

UTEP trains coaches to drink alcohol responsibly

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Robert Seltzer

It sounds like the perfect class for a party-loving fraternity member: Alcohol 101.

"Now there's a course I can ace," the frat member might say.

Think again, Budweiser Breath. Alcohol 101 is not about imbibing; it is about imbibing responsibly, about knowing the consequences of your drinking habits. This is a serious issue -- so serious that it is being discussed in the halls of academia.

UTEP is offering an alcohol-education program, but the computer course is not for the general student population. It is for the coaches -- a mandate that follows the recent arrest of basketball coach Billy Gillispie for allegedly driving while intoxicated. The program may represent a sad commentary on our society, but sad or not, it is necessary.

Gillispie, who will be arraigned in April, has maintained his

innocence, and it is important to remember that he has not been convicted of any crime. But, regardless of his guilt or innocence, his arrest has trained a powerful spotlight on a social problem. And if it leads to greater awareness of its consequences, the community will benefit.

"It goes beyond the Gillispie issue," UTEP track coach Bob Kitchens said. "It's an issue we all need to be aware of."

Making a difference

The course is aimed at all coaches, whether or not they drink. Take Kitchens; he is not a drinker, partly because he does not want to feel as if a cleanup hitter is taking batting practice in his brainpan. But he has to take the course, too.

"I've been around alcohol all my life," he said. "My mom and dad were alcoholics. Don't get me wrong. I did not have a bad family life. My parents weren't mean to me, by any stretch. But I chose not to go that route, and

their experience had something to do with that decision. ... Plus, I never wanted to do anything that made me feel bad."

If Kitchens does not drink, what would he gain from the course?

"Just because you don't actually do a certain thing doesn't mean you shouldn't know more about it," he said. "The more you know about something, the better person you are. Education makes a difference for everybody."

Could expand

Developed by the Century Council, a nonprofit organization that fights alcohol abuse, the course should be available the second week in March, UTEP Athletics Director Bob Stull said.

"The program has been around for about 10 years, but it's being upgraded," Stull said. "After we review it ourselves, we may require that all student-athletes complete either all or part of the program."