The college fielded a football team from 1928-30. It started with much community support and enthusiasm and with some mild degree of success despite the fact that the student body hadn't hit 100 yet.

Although there was a modicum of success under the circumstances, interest and game attendance dropped dramatically. In January 1931 school administrators voted to halt football, blaming it for the \$400 athletic budget deficit. It never returned.

LOCATION HELPS RECRUITING

While much of the college's consistent athletic prowess – particularly in the last half-century – can be attributed to the unusual stability and longevity of the coaching staff, another reason naturally follows in lockstep: location.

Any issues with scholarship availability are quickly canceled out by the college's centralized location of Temple. There's nothing remote about being situated squarely in the middle of the state right off Interstate 35. It's an attractive option for athletes being a relatively short drive from bigger cities as well as their families, most of whom would be recruited from within two hours travel time.

“Temple is a really great place,” McMurtry said. “Being in the central part of the state you're close to everything and places like Austin, Dallas and Houston. It's a nice campus in a small-town setting, but it's not a small, small town.”

While the town's location helps recruit athletes, it also is a place where coaches are likely to settle in for the long term. For the



most part, Temple and Bell County have been a destination landing for most of its coaches rather than a stepping stone on the way to someplace supposedly grander.

“People would ask me, ‘Don't you want to go to a Division I program?’” Johnson said. “I told them I am at a Division I school, it's just junior college Division I.”

The nature of a two-year school is what has kept the coaches engaged for such a long period of time.

“Our coaches never got complacent,” McMurtry said, “because you have people leaving every year. Athletes don't get to develop over three or four years. They have to be ready to play. There's going to be (athlete) turnover, so you get to play early instead of sitting.”

The first century of athletics at Temple College has proven to be one that other programs would be wise to emulate. Support from the community and the desirability for quality coaches to remain with the school has been its calling card.

This chapter was written by Tim Waits.