

Editorial: Baylor's ideals must top gridiron glory

May 24, 2016

A happy-go-lucky joke made the rounds among people who love Baylor University the past few years: *Anybody* could succeed as president of Baylor now.



Marv Knox Ken Starr enjoyed the fortune to become the Texas Baptist university's president about the same time the football team got really, really good. But that seemed coincidental compared to the hiring of Head Coach Art Briles a bit earlier. With the Bears winning a Heisman Trophy, a slew of games and conference championships, plus building a new stadium and enjoying national rankings, everything else—fund-raising, student recruitment, faculty retention, and plain ol' fun—seemed to come easy.

Live by football; die by football.

Unfortunately, this was not how anyone would've expected the good times to fade. We all knew the Texas Longhorns and Oklahoma Sooners wouldn't stay lousy forever. But a nauseating spate of rape convictions by members of the football team? Heavens, not Baylor.

Now, Starr [reportedly is on the way out as Baylor's president](#), his termination apparently prompted by what the university's board of regents

heard from the Pepper Hamilton law firm, hired to investigate Baylor's reports of sexual violence.

The regents' action regarding Starr remains unconfirmed, and we might not know what the board has decided until June 3, according to a university news release. We talk about it now, because even the possibility of Starr's removal is big, national news. Either way, change must come to Baylor. Here are important points to consider:

- *The regents should release the Pepper Hamilton report.* Redact names of rape and assault victims, but release everything else. Baylor owes nothing less than full honesty to its students and their families, its faculty and staff, its alumni and its donors, as well as Texas Baptists, who have supported their school for generations.

A reporter asked if Baylor should protect its reputation by protecting information about sexual assault on campus or among students. The opposite is true. The only way to save Baylor's reputation is for the regents and administration to own up to the university's shortcomings, implement a plan to correct them, and establish a campus culture that values the divine image and sanctity of every individual so highly rape and sexual assault become unthinkable.

- *If Starr failed at any point to lead Baylor to implement and exceed all guidelines of student safety,* to thoroughly investigate and follow up on every charge of rape and assault, to provide due process for all the accused, and to establish a culture of safety and protection for all students, then he should be removed.

Of course, a president cannot know the actions of all 16,000 students at all times. But with ultimate power comes ultimate responsibility. The president is responsible for every component of the university—from the Title IX office, to every dean and school, to every athletic team and Greek

organization.

If Starr has fulfilled all these responsibilities perfectly, he should remain. However, that is an exacting standard and demands exacting accountability. As an alum noted, moral failure in a football program at a state university might not cost the president's job, "but at Baylor, we have higher standards."

- *Similarly, if Briles has failed to adhere to all standards and in any other way turned a blind eye or deaf ear to sexual assault or other improprieties on his team, he has to go. Even one of the most successful football coaches in the land cannot stand apart from justice.*

That's a bitter pill for many Bears fans. Another alum said it this way: "I really like Art Briles. I don't want to think he knew anything about this. But if he knew, he has to be held responsible." And even if he is not removed, he must be held responsible for his recruiting policies and practices.

- *The same goes for Athletic Director Ian McCaw and any other coach.*

Baylor doesn't need scapegoats. But it must hold people of power and prestige to account.

These are sad days on the banks of the Brazos. Even before the gleam on that shiny new football stadium has dimmed, scandal has plagued the football program. Sexual assaults elsewhere also have raised disturbing questions—about campus culture, student safety and Baylor's honor.

Baylor must attain the standards Texas Baptists who love it expect of it. An All-American is not worth a rape, neither is a national championship, a conference victory or even a single game.

Baylor—and its ideals—are far bigger than football.

Editor's Note: Baylor University's board of regents announced plans May

26 to remove Ken Starr from his role as president, fire Head Football Coach Art Briles and sanction Athletic Director Ian McCaw.