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Sports

New coach displays old intensity

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Jeff McDonald
Express-News Staff Writer

AUSTIN — Texas defensive end Tim Crowder cast a cautious eye toward the little man in the front of the room.

Dispensing with the introductions and laying out his expectations, the little man was barking more than talking.

He was not smiling.

"I thought he was a drill sergeant," Crowder said. "He was all serious."

So went one Longhorn's first impression of the man who would be UT's new co-defensive coordinator alongside defensive backs coach Duane Akina.

Gene Chizik, six months into his tenure as Texas' third defensive signal-caller in three seasons, can laugh at that assessment now.

It's not totally inaccurate, he said.

"I'm going to tell them exactly what needs to be done," said Chizik, the son of a World War II veteran. "I'm going to speak my mind."

Contrary to popular belief, Chizik can crack a smile.

If he's seen as serious, it's because coaching defense at UT has become serious business.

Greg Robinson came from the NFL last season to replace Carl Reese and resurrected a slumping Longhorns defense. With Robinson one-and-done at UT — he left to become Syracuse's head coach — Chizik's challenge is to keep it resurrected.

He certainly has the résumé for the task.

During Auburn's 13-0 season in 2004, he called the shots for a unit that gave up points begrudgingly — 11.3 per game, best in the nation.

For his efforts, he won the Broyles Award, handed out each year to college football's top assistant.

"That gave him instant credibility with the kids," UT coach Mack Brown said.

What Chizik doesn't necessarily have — or want — is a mandate for change.

On the surface, Chizik's defense won't look much different than Robinson's. He'll even keep much of his predecessor's terminology.

Like Robinson, Chizik believes in speed and physicality. He wants to blitz early and often. He doesn't mind playing zone and, at times, may prefer it.

Unlike Robinson, he doesn't want to overhaul anything.

"They were pretty good on defense here last year, too," Chizik said. "If it's not broke, don't fix it, right?"

Senior strong safety Michael Huff summarizes his new coach's philosophy this way.

"Just be physical and get to the ball," Huff said. "Just make plays."

Chizik, who will coach the linebackers, has said he would like his unit to allow no more than 13 points per game.

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Chizik's new charges have a loftier goal in mind.

"We're going try to hold teams to zero," free safety Michael Griffin said. "We want to give Coach Chizik the No. 1 defense again."

Anything, it seems, for the Longhorns' new defensive drill sergeant.

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