

Gila Monster Girls' Basketball

Putting the Scare Back in the 1A South Region

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Gila Bend is a great name for a southwestern Arizona town. Located in southwestern Arizona at the junction of I-8 and Arizona 85, Gila Bend would have also been a great title for one of those black-and-white giant lizard movies from the 1950s, or maybe a sagebrush Western starring Gary Cooper. Yet the only thing scary about Gila Bend this winter is their 1A girls' basketball team. Before Dallas Luttrell became the Monsters head coach in the 2005-2006 season, the Monsters probably scared their opponents as much as one could be scared by a stuffed gecko. To say the program was down was an understatement; the Monsters had reached the girls' state basketball tournament only twice in school history, and in two decades could only muster two winning seasons.

Like a dusty road winding across a mesa, it's easy to get lost amid the blowing sands of time. Successful programs and failing programs alike often seem to be pushed along by prevailing winds, an invisible force pushing them either forwards or backwards. Gila Bend was, and had been, drifting backwards. Until suddenly the winds change and the lizard script is officially scrapped for a Western, and Sheriff Luttrell (actually a sergeant in the Arizona Highway Patrol) rides into town to set things right; he had been transferred to Gila Bend to run the Highway Patrol office, and approached the school to see what openings were available. Apparently there wasn't a long line of candidates to coach girls' basketball.

Naysayers said Luttrell would be lucky to win one game his initial year. Instead, the Monsters won seven. In 2006-2007, the Monsters

went 12-14; in 2007-2008, they finished 19-12, reaching the state tournament for the first time since the 1981-1982 season. It wasn't easy resurrecting a program that some considered hopeless. Luttrell began with no assistants, and initially found only eight players on his bench. Eight well-conditioned players.

"Defense is our offense," Luttrell said. "We press and run a lot; not many people are going to outrun us."

