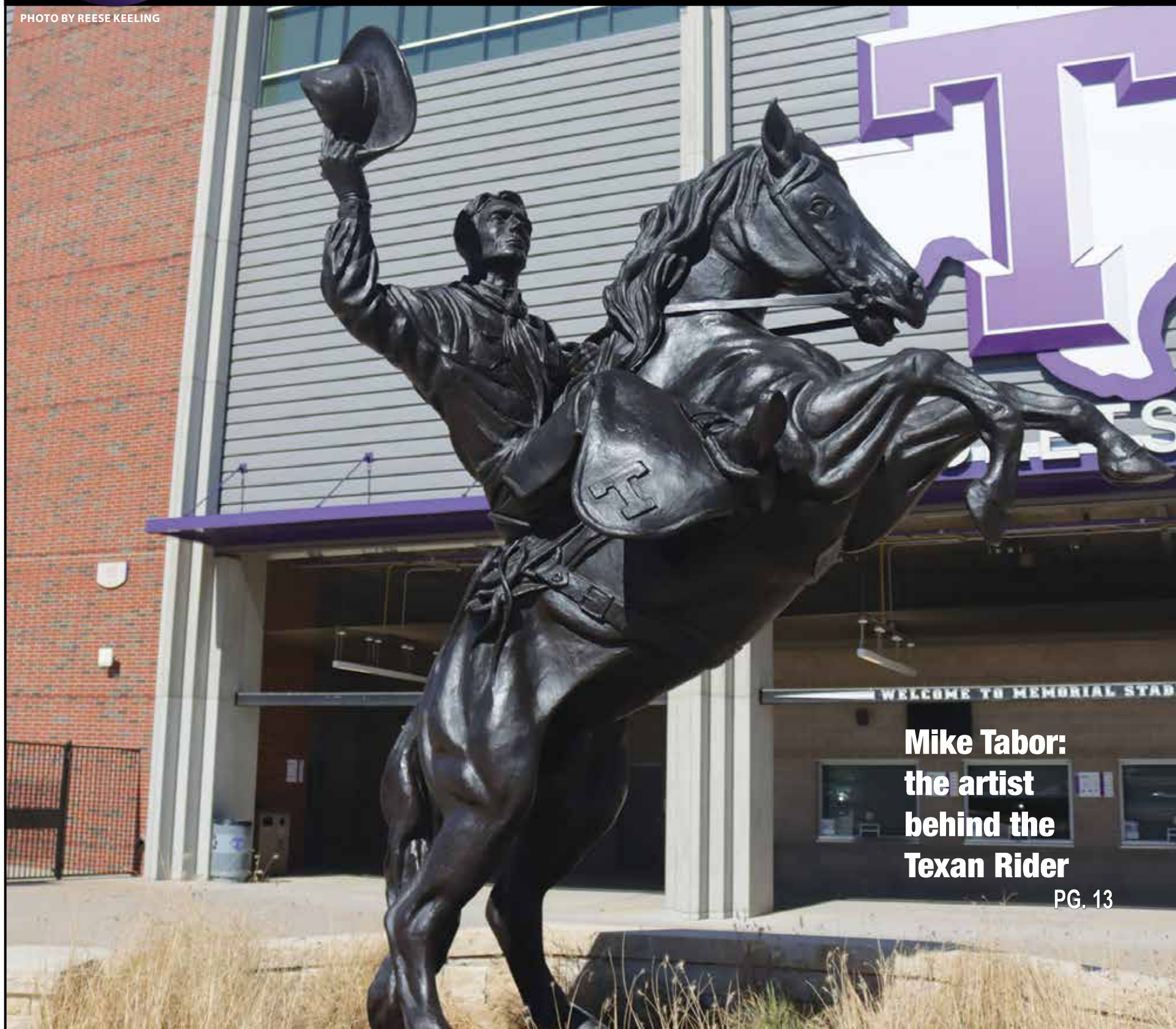




# THE J-TAC

A PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAN NEWS SERVICE

PHOTO BY REESE KEELING



**Mike Tabor:  
the artist  
behind the  
Texan Rider**

PG. 13



FALL SPORTS

# Texans now 0-3 vs. Power 5. What went wrong?

BY GAVIN PATRICK  
*Sports Writer*

Tarleton State University has one of the strongest football programs in Texas. The Texan Faithful, and anyone who follows FCS football would know. But it’s hard to sugarcoat what’s gone down in its three most high profile games of the last three seasons.

The Texans’ matchup with Baylor University on Saturday night marked the third straight year the team has fallen to a Big 12 opponent. Losses to Texas Tech in 2023 and to Texas Christian University in 2022 preceded it. But these weren’t just ordinary losses; the games weren’t competitive, nor were they expected to be.

The outcome of the games just about matched what the odds suggested coming in. Baylor walked in as a 33.5-point favorite -- winning 45-3 -- Texas Tech a 36.5-point favorite -- winning 41-3 -- and TCU a 40-point favorite -- winning 59-17 (All odds via ESPN BET and Caesars Sportsbook).

So, it begs the question: What went wrong?

To start, the Texans couldn’t jump out to a fast start. In the first quarters alone, Tarleton was outgained by 333 yards (97-430), and in all three games, they went into the second quarter facing a 21-0 deficit.

“It got lopsided there and got out of hand,” head coach Todd Whitten said after the TCU game. “I thought we got off to a slow start. We really wanted to



PHOTO BY HAELEY CARPENTER

**Tarleton State was thrashed 45-3 by Baylor on Saturday, Aug. 31, giving the team an 0-3 mark against Power 5 schools.**

avoid that.”

Sadly, it was the same story all three years.

A common theme in those slow starts was an inability to run the ball. Again looking at the first quarter, the Texans gained just three yards on the ground versus TCU (1.0 YPC) and 16 yards against Texas Tech (2.3 YPC). Against Baylor, the Texans were without top quarterback Victor Gabalis, so having a strong run game was an obvious must. Predictably, they had 12 rushing attempts in the first quarter but for a net gain of zero yards.

The Texans were at an obvious size disadvantage in the trenches facing Big 12 defensive lines, and their opponents took advantage of it. Whitten acknowledged that Baylor’s defense had a good plan defensively by not selling out against the run, even though they were facing a backup quarterback, which enabled them to play in light

boxes.

“They played really soft, so they were saying we weren’t gonna be able to run the ball and beat ‘em, and they were right about that,” Whitten said.

Another area that plagued Tarleton in the early stages were turnovers. It didn’t take long in any of the three games for the opposing defense to get their hands on a ball. In the two most recent games, against the Bears and Red Raiders, the quarterback threw a pick six in the first quarter. And against Tech and TCU, an interception was thrown on the first and second offensive possessions.

Once Tarleton found themselves in a hole early, there was no going back. Having to play a team in a higher division is a hole in and of itself, and when the Texans gave them a head start with mistakes, it became almost impossible to work their way back in the game.

“[Baylor] would have scored 100

points if they could have today, I guarantee you,” Whitten said postgame in Waco. “We got everything they had, they left their best players in there until the end, the game was certainly out of hand. But that’s ok, it makes us better as well. I’m proud of our guys.”

Teams can find ways to take positives out of any loss, but it’s clear that Tarleton State has a long way to go before they can hang with a Power 5 opponent. Their next crack at an FBS school won’t come until November of 2025 when they travel to College Station to face Texas A&M.

For now, the Texans (1-1) will look forward to a big game on the road against Houston Christian (0-1) on Saturday, Sept. 7. Hopefully a win can put them back on the upswing, a place the team is familiar with after becoming a full-fledged Division I program this summer.

FALL SPORTS

# Texan football, Tarleton featured on National ESPN broadcast

BY ANDREW UTTERBACK  
*Multimedia Journalist*

The Tarleton Texans took home a 26-23 victory over the McNeese Cowboys on Saturday, Aug. 24 after the game came down to a nail-biting 4th quarter. This game was not only a season-opening purple-out home game, but also the first Tarleton football game to be broadcast on national TV. ESPN 2 carried the 2:30 p.m. game played at Memorial Stadium in Stephenville, Texas and the Texans did not disappoint.

I got a chance to speak to Head Coach Todd Whitten, starting quarterback Victor Gabalis and corner Kasyus Kurns about the atmosphere of the national stage.

For Coach Whitten the ESPN coverage was an “added bonus” saying that there is never a normal game and that he and the team “always feel pressure to play well and get a win for our university.” He said the ESPN presence amounted to a “nice atmosphere” and that they were “very thankful for the opportunity to play.”

Gabalis echoed this, saying the focus in the locker room wasn’t national TV, but instead that the team was just “excited to see how we were going to perform.”

Kurns says that after practicing in the heat all week, he and his teammates were ready to be themselves, “Play our game and play for each other”.

He also said that the team had been practicing outside in the heat all week, which likely helped the Texans overcome the nearly 100 degree Texas heat.

Both players, with a smile on their face, said it was nice for their friends and family to be able to see them play and added that their phones were full of texts from family and friends watching from around the country.

Kurns said that his family was able to watch him from back in Chicago and that he was “truly blessed to have that opportunity.”

Both Gabalis and Kurns had strong performances to kick off the season. Gabalis threw for 140 yards and a touchdown, helping put the Texans up 26-7 before exiting the game at halftime due to a thumb injury which should sideline him for around three weeks. Kurns had two fumble recoveries, a forced fumble and a touchdown to help the Texans secure the win and start the season 1-0.

Tarleton just recently became a Division 1 school and their football program is certainly off to a strong start.

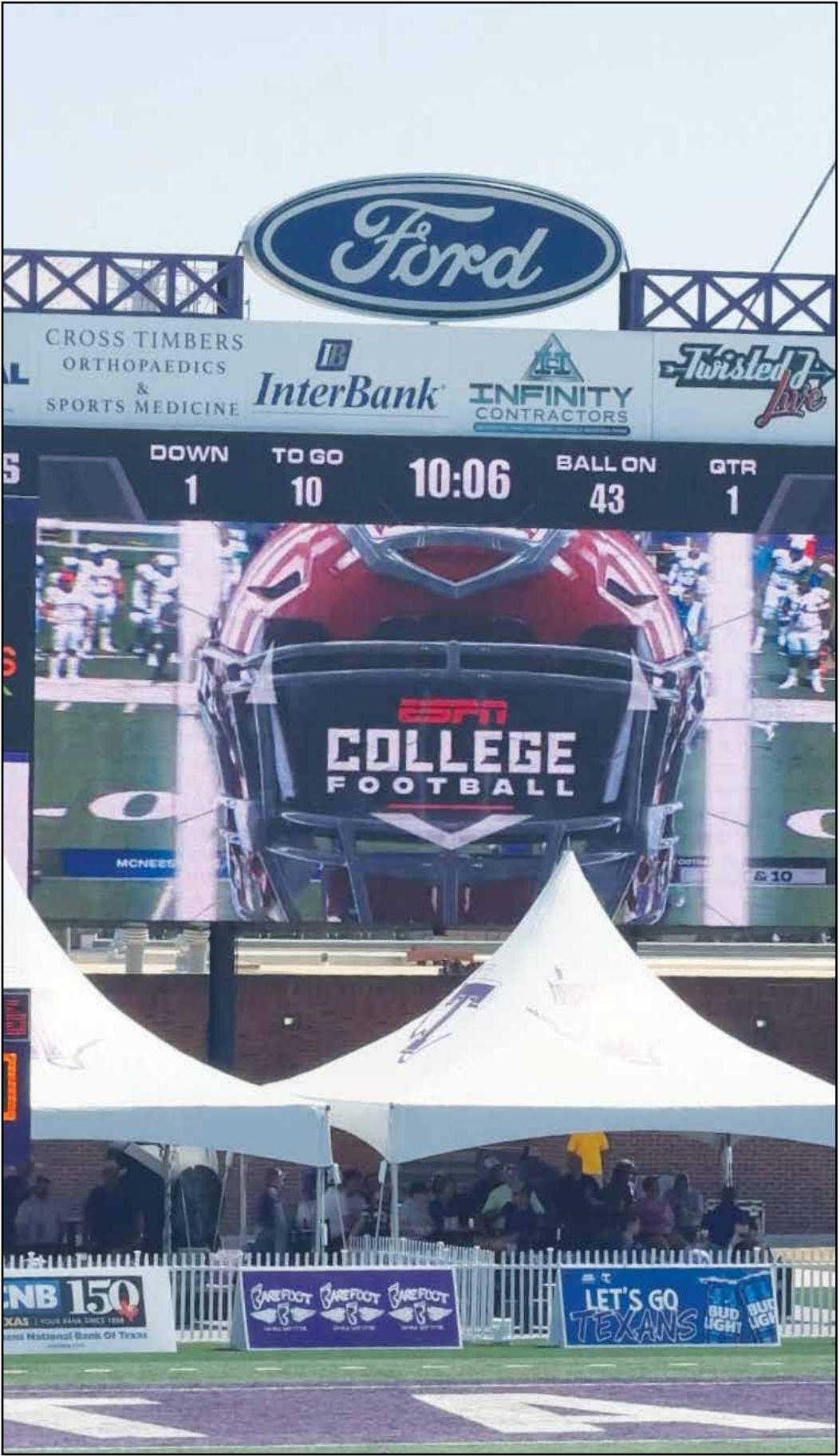


PHOTO BY ANDREW UTTERBACK

**An ESPN graphic fills the screen Aug. 24 at Memorial Stadium during ESPN Gameday vs. McNeese.**



FALL SPORTS

# Beyond the Buckles

## Tarleton Rodeo measures success past the hardware

BY MACKENZIE JOHNSON

Multimedia Journalist

Out of the entire English language, title is the term that Tarleton State Univerity’s rodeo team may just be most familiar with.

Tarleton rodeo is commonly crowned with the title of having the best facility, the most valued coaches, the most successful athletes and being the top collegiate rodeo team in the country.

And more officially, Tarleton’s rodeo team has earned 39 distinguished titles on the College Nationals Finals Rodeo stage since the program was born in 1947.

Over the years, the mens’ team has accounted for five of those championships and the women’s team four, with the other 30 titles belonging to individual holders, both men and women.

This past June at the 2024 College Nationals Finals Rodeo, the men racked up another team championship and saddle bronc rider Gus Gaillard scored an individual championship title of his own to bring back to Tarleton. The womens’ team had a successful run as well, earning the title of reserve champions as a team when the dust settled.

As we look into the new season quickly approaching, the team is planning to steamroll their way back to the CNFR (College National Finals Rodeo) to capture even more titles. This fall, Tarleton rodeo will travel to Eastern New Mexico University rodeo in Portales, New Mexico, Sept. 19-21; the Sul Ross State University rodeo in Alpine, Texas, Sept. 26-28; the Clarendon College rodeo in Clarendon, Texas, Oct. 10-12; the Texas Tech University rodeo in Lubbock, Texas, Oct. 24-26 and the Vernon College rodeo in Vernon, Texas, Nov. 7-9.

Much can be attributed to Tarleton rodeos’ past and no doubt future success. Earning such a prestigious title as one of the best rodeo teams in the nation doesn’t take shape without many hands in the mix to keep the program on its feet and running. Two pairs of hands that have helped front the team to consistent victory are head rodeo coach Mark Eakin and associate head coach Brittany Stewart.

This fall season of rodeo will denote Eakins 17th and Stewarts 8th year as a full-time coach at Tarleton. Both Eakin and Stewart grew up in the industry and rodeoed for Tarleton before stepping into their coaching roles, Eakin rodeoing for Tarleton from



PHOTO BY MACKENZIE JOHNSON

The Bob and Darla Doty Rodeo Complex is where Tarleton’s rodeo athletes call home. Tarleton’s arena is top notch and gives students the unique opportunity to train in the one of the best facilities with some of the best coaches.

FALL SPORTS

1995 to 1997 and Stewart rodeoing throughout her college career until graduating from the university in 2012, having Eakin himself as her head coach.

The twos rich history in rodeo has permanently left its mark on their coaching styles, having helped influence them into the top-tier coaches they are recognized as today.

“What I experienced as a competitor and as a student has completely developed my coaching philosophy,” Stewart said. “I’m definitely not a cookie cutter type coach. I know that one thing doesn’t work for everybody.”

Coaching on such an individual basis is part of the reason Tarleton rodeo has the accomplished reputation that they do. Every competitor has their own personalized agenda.

“To me, success is on different levels,” Eakin said. “Yes, it’s nice to win the national titles, but each individual has their own goals. Maybe making one short go is somebody’s (equivalent to making the) National Finals Rodeo or getting a degree is their main goal. We just try to help each student to the next level, wherever their level may be.”

Catering to each rodeo athlete is a tricky task in itself, but tack on the high member count of Tarleton’s rodeo team and that mission gets a little more complex. This year, Tarleton is expecting to have roughly 140 members on the team. Your average rodeo team typically houses no more than 50.

“Two years ago, we were at 165 students, and we were concerned about going upward to 200,” Stewart said. “We want to make the team very intentional for our athletes to have the opportunity to actually get something out of it, so we had to start limiting what was coming in on the team.”

Narrowing down team numbers is not a typical sacrifice most rodeo programs have to make, but it’s one Tarleton rodeo has to grapple with. Giving rodeo athletes the resources they need to be successful is an important priority for the team, and that can only be done in light of tough choices.

“We’re not able to take a true beginner anymore just because we don’t have the time and trying to figure out that balanced number (of members) and how to tell someone no is my hardest part,” Eakin said. “But last year we were able to, whether it’s through out of state waivers or endowed scholarships, give right at about half the team some form of scholarship.”

Although Eakin and Stewart feel comfortable at 140 athletes, Tarleton rodeo is still bigger than most of the teams out there, and it takes a village to manage all of the responsibilities that come with that.

“I think it’s truly in the masses and how we each work with each other and have our compartmentalized

sections of what we take care of,” Brittany said. “I’m in charge of this, and Mark’s in charge of that, and Hadley (Kibee) takes care of the marketing, and Tyler (Frank) does the workouts, and it’s truly a group effort. The students putting in the effort makes our job easier as well.”

Keeping such a large team afloat also requires assistance pulled through the city of Stephenville itself.

“Our successful student athletes start from the community and the administration,” Eakin said. “Between our fundraising, we’re up to around 18 big team sponsors. Last season was our biggest year and through fundraising we raised over 200,000 (for the team).”

Without the community to back the rodeo program, Tarleton rodeo wouldn’t be where it is now. Tarleton State University’s Rodeo Hall of Fame dinner and auction accumulates a lot of the funds to support scholarship opportunities for rodeo students and the Tarleton Stampede Rodeo sponsors greatly impact the quality of rodeo Tarleton is able to host to conclude the season.

“The community is huge and second to none,” Stewart said. “I’ve been in a couple different areas, and I’ve never seen any community like Stephenville, Erath County and all the surrounding have the support that we have.”

It’s easy to see Tarleton rodeo has risen to its highest peak yet, but this won’t be where it caps off, and a lot of that is thanks to the phenomenal facility.

“This facility is every coach’s dream,” Eakin said. “For the first time ever, we’re able to offer what any D1 sport has been able to offer, from the workout facility, to the doctors, to the orthopedics and to anything that’s going to help the athletes and their horses stay healthy.”

With these assets, Tarleton rodeo students have the ability to go far, but with that possibility can also come built in pressure when wearing a purple vest in the rodeo arena.

“I think it’s in the idea that God has a purpose for us all and he wouldn’t have opened these doors for students if they weren’t supposed to be here,” Stewart said of dealing with the pressure. “So take that and run with it. We either build on it or we look back at what we need to work on and go from there.”

Staying in the right headspace as a rodeo athlete falls back onto both that faith and belief within.

“At nationals, you don’t see anyone else that has as many vice presidents, the presidents of the school and alumni up there supporting us... So there’s always been an expectation to win around here,” Eakin said. “But it’s all about building the confidence within

you. You’ve got to believe in what you want to do and (believe in) the workouts, different coaches and all the avenues you can go to.”

One may think that overseeing a team so talented would also boost the coaches’ expectations for how many CNFR titles are won, and although they certainly encourage the team to strive for them, the accomplishments that define the team as successful stretch far beyond just the buckles brought back to Stephenville. It can be just as simple as seeing team members love the sport.

“I really like to see a team that is cohesive – one that enjoys being around each other, having fun practices and getting something out of it,” Stewart said. “I think the ultimate goal for a college rodeo athlete is to be a successful human being when they get done college rodeoing and having a plan on what they want to do. We want to get them prepared and ready for that next step.”

Seeing students identify their next stride, whether in rodeo, academics or their future, is a process Tarelton’s coaches love to see unfold.

“Seeing each individual getting to the next step, wherever the next step is for them, is where I get my reward (as a coach),” Eakin said. “I may get more satisfaction seeing one person make a short go because that’s all they’ve worked their whole life for – it is just as important as those that are trying to make the NFR or win the college finals. Every student’s on a different level, and as long as we can be intentional about what we do, it gives me a reward to watch people reach their goals.”

The esteemed rodeo accomplishments are no doubt one of the components that contribute to the many titles Tarleton holds – whether that title is an unofficial one spoken by rodeo fanatics across a dinner table or the one given once a year in Casper, Wyoming at the CNFR.

These titles and the awards that come with them are what Tarleton is known for, but sometimes the biggest accomplishments aren’t necessarily boiled down to a term as simple as title.

Sometimes, the biggest accomplishments aren’t as tangible as an award saddle to put on your horse, a new buckle to put on your belt or a fancy plaque to drill into your wall. In fact, the majority of the time, success is measured in individual progress, and that’s something that spans too far and wide to fit into a trophy case.

Maybe the best title Tarleton holds is the title of being a team that values the small successes, and although that title isn’t one that will likely lead the sentence spoken by an announcer at a college rodeo, it may just be the one Tarleton rodeo merits the most.



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FALL SPORTS

# Men’s Golf is ‘focusing on the present’ as the new season starts

BY JAXON HANSARD  
*Sports Editor*

Among other traditional sports starting in the fall semester at Tarleton State University, the one with the longest season starts soon with Men’s golf as they come off their top 4 placement in the WAC Championship tournament in April.

Tarleton placed in the top ten at 8 of their 11 invitationals last year with four of those coming in at the top four. A great performance at the WAC Championship has been pushing this team all offseason to do it again and hopefully even further.

Senior Carson Gallaher has been motivated all offseason by what most would consider a good ending to a season with a 4th place finish in the conference championship but it wasn’t first place so why settle?

“My summer was amazing, it was the best summer of golf that I have ever had,” Gallaher said. “A lot of that had to do with the work that was put in after the frustrating finish at conference last year. This summer I won my first tournament in almost 4 years, and it reminded me that I have what it takes to compete with the best.”

This will be the Texan’s first year to be completely playoff eligible and the schedule reflects it with invitationals to schools like the University of Colorado for the Mark Simpson Invitational, a trip to

College Station for the Aggie Invitational against the big brother school, and before the WAC Championship, the Texans will go to Ohio State for the Robert Kepler Invitational.

“I know for everyone conference is circled, although it is circled our team motto for this year is “focus on the present” Sometimes we have a tendency to look too far ahead and it gets us out of sync. If we want to perform our best at conference we as a team have realized that we need to focus now and put in the work so when we get to that circled tournament we are ready and better than ever” Gallaher said.

While Tarleton placed high last year, this is going to be a different team with 6 new players being added to this edition of the men’s golf team. Head Coach Chance Cain is going to be managing all of the new faces and blending them with the veterans of past teams.

“It’s really exciting to see us keep trending in the right direction, both with talent and bringing in the right personalities that fit our culture” Cain said. “We’ve added depth this year as well, so we will probably see the lineup move around more than it ever has and that will keep the competition at a high level throughout the year.”

Last season’s culture was based on process, work ethic and competing. These key habits were crucial and want to be retained as the keys for this season to

recreate the success of the 23-24 season.

“With this big of a turnover, I’m just getting to know the guys, their tendencies on the course, golf swing, and what they need to work on individually” Cain said.

The men’s season will start Sept 21 in Colorado Springs for the Gene Miranda Falcon Invitational then another Colorado-based meet with the Buffalos for the Mark Simpson Invitational while Oregon State and the Monterrey Collegiate Classic round out the first half of the season before the winter break.

The season will resume on Feb 10 for the Bentwater Intercollegiate in Montgomery Texas. A quick east side surf along California and Oregon for the Desert Intercollegiate and Bandon Dunes Invitational. After those seaside shoot offs the Texans will return for the Aggie Invitational and Robert Kepler Invitational before heading to the WAC Championship with hopes to win it all.

“I think everyone on the team has the same goal for the season which is to make the postseason,” Gallaher said. “Although we couldn’t go to the postseason last year, we made a very good run at conference that had us come up just short. It stung a lot but it gave us a lot of confidence, even with the new guys this year I am seeing that same fight in them that we had at conference last year.”



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FALL SPORTS

# Fantasy Football: 5 tips to win your league

BY GAVIN PATRICK  
*Multimedia Journalist*

Ah yes, it’s football season again.

With Labor Day weekend behind us, the NFL season is coming in hot, with the defending champion Kansas City Chiefs fresh off a 27-20 season-opening win against the Baltimore Ravens on Thursday night.

With real football comes fantasy football, so I’m here to give you five tips on how to win your league this year. Personally, I’ve been playing fantasy football since 2017 with my family and, not to brag, have played for the championship three times already, with my lone victory coming in 2020. So sure, I guess I qualify as a credible source.

But this piece isn’t about me. I certainly wouldn’t know as much as I do about fantasy football without years of experience, a love for the game and a little help from the experts. So with that in mind, here are the five most useful fantasy football tips I’ve learned over the years.

**1. Stay active on the waiver wire.**

If you’ve played fantasy football long enough, you know that your team in Week 1 will look nothing like your team in Week 17, nor should it. The best fantasy managers are always looking to improve their team, and the waiver wire is where you’ll get that new influx of talent.

If there’s an available player who just had a big game and you feel like they can keep it up, add them, especially if they can replace someone on your team who’s underachieving. At the same time, however, don’t overestimate. It’s your job as a manager to determine if that big game was a fluke or a sign of things to come. And even if you’re ready to cut ties with a player who isn’t performing well, they can turn it around at any time. I know these decisions can be a headache, but when you do decide to make a move, just make sure it’s cost-effective.

Always keep your eyes peeled. Last year, no one expected Rams’ then rookie receiver Puka Nacua to emerge as a WR1. But after opening the season with two monster performances, he was that, and whoever picked him up in fantasy was rewarded handsomely. (Psst: I was one of those people.) Cases like Nacua happen every year, which means someone else is bound to emerge in a similar way this year. It’s your job to find them.

**2. Avoid trades.**

Trading in fantasy football is a slippery slope. Sure, there’s always fair trades to be made, but more often than not, someone is trying to sabotage you.

I get offered trades all the time in my league, and they’re usually offered by a manager who’s desperate to land a great player and part ways with another player they see as less-than.



When you’re on the receiving end of that, always take a step back and question: why should I want a player who someone is willing to let go of? A lot of times, it’s a trap. Now, maybe you’re intrigued by the player being offered to you but you’re not willing to give up the player your opponent wants in exchange. That’s another common case, and in both cases, a deal usually never gets done. The ole’ double-edged sword is too big a fight, and we always fall back to where we started.

That’s why I typically avoid trades, especially after I fell for the trap a few years ago. In 2021, I traded away then Packers’ quarterback Aaron Rodgers in exchange for Ravens’ quarterback Lamar Jackson. Well, little did I know that Rodgers would go on to win MVP and Jackson would have his season cut short by injury. Like I said, it’s a slippery slope.

**3. Put players listed as “out” on IR.**

Every fantasy football team is granted at least one IR (injured reverse) slot, which, just like in real life, does not count against the active roster. Once a player is listed as “out” by their (real-life) team, meaning they won’t play in the next game, fantasy managers are able to place them in the IR slot. This then opens up an empty spot on the roster, giving you flexibility to add another player at no cost.

Always take advantage of this free space when it’s available. Even if you don’t plan on using the player you pickup immediately, keep them stashed on your bench for as long as possible. Because who knows: maybe they perform well enough that you’d want to hang on to them even after your player on IR is healthy. If that’s the case, surely you could identify another player to cut loose. If it’s not that easy, you’ve got a good problem on your hands.

**4. Replace unavailable stars with players in favorable matchups.**

There’s some players in fantasy who are what we call “matchup-proof” -- like Christian McCaffrey, Ceedee Lamb and Tyreek Hill -- which means you lock them into your starting lineup every week they’re available, no matter the matchup. Most guys, though, are very matchup-dependent, and the main reason you decide to play one over another is because they’re facing a lighter opponent.

So when one of your stars isn’t available one week because they’re either injured or on bye, replace them with someone in a favorable matchup. Maybe the answer is already sitting on your bench, but always explore the waiver wire to find the best alternatives. Look for that green next to a player’s opponent, indicating they have a soft matchup, and compare them against what you already have in house. (Remember that green signals a lighter matchup, yellow a medium, and red a hard.) Always go for the best player with the lightest matchup.

Whether or not you hit on these replacements could be the difference between winning and losing that week. And remember: you won’t be the only one with this problem. That’s why it’s important to scout players and matchups weeks in advance so you beat your opponents to the punch.

**5. Listen to the experts.**

Most people in your league are probably just average football fans and aren’t arduously working to develop a winning formula. So if you love football enough and want to gain an edge on your competition, keep up with the latest rankings, analysis and opinions from experts.

To start you off, I would highly recommend listening to ESPN’s “Fantasy Focus” podcast -- hosted by Field Yates, Daniel Dopp and Mike Clay, with guest appearances from their colleagues -- and the “Up & Adams” show with FanDuel’s Kay Adams. Those are my go-to’s for fantasy football advice, but there are all kinds of sources out there to help you win your league.

And one more tip . . . have fun! Fantasy football is a thrill to play, and it’s also an amazing avenue for you to bond with family and friends.

To me, the best part about it isn’t winning a championship (and trust me, I love to win); it’s all the fun I have in between of getting to assemble my favorite players, ponder ins-and-outs, engage in some healthy banter and be engaged by teams and players I wouldn’t be otherwise. It’s amazing how fantasy football will grow your love for the game of football, the people you play with and all things NFL.

OK fine, that last bit was kind of cutesy. It’s time to win your league now.





# Support the Purple & White

## Tarleton Football Schedule

- September 21st  
*at Houston Christian*
- September 28th  
*Family Weekend*
- October 5th  
*at Southern Utah*
- October 12th  
*Homecoming*
- October 26th  
*at Austin Peay*
- November 2nd  
*Military Appreciation*
- November 9th  
*at West Georgia*
- November 16th  
*Legends Game*
- November 23rd  
*Senior Day*

## Tarleton Volleyball Schedule

- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| September 19th<br><i>vs Oral Roberts</i>      | September 26th<br><i>at Southern Utah</i> | October 10th<br><i>vs Abilene Christian</i>  | October 26th<br><i>vs Utah Tech</i>          |
| September 20th<br><i>vs Alcorn State</i>      | September 28th<br><i>at Utah Tech</i>     | October 12th<br><i>vs Utah Valley</i>        | October 28th<br><i>at Abilene Christian</i>  |
| September 20th<br><i>vs Houston Christian</i> | October 3rd<br><i>vs Seattle U</i>        | October 17th<br><i>at California Baptist</i> | October 31st<br><i>Vs California Baptist</i> |
| September 21st<br><i>vs Louisiana Monroe</i>  | October 5th<br><i>at UT Arlington</i>     | October 19th<br><i>at Grand Canyon</i>       |  |

## Tarleton Women's Soccer Schedule

- September 12th  
*at Northwestern State*
- September 15th  
*at Houston Christian*
- September 19th  
*vs Southeastern Louisiana*
- September 28th  
*Family Weekend*
- October 3rd  
*at California Baptist*
- October 6th  
*at Grand Canyon*
- October 12th  
*at Seattle U*
- October 17th  
*Military Appreciation Night*
- October 20th  
*SoctoberFest*
- October 26th  
*Senior Day*



FALL SPORTS

# Purple and White is wrestling their way to Division I status

BY HELENA KNUTSON  
*Multimedia Journalist*

As the school year begins, students at Tarleton State University might notice some new additions to the athletics program, one of which is the new wrestling club.

Coach Grant Leeth, former assistant coach at Stanford University, came to Tarleton on a mission to bring D1 wrestling to the university.

“I’ve been wrestling since I was six,” Leeth said. “Having the opportunity to potentially bring division 1 wrestling to the state of Texas was extremely enticing.”

Coach Leeth isn’t the only one on this mission to bring D1 wrestling to Texas University. Several of his wrestlers are also excited to be part of this.

Freshman wrestler Daniela Martinez is excited for all of the possibilities.

“It feels amazing thinking about how I could make a mark here,” Martinez said. “Becoming the first national champion, the first all-American; I can do that as long as I put the work in.”

Another member of the wrestling team, freshman Laird Bordo’n was excited to join the wrestling team because of the opportunity to start something new.

“It’s so cool because I’ve seen so many good wrestlers have to leave the state of Texas to get an opportunity somewhere,” Bordo’n said. “To be part of something here in Texas and start a new chapter here is awesome.”

The new team has also gotten support from other schools. Several other Universities have helped shine a light on the club by repping their Tarleton gear. One of the biggest acts of support is from the donors who helped fund a training facility for these athletes.

“It’s amazing. Just the ability to come and lift or wrestle whenever you want and get better is so cool.” Bordo’n said.

With a total of 58 wrestlers, the recruiting process wasn’t easy for Leeth but his mission has struck the interest of several wrestlers,



PHOTO BY HELENA KNUTSON

Two wrestlers practicing their takedowns on the mat of the new facility.

many of them from out of state. Freshman Gavin Blondeaux, originally from Nevada, came to Tarleton because of Coach Leeth’s ambitious dreams.

“I like the idea of being part of something new like the culture here and setting a bar for something that’s going to be very big,” Blondeaux said.

The wrestling club is excited for this upcoming season and can’t wait to reach the goals that they have been setting.

“I want to be able to get better and to encourage the little girls back home,” Martinez

said. “I want to be able to make a mark, and if those little girls come here, they will be able to see that.”

Tarleton’s wrestling club will have its first match on Nov. 9 and 10 at Carl Albert in Oklahoma.

With having a different circumstance last season, Gillispie learned in new

FALL SPORTS

# Tarleton volleyball gears up for the 2024 season

BY LINDSEY HUGHES  
*Multimedia Journalist*

The 2024 season of Women’s Volleyball is officially underway at Tarleton State University. Fans got the chance to show support for the players off the court as the team kicked off the season at the annual volleyball block party on Aug. 19.

Tarleton will be hosting 10 themed home games this year. The season will begin with opening night, which will take place on Sept. 19 at Wisdom Gym against Oral Roberts. Spectators can score some swag in the form of mini volleyballs when showing their support for the Texans.

Several other notable upcoming themed games are Greek Night on the morning of Sept. 20 against Houston Christian and Bloktober on Oct. 3 against Seattle U.

There are also several upcoming home games that will be themed for good causes and to raise awareness, including Education Day on Sept. 20

against Alcorn State, where Texans will welcome over 200 elementary students to the event. Pink Out/ Dig for a Cure will take place on Oct. 26 against Utah Tech, in support of breast cancer awareness month.

Coach Mary Schindler has been the head volleyball coach at Tarleton for 20 years and has brought the Texans through 15 winning seasons during that time. Under her leadership, Tarleton women’s volleyball has reached new heights.

“I believe it should be fun. This is an opportunity. We get to do this, it’s not a requirement... Our job is to represent ourselves, the university, and the team in the best way possible. For me doing that is being the last team in the gym, the team with the best culture, the team that’s seen in the community, the team that is building relationships that are going to last a lifetime” Shindler said.

Coach Shindler made it clear that she has high hopes for many of the up-and-coming players on the team, both new recruits and incoming freshmen.

“We had a freshman come in last year who competed on the beach program, Tatum Busch. She came in early...she is going to be an athlete.” Shindler said.

Longstanding Tarleton volleyball player Emma Halcomb also expressed excitement for the new season with her team after returning from a break last year.

“This year is pretty exciting because I feel like our chemistry is really good off the court, so it translates well whenever we’re on the court,” Halcomb said.“Taking a year off last year really helped me gain confidence in myself, and because I am older I’ve realized that it’s only as stressful as you make it.”

The 2023 season was an exciting one, the purple and white made it to the WAC Tournament for the first time since becoming a Division I program. This year, with a team of almost evenly mixed new and returning players, Thr Texans are hoping to overcome any challenges they may face and go even further.

# Billy Gillispie returns as head coach for Men’s basketball

BY JAXON HANSARD  
*Sports Editor*

The winningest team in Tarleton State University Men’s Basketball history is back and March Madness eligible, but there are some things that are different from last season that will ultimately test the team.

The biggest change is the return of recently extended head coach Billy Gillispie, who’s back in driver’s seat coaching this season. In the ‘23-’24, season Gillispie stepped down early in the season with a 2-2 record because of medical circumstances. At the time, Assistant Coach Jones took over the rest of the season for Gillispie. On Feb. 1, Gillispie was medically cleared to return but let Jones carry out the rest of the season, where he won WAC Coach of the Year.

With having a different circumstance last season, Gillispie learned in new

ways than before.

“You always learn. I mean if you don’t learn it you might as well just give it up. We’re always learning and this game is constantly changing,” Gillispie said.

Through NIL (Name Image and Likeness) commits, recruiting and the transfer portal, Tarleton has been working hard to refill a great roster to compete in the WAC. During the offseason in trying to get the best players available, Tarleton had a storybook moment of bringing back a beloved record-holding player in Forward Freddy Hicks for his final year of eligibility.

“Having Freddy back is going to mean so much to us, much more than his playing ability. He is a great person, a great leader and one of the best guys I’ve ever coached as far as having everything you need to be successful,” Gillispie said.

Hick’s career started in Stephenville with Gillispie when Tarleton just started their transition period to Division 1. Hicks would go on to win WAC Freshman of the Year and is currently looking to increase his totals and records here at Tarleton where he is second in the program history in field goal attempts, offensive rebounds and blocks.

This season being the first to play in the NCAA tournament due to eligibility doesn’t change much for Coach Gillespie’s return as he will focus more on the culture and success.

“Ever since we’ve been here our goal is to win every game, and the way you make the postseason is try to win every single game and kind of develop your team into a team that is ready,” Gillispie said. “We’re very accountable to the program, to the school. We have a great deal of pride in the community. And so we don’t accept failure, we



don’t accept anything less than strive for perfection.”

The culture is “off the charts” and is built through Gillespie’s coaching and high accountability.



FALL SPORTS

# International athletes, youth teammates reunite at Tarleton

BY BROOKLYN MCKINNEY  
Multimedia Journalist

Imagine experiencing college almost 4,000 miles away, doing what you love in exchange for a scholarship, and experiencing it all with your best friend.

Well, that’s exactly what Tarleton State University students Kimberley Dóra Hjálmarsdóttir and Una Hlynisdóttir decided to do.

Hjálmarsdóttir and Hlynisdóttir both grew up in Akureyri, a town in North Iceland bustling with entertainment, yet small enough to feel intimate and close to nature.

Kimberely Hjálmarsdóttir is a midfielder and defender for the Tarleton women’s soccer team, and Una Hlynisdóttir is a forward. They played for the Youth National Teams of Iceland together for many years.

“We have experience with very good players from back home, and we played against people who were in top leagues from Germany,” Hjálmarsdóttir said.

But their bond goes deeper than just soccer. Hjálmarsdóttir and Hlynisdóttir really got to know each other during a middle school theater class. They have been inseparable ever since and even decided to attend college on the other side of the world together.

“I wanted to get the opportunity to go to school and play football together. And it was nice we got a good scholarship too, so we didn’t have to pay a lot,” Hjálmarsdóttir said.

While they may have experience with soccer, they didn’t have any outside of Akureyri, Iceland, and their previous soccer team.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TARLETON ATHLETICS

Una Hlynisdottir and Kimberly Hjalmarsdottir

“For me, it was just the experience of trying something new, like completely new. Because I had never been in the States. So just meeting completely new people, a new team,” Hlynisdóttir said.

To Hjálmarsdóttir and Hlynisdóttir, becoming Tarleton Texans has been exciting and fresh so far.

“Everything is just bigger here. Like the food, you get more when you go to restaurants,” Hlynisdóttir said.

Hlynisdóttir loves sushi, while Hjálmarsdóttir’s favorite meal is steak with baked potatoes. But fish will always have a special place in their hearts.

“We miss fish, there’s a lot more fish in Iceland,” Hlynisdóttir said.

Having been from Iceland, Hjálmarsdóttir and Hlynisdóttir had never been to a Walmart or Target store.

“We like trying new things here,” Hjálmarsdóttir said. “Our first trip to Walmart was really fun.”

Another concept that was initially foreign to them was a waffle maker.

Andrew Loewe, the assistant Director for Athletic Communications

said, “You guys were very confused with the waffle maker in the hotel.”.

“They made waffles for the first time in San Antonio, and them and the Australian were very confused on what the maker was.”

Not only the food but also the customs and culture are very different in Texas.

“I found it kind of funny that they (the women’s soccer team) were like line dancing in the locker room today,” Hjálmarsdóttir said.

Instead of dressing up for Halloween, they have Öskudagur which takes place the first week of March.

“It’s kind of like Halloween but not scary,” Hlynisdóttir said. “We go to companies instead of people’s houses and sing for them. And there’s costumes, and they give you candy.”

In addition to exploring everything Texas has to offer, Hlynisdóttir and Hjálmarsdóttir love hanging out with their team.

“It’s just easier to talk to each other when we’re all the same age, going through the same things,”

Hjálmarsdóttir said. “And everyone is super nice too.”

Hlynisdóttir and Hjálmarsdóttir enjoy studying together in their free time because they are both computer science majors. They are grateful to have been able to lean on each other for support and meet so many new people at Tarleton.

“Just put yourself out there. Don’t be shy because if you’re going alone, you’re going to need to get to know people,” Hjálmarsdóttir said.

Hlynisdóttir and Hjálmarsdóttir have a lot of soccer experience under their belt that the Tarleton Texan soccer team is lucky to have, and they have already done more than just break the ice with their teammates.

For more information, go to: <https://www.northiceland.is/en/destinations/towns/akureyri>, <https://grapevine.is/news/2020/02/26/oskudagur-is-today-heres-everything-you-should-know/>, and <https://tarletonsports.com/sports/wsoc/roster>.

FALL SPORTS

# Mike Tabor: The artist behind the Texan Rider

BY THOMAS ENGELBERT  
Associate Producer

Tarleton State University’s campus is home to many cherished statues and landmarks, but few are as iconic as the Texan Rider, now standing proudly outside the Memorial Stadium. This powerful bronze figure, symbolizing school spirit and pride, was brought to life by renowned artist and Tarleton alumnus, Mike Tabor.

The Texan Rider statue, now a focal point on campus, was a deeply personal project for Tabor.

“We’ve never had kind of a life-like representation of the Texan Rider. It’s always been presented as a graphic,” Tabor said. “I told the university, I see that, this stadium is absolutely beautiful, but we need a, we need a rider out front of it. We need to make a statement.”

Tabor approached the project with a deep respect for tradition while embracing growth, all while managing a leukemia diagnosis from over eight years ago. Through daily medication, he continues to create and pursue his artistic vision.

“I didn’t wanna reinvent the wheel,” Tabor said.

Knowing what the Texan Rider had always looked like, he translated the familiar image into the lifelike figure that now stands on campus. Creating the statue was more than just a professional commission for him, it was an honor.

“It means a lot to me, and then this being my alma mater, I really wanted to do something special,” Tabor said.

Before fully embracing his artistic career, Mike Tabor spent years managing a ranch in central Texas. Tabor had a brief job as a teacher and coach. He worked for the Calico Cattle Company, serving as a consultant for absentee



PHOTO COURTESY OF TARLETON MARKETING

This photo was taken at the statue’s unveiling, after the tarp was taken off.

landowners and managing his family’s ranch. His responsibilities ranged from livestock sales and pasture management to construction and fence design.

It was during his time as a rancher that Tabor would spend Sundays drawing cattle, a hobby that ultimately sparked his professional journey in art.

“I would draw on Sunday afternoons just for entertainment. And my wife said that if you’re gonna do these drawings, well, you should try to sell them,” Tabor said. “And, so, I took a drawing I had done of a well-known big master bull up to the Fort Worth Stock Show. And that kinda led to doing some drawings for beef kettle publications and really got me into

the professional art business.”

Tabor’s passion for art began in elementary school, where he discovered his love for visual arts, particularly pencil drawings. His early talent led him to sell a drawing of a well-known Beefmaster bull at the Fort Worth Stock Show. Though he started in 2D art, his path to sculpture began unexpectedly after the death of his close friend and sculptor, Dan Coates. Tasked with completing Coates’ unfinished bronze pieces, Tabor taught himself how to sculpt, launching a successful career in 3D art—something he initially found challenging but eventually embraced.

“And, so when I got started, I really had a lot of doubt and self-doubt,” Tabor said. “Anyway,

it took me a long time to get to where I felt confident and comfortable with what I was doing.” Tobars wife pitches in “You’re also on a timeline of being a teacher.” “Yeah. At that time, I was still teaching and trying to meet deadlines in the sculpting business. It was a new experience for me,” Tobar said.

Despite his successful career, Tabor has faced personal health challenges in the past years with determination.

“Everyone has something they have to deal with, and this just happens to be mine,” Tabor said.

“It’s not easy, but it hasn’t stopped me from doing what I love.”



FALL SPORTS

# Tarleton Mens’ Basketball expectations high for the upcoming 2024-25 season

BY BARRETT JORDAN  
*Multimedia Journalist*

The bar has never been set higher for Tarleton Men’s Basketball than it is for the fast-approaching 2024-25 season. The team seeks to build upon last year’s incredible 25-10 overall and 16-4 conference records. The team has several returning players including one familiar face that is sure to have an impact on the court.

Freddy Hicks spent his first 3 years with Tarleton beginning in 2020 and lasting through the 2022-23 season. Last season was spent at Arkansas State University, and he has returned with the Texans in what is his final collegiate season.

“We’re going to win the WAC,” Hicks said. “I think my experience will help me a lot and it will also help me lead some of the younger guys and hopefully get our team in the right direction.”

Hicks has the opportunity to build on several categories that he already leads the program in during the Division I era and to potentially add additional records to his title.

The Texans will begin the season at Southern Methodist University on Nov. 4. The remaining non-conference games have yet to be released on the schedule.

The Texans will enter conference play hosting UT Arlington on Jan. 4. The following week they will endure two road games at Southern Utah University and Utah Tech University.

They will return home to face California Baptist University on Jan.16 and then hit the road again for a game against Grand Canyon University on



Guard Bubu Benjamin uses his size to go up high and block the shot attempt in a home conference game against UT Rio Grande Valley.

Jan.18.

After a game on the road versus Abilene Christian on Jan.23, the Texans will face repeat opponents in Utah Tech and Southern Utah at home the next week.

The Texans will then have six additional conference games in February and two in March leading up to the 2025 WAC Basketball Tournament.

Izzy Miles is a sophomore guard for the Texans that played in 23 games during the 2023-24 season.

“We got a lot of new pieces, a lot of guys coming from overseas and junior college guys that are ready to help us and ready to play hard,” Miles said.

Despite newer additions to the team and several notable departures, the Texans remain confident in their team chemistry and ability to succeed together on the court.

“I feel like we’re going to surprise a lot of people,” sophomore guard Bubu Benjamin said. “Even though people say we’re young and we’re inexperienced, the team that we have,

I think it’s going to surprise a lot of people.”

The men’s basketball coaching staff is led by head coach Billy Gillispie, assistant coaches Luke Adams, Zach Settembre and Glynn Cyprien.

The Texans are calling on students and fans to attend home games and bring high energy.

“We need everyone to come out and support us so we can get Wisdom packed again,” Miles said.

The season begins for Tarleton Men’s Basketball in Dallas on Nov. 4.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TARLETON ATHLETICS

FALL SPORTS

# Football for dummies

BY ASHTYN HANSARD  
*Executive Producer*

Football is a popular sport in colleges and schools everywhere. However, if you don’t pay close attention, you may not fully understand all the roles and rules of the beloved sport. Here is a simple guide to understanding football.

For the most part, football can be vaguely understood by the general audience. Each game has two teams, both playing to win. The teams will switch off being offensive and defensive and try to score a touchdown at their end of the field. Offense is the team that has the ball in their possession, and defense is the team trying to get the ball from them and stop them from scoring. But what else is there to know?

I asked some students on campus what part of football confuses them the most. “I’m confused about how they line up and then run towards each other at the kickoff,” said Lindsey Hughes, a sophomore at Tarleton State University.

The way the players position themselves depends on what their plan of action is. If they’re on offense, then they form a line of players in front of the quarterback to protect him. If they’re on defense, then the defensive linemen will line up to try and get to the opposing team’s quarterback. Many of the positions have their own goals to help progress the play down the field.

Another student, Brooklyn McKinney, was more confused about



PHOTO BY JAXON HANSARD

Tarleton's practice footballs at the the Baylor game.

the players.

“I just want to understand what each player does and how it’s important to the game,” McKinney said.

During a football game, each team has 11 players out on the field. The most important players are the quarterback, the running back, the receiver and the linemen. These players are vital for the offense. These roles help put the plays into effect and move the team down the field when on offense.

The linemen are also extremely important when it comes to defense, as they are the main players to attack the other team. Their main focus is to tackle their offense and to make their way to the opposite team’s quarterback.

As the game progresses, there are different ways the players can make a move that changes the game. One of

these moves is called an interception.

Let’s say a player from Team A throws the ball but a player from Team B jumps in and catches it. This will make the ball go from being in Team A’s possession to being in Team B’s possession. This would then make Team B go from playing defense to playing offense and vice versa for Team A.

Coaches of the team are also given three time-outs per half, six in total. These time-outs can be used to re-discuss their strategies, avoid penalties and manage the time they have left in the half. Although it’s not a rule, coaches often use their remaining time-outs towards the end of the half to save as much time as they can to help bring in a touchdown.

Even with this guide as some

simpler explanations of how the game works, football can still be pretty confusing. I spoke with senior sports communications major Jaxon Hansard and asked him to explain football as simply as possible in a sentence or two.

“Football is a violent game of tug and war where momentum and strategy are important to gain leverage and yardage on the field to try and outscore the opposing team,” Hansard said. “Everyone must play their part to be successful.”

After reading this guide, hopefully you’ll be able to understand a little more about football than you did before. Also, if you want to support Tarleton’s football team, be sure to buy your tickets and go watch our Tarleton Texans play their hearts out.



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