

COMMENTARY: KIRK BOHLS

It's time to give credit to Greg Davis

Longhorns have best offensive coordinator in Big 12.

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Are you sitting down? If not, grab a seat and brace yourself.

Greg Davis is the best offensive coordinator in the Big 12.

OK, there, I've said it.

I know, I know: Everyone but Mack Brown and the Longhorns think Davis is the worst play-caller ever, has the imagination of an accountant and is the reason the world has acne, crabgrass and the designated hitter.

But you are all wrong.

He's smart. He knows what he's doing. He's as big a reason as Vince Young that Texas has recently had the five most prolific scoring offenses in Longhorn history.

In fact, Davis may be my favorite Longhorn assistant coach since defensive coordinator Leon Fuller.

Davis — last season's Broyles Award winner as the nation's top assistant coach — has never once lashed out at a reporter or columnist, and believe me, I've given him cause. He amicably spars with reporters without being condescending or contentious. He can quote you stats and plays and situations that only Beano Cook could recite. He's the most prepared Longhorn coach in any sport that I've ever come across.

And he's the same after a 65-13 loss to Oklahoma as he is after a 41-38 win over Southern Cal.

"He's the most consistent guy I've ever been around," Texas receivers coach Bobby Kennedy said. "I've been around some great coaches . . . and Greg is the best I've ever been around."

Davis works at it like few others. Take, for example, the Monday of an off week after Texas had slipped by Kansas in 2004. Kennedy — who usually reports for work about 6 a.m. to break down the blitz packages of the upcoming opponent with Davis — ambled in at 7.

Davis, who always shows up at the office by 4:30 in the morning, come rain, shine or bye week, had already finished the work.

"BK," Davis told him without judgment, "that's the way we do things around here."

Still, Davis drives me crazy with his sideways offense. I have nightmares about the hitch pass. And I'm still waiting for Roy Williams to score against Oklahoma, but it'll never happen.

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That said, Davis is very much an acquired taste. Yeah, the boobirds say, a sour one.

But I'm here to defend the most embattled Longhorn coach since John Mackovic lifted his first glass of wine.

Greg Davis can't win. Oh, he can, but it's always someone else who gets the credit. Major Applewhite was a genius on the field who could call his own plays. Young didn't need any coaching at all. Who couldn't win with a Heisman Trophy winner in the backfield?

Those were the arguments raised over the last nine seasons, but they too often ignored the facts. Davis wins with whomever he has. And that's a sign of great coaching.

Davis' previous two students at quarterback have made 19 starts in the NFL. Oklahoma's Bob Stoops has had none.

Davis has developed offenses around power backs (Ricky Williams and Cedric Benson), around dropback quarterbacks (Applewhite, Chris Simms), around a versatile, mobile quarterback (Young) and with a redshirt freshman (Colt McCoy). Mike Leach never changes his offense.

With no prior work with the scheme, he studied the zone read that Rich Rodriguez was running at West Virginia and Urban Meyer was running at Utah. Davis learned it quickly and embraced it.

Others understand that. Joe Paterno's Penn State staff came to visit. Michigan's has stopped by. So have Tennessee, Clemson, North Carolina State and 15 other teams the last two springs. Tennessee Titans coordinator Norm Chow dropped in to pick Davis' brain on how best to use Young. Boise State — Texas' likely opponent in the Fiesta Bowl — also popped in.

Davis is getting more inventive the longer he's here. Against Texas Tech, he called a throwback pass to Jermichael Finley and a stop-and-go pattern to Jordan Shipley.

When he called for a skinny post pattern to Nate Jones that the Longhorns worked on in practice all week, Colt McCoy confidently told everyone in the huddle the play was going for six. Jones scored.

One minute, Davis is too conservative, the next he's too aggressive.

"He does the one job I wouldn't want to have," center Lyle Sendlein said. "Everyone thinks they know what to do, but the one person who does is him."

He gets hate mail, or so he's told. No one can deliver their vitriol through e-mail directly to him. He doesn't read the newspaper and won't come near the Internet. Smart man.

Davis did receive a particularly blistering e-mail from a man with no return address two weeks ago. "He thought we should have beat Nebraska worse than we did," Davis said.

He gets far worse second-guessing from his 74-year-old father. Rusty Davis hoped one of his three sons would follow him into the insurance business, but none did. Dad reminds his son of that every now and then when the Longhorn offense struggles.

Like, say, in a 12-0 loss to Oklahoma.

"Yeah," the elder Davis said, "life insurance looks pretty good now."

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