

Lady Bears bring national title home to Baylor_41805

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Coach Kim Mulkey-Robertson (center) and her Lady Bears accept the NCAA women's basketball championship trophy. (Photo by Clifford Cheney)

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By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

WACO-Baylor University's Lady Bears basketball team won the Texas Baptist school's first NCAA title by a women's squad with a decisive 84-62 victory over the Michigan State Spartans.

The Baylor women finished the season with a 33-3 record, including 20 straight wins. They entered the winner's circle by posting victories over

three No. 1 seeds—North Carolina, Louisiana State University and Michigan State.

The Lady Bears' title win made Coach Kim Mulkey-Robertson the first women's basketball coach to play for a national championship team—1982 at Louisiana Tech—and then lead one as head coach. She also was assistant coach at Louisiana Tech in 1988 when the Lady Techsters won the NCAA championship.

Mulkey-Robertson—a former All-American and member of the 1984 Olympic gold medal women's basketball team—took the reins of the Baylor women's team five years ago, when the Lady Bears were last in the Big 12 with a 7-20 record.

At a post-game news conference, Mulkey-Robertson described the impact the Lady Bears' successful run had on Baylor and Waco—particularly in light of a scandal in the men's basketball program that came to light after a former player was accused of killing a teammate.

“Look up at these fans. That's how we changed the Waco community,” she said. “We're positive, and there's a lot of good there. There's great programs, great coaches, and this (title) is one of many more to come.”

Steffanie Blackmon, a senior from Rowlett and star center of the Lady Bears, expressed similar sentiments.

“It is such a blessing to be here and a blessing to win because this is what we worked so hard for,” she said. “I really think we put our eyes on the prize in the beginning, saying this is what we want to do. We set goals, and we reached every single one of them. This means a lot for the community. We've been through a lot. We had a tennis national championship, and now we can say we have a women's basketball national championship.”

A Dallas Morning News editorial sounded the same theme, saying: “Baylor

University should rethink whatever it offered Kim Mulkey-Robertson to extend her contract last week. The dollars can't possibly compensate for the headlines she and her Lady Bears basketball team are bringing home to Waco. Baylor has had its share of national spotlight in recent years, for all the wrong reasons.”

The newspaper went on to note: “At least two of their many fresh-faced stars found Baylor as a result of the conservative values for which the school sometimes takes a beating. All-American Sophia Young, an exchange student from the West Indies, became interested in Baylor's religious foundation. Abiola Wabara came to Baylor's attention because her aunt attended the school's Truett Semi-nary.”

President Robert Sloan agreed the Lady Bears players and coaches represented the university well, and the school was “enormously proud” of them.

“It's wonderful to have Baylor University given such positive national recognition,” said Sloan, who will step down as Baylor's president and become university chancellor June 1.

“Our prayer is always whether in athletics or academics that excellence would be seen as an expression of our commitment to the Lord. We see this as an opportunity to bear witness.”

Sloan praised the women's team both for their character both on and off the court, saying, “These girls are wonderful moral representatives of the university.”

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