

SPORTS

Aggies dreaming of NCAA's

A&M needs good SWC tourney to help guarantee an invitation

By BRANDON BERRY
Sports Writer

The Texas A&M men's basketball team is hoping "Big D" stands for "Big Dreams" as they kickoff the 1985 Southwest Conference Postseason Basketball Classic against TCU in Dallas' Reunion Arena at 12:08 this afternoon.

"We've been dreaming of winning the tournament for a long time," said A&M junior forward Al Pulliam. "I think we've got a real good chance to win it."

Should the Aggies get past the Horned Frogs, they will face the winner of the Texas Tech-Baylor game in tomorrow's semi-finals.

The winner of the tournament receives an automatic bid to the NCAA National Championship Tournament.

"I think we should definitely receive NCAA consideration," said A&M Coach Shelby Metcalf. "I don't understand talk that our conference will only get two teams invited. From top to bottom, we have one of the best conferences in the country."

"The easiest thing would be to just win the tournament and get invited to the NCAA's regardless."

Seven other coaches at seven other SWC schools have been telling their teams the same thing — we have a shot at a sure NCAA invitation if we win the SWC tourney.

Texas Tech, the surprise SWC regular-season champion with a 12-4 record and the team seeded to meet A&M in Saturday's semi-finals, is the Rodney Daingerfield of the tournament — they get no respect.

"I think Texas Tech is going to have a tough time winning that tournament," said ESPN sports commentator Dick Vitale. "Gerald Myers, their coach, has done a great job of preparing his team and having them at their potential every time out."

"They're a very intelligent and experienced team, but they don't really have the talent of SMU or Arkansas. I don't think they will be able to win against one of the really talented teams if that team was having a really hot night."

SMU, one of the three teams tied for second-place in the conference with a 10-6 record, wasn't expected to need any "hot nights" to win the tourney.

The Mustangs were everyone's pre-season pick to gallop away with

the conference roses. And while they have shown their talent and experience against such non-conference opponents as Louisville, Kentucky, Oklahoma and North Carolina, they frequently looked disjointed and uninspired against their conference rivals.

"Don't let their record fool you," Metcalf said. "I don't know what their problem is, but you can bet they'll have it worked out before they get into the tournament. If you listen to talk around, SMU is still the favorite because of their talent."

"They could still make it to the Final Four."

Arkansas, the other team to tie with the Aggies for second place at 10-6, has been to the Final Four once in Coach Eddie Sutton's tenure, but the Razorbacks are in danger of not making the tournament for the first time in 10 years.

Senior 6-foot-11 postman Joe Kleine has carried the young Hogs on his shoulders, along with at least two defenders from the opposing team. The double-team defenses Arkansas faces are made possible by their guards' inability to hit the outside shot.

But the SWC tournament and the ensuing NCAA tournament don't use the 45-second shot clock that the Razorbacks have been "forced" to use during the regular season. Sutton's slow-down, patient offense will likely make the Hogs more of a threat than when they couldn't, sometimes literally, wait all day to take a high-percentage shot.

TCU, Texas and Houston all finished the year within three games of second place and they all have winning records for the season. They are all considered long-shots, but they are also considered "possible upset-makers."

Houston, who has been to the Final Four the past three years, is considered especially dangerous.

"Houston has exceptional talent," Metcalf said, "and they've been there before and that's got to help. Alvin Franklin is just an exceptional player and you get the feeling they could just explode at any time."

"But don't forget about TCU. (Coach Jim) 'Killer' (Killingsworth) always has them tough come tournament time and they have a fine team this year. It's not very comforting knowing we have to play them in the very first game."



Photo by DEAN SAITO

Texas A&M forward Kenny Brown (right) eyes the goal as TCU's Jamie Dixon (23) eyes Brown in a game earlier this season.

The Aggies and Horned Frogs will eye one another again at 12:08 p.m. today in the first round of the Southwest Conference Classic.

The Aggies' schedule in the tournament appears to be an advantageous one.

They have matched up well against TCU (winning both games this season) and Tech (splitting the games 1-1), as opposed to the other half of the draw, with SMU and Arkansas in which the Ags are 0-4 this season.

The troubled Baylor Bears, with the only losing record in the tournament, round out the field. How troubled?

During the regular season, the Bears lost a player with one eye, John Wheeler, who used his ears and a tape deck to record rules violations by Coach Jim Haller.

Haller resigned, effective immediately at the end of the season, and the entire program has since undergone a purge of "Biblical" proportions. The Bears are considered the only real no-chancer in the tournament.

But the Aggies do have a chance — a good chance according to Metcalf.

"We have a chance to do some good things in the tournament and what we do will have a big say in whether we get out of town afterwards," he said. "The guys have had a good year and we need to keep on doing what we've been doing that's been successful."

"Anybody could win it this year. Just look at what's been happening the rest of the year."

Maybe Baylor should start making reservations for the NCAA's.

Swimmers vying for SWC title

Nash's Ags expecting 4th place team finish

By MARY McWHORTER
Reporter

Texas A&M swimming coach Mel Nash said he expects the men's swim team to place fourth in the Southwest Conference Men's Swimming and Diving Championships held at Fayetteville, Ark. Thursday through Saturday.

Nash said that Texas A&M has several excellent swimmers to compete in the championship.

"Chris O'Neil could be a national champion. He is that good," Nash said.

O'Neil has the best time in the conference this year in the 100-yard butterfly with a time of 48.76 seconds. This qualifies O'Neil for the NCAA Championships to be held March 28-30 at the University of Texas in Austin.

John Heldenfels and Chris Emig are other Aggies Nash expects to do well.

Heldenfels has the fifth best time in the 200-yard butterfly in the conference with a 50.22 and can be an All-American, Nash said.

Emig is the leading Aggie swimmer with a 52.51 in the 100 yard backstroke and a 1:52.92 in the 200 yard.

"In all, we are deeper than we have ever been," he said. "Our 18th man on this year's team would have probably been our tenth or 11th man on any other team we've had in the six years I've been here."

Although the team began the season with nine new members out of a team total of 18, Nash said that it has the potential to be most talented and accomplished team that he has ever had.

The Aggie men finished the 1984 season ranked fourth in the Southwest Conference moving up from fifth place. In '84, Texas placed first, Southern Methodist placed second and Arkansas third.

Nash said he expects the results to be about the same for the 1985 SWC Championships.

"I would say that SMU and Texas will fight it out as always for the team championship," Nash said. "Arkansas should be considered third and us fourth."

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