Florida State's Bowden: 'We've Been Mighty Fortunate'

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It didn't take Bobby Bowden long to turn a loser into a winner—a big winner at that.

Bowden state away from West Virginia in the dead of winter less than two years ago to take over as Florida State head football coach.

Comparing the Seminoles had won a total of just four games in three years prior to the hiring of Bowden.

In Bowden's first three games last year, it looked like a slow rebuilding process. Miami of Florida trampled the Seminoles 47-0 in one of the games and two others were losses. But the third defeat was a 24-7 setback to Oklahoma—the first ray of light.

Over the last eight games, Florida State won five times. Now the Seminoles visit beleaguered Virginia Tech for the Hokies' homecoming Saturday with a 6-1 record and a ranking of 15th in the nation according to the Associated Press.

How did Bowden do it?

"We've been mighty fortunate," said the Florida State coach in a southern drawl typical of his native Alabama.

Then the reason.

"When we got beat 47-0, we made wholesale changes the next week," said Bowden. "We haven't played a bad game since although we haven't won every game."

Bowden took over the sagging program from Darrell Mudra, whose masterpiece it was to win just four games in three seasons.

"He (Mudra) was getting some good players," claims Bowden, who obviously had some material in the inherited program.

"He might have done the job if they had let him stay. But he's different than any player you've ever seen. He coached from the press box and a lot of people got on him.

"They didn't have a lot of training rules. The town of Tallahassee (where State is located) is pretty conservative."

When Bowden arrived, rules came with him. He's not worried about players being too modern these days to be limited by a few standards.

"They've accepted the rules. If the players are too modern and don't like the rules, I don't recruit them," he said simply.

Bowden says he expected improvement, but he never figured Florida State would have the kind of success it's enjoying so soon.

We started six freshmen last year and three this year. So it's happened sooner than I thought and that's why I'm reluctant to say we have a good team. Young people come and go and you're second and not number one."

According to Bowden, the state of Florida has 9,000,000 people. While Florida State doesn't get all the choicest athletes, Bowden says there are enough to go around. Last year Florida State got 18 Floridians and six more from south Georgia, which is like home recruiting territory to the northern Florida based school.

"He chose Florida State because he knew he could play sooner—quicker than he could at other places," said Bowden of a player who obviously got away from some of the big Southeastern Conference powers.

Recruiting is one of the reasons Bowden left West Virginia on the fly during the winter of 1976 and getting players like Simmons, according to the Seminole coach, is more likely to happen at his new job.

"We could get some good players at West Virginia," said Bowden, "but only 150 schools in the state played football. We had to go to Pennsylvania, Ohio and Virginia where you're second and not number one."

"We haven't taken over No. 1 in this state. Florida still gets the majority of the top 10 players. If I don't get the last two of the year, we got two and two others went to other schools," said Bowden.

"But out of the last 30, I'd say we got more than broke even. We don't have the best material yet—but we are getting closer."

This is essentially how Bowden has taken a downtrodden program back to the top. He's been recognized for this effort because he has been rumored as moving on to Auburn or Mississippi if and when those two SEC schools fire their coaches following the season.

"Nothing to it," said Bowden, who was back to the book answers.

"My plan is to stay and build us up. I like Tallahassee. If Florida State was in a conference, it might be better. But it doesn't mean that much to me."