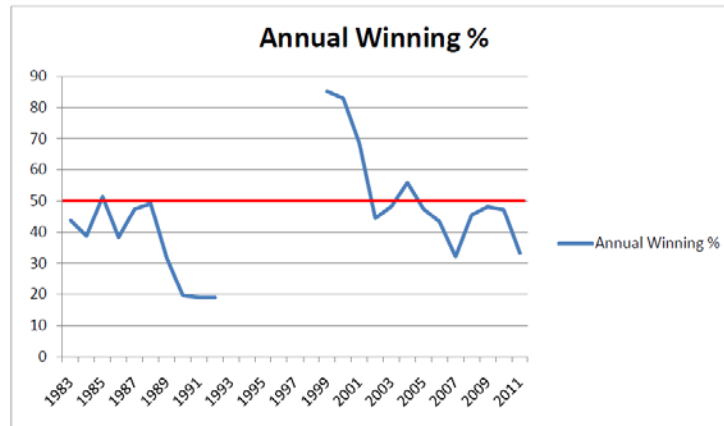


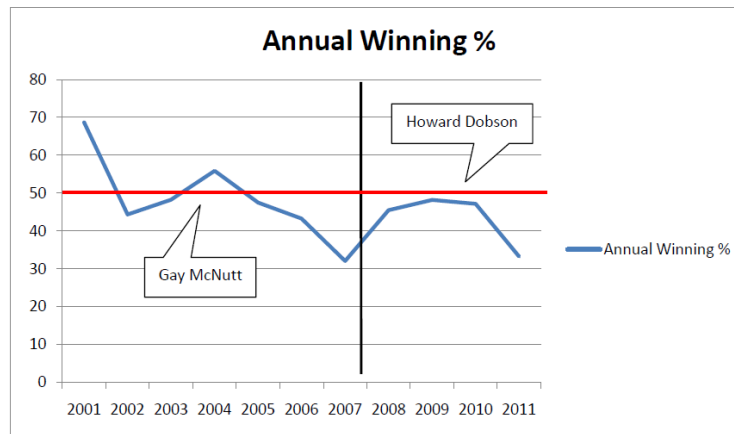
Back on Blocks?

A Look at the State of USM's Softball Program

The story of USM's softball programs occurs in two parts. As the insert below shows, the program began in the early 1980s, but was put on proverbial blocks by the early 1990s. During the early era, the program struggled to reach the .500 mark, declining precipitously (to about .200) from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, when the program was shelved for a few years.



The program re-emerged in the late 1990s, when it was arguably, for a brief time at least, the greatest sports program that USM has ever had. The team appeared in two consecutive College World Series under former coach Lu Harris-Champer, now at the helm at the University of Georgia, and it boasted some of the best talent in the nation. However, the USM administration reportedly declined to meet Harris' modest requests for upgrades, etc., and she bolted for greener pastures in Athens. Since Harris-Champer's brief stint, the program has seen its second precipitous decline, and it is currently working its way toward prior depths, when the program was put on blocks.



The second insert (above) shows that current head coach Howard Dobson is doing much worse than Harris-Champer's successor, Gay McNutt. In fact, *the Martha Saunders hire* (Dobson) has failed to achieve even the modest successes of the program's original coaches, as seen in the first insert. Dobson's failings have some questioning whether or not it's time to stack up the blocks once again.