

The Battalion



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Ags Win SWC Title With 79-66 Victory



WE'RE THE GREATEST

It was a time for rejoicing in the Aggie dressing room last night as Coach Shelby Metcalf's cagers clinched the Southwest Conference championship. Joining in the celebration from left to right above are assistant coach Jim Culpepper, Sonny Benefield, Billy Bob Barnett, Ronnie Peret, Oliver Biggers and assistant coach Terry Trippet. (Photo by Mike Wright)

By RICHARD CAMPBELL
Assistant Sports Editor

As Bill Cooksey's jump shot lay on the rim for three full seconds and finally dropped in, so the Texas Aggies dropped into the Southwest Conference throne room Tuesday night by whipping the Arkansas Razorbacks, 79-66, before 5,800 fans in G. Rollie White.

This victory had iced away at least a tie for the conference crown, but the underdog Texas Christian Horned Frogs helped pave the way by upsetting the second place Baylor Bears to give the Aggies the outright championship, their first since 1964.

The victory gave A&M an 11-1 conference mark while Baylor is now 8-4 and tied for second place with Southern Methodist, who beat Texas, 71-69. With only two games left, the Aggies have the mathematical edge on the rest of the field.

A&M WILL now meet the Trinity Tigers of the Southland Conference in the university division playoffs of the NCAA on March 8 in Fort Worth for the right to advance to the Midwest Regionals.

The Aggies used fine outside shooting coupled with a fierce rebounding attack to put down the scrappy but outmanned Razorbacks. A&M, led by Billy Bob Barnett with 16 rebounds, completely dominated the boards by pulling down 50 to 26 for the Hogs. Barnett also led all scorers with 21 points to put in one of his finest games of the year.

Towering seven-footer Steve Niles dropped in two free throws to start the contest and give the Aggies their first lead at 2-0 while sharpshooting Sonny Benefield kept A&M ahead with two long jump shots. With 16:22 left, Razorback Benton Cone, a quick 5'11" guard from Wilmot, Ark., popped in two 20-foot jumpers to push the Hogs ahead for the first time, 8-7.

ARKANSAS STAYED in front until Benefield hit a 24-foot

jumper to put A&M ahead 15-14. From there on, the lead changed hands seven times and was tied three times until with 7:54 left in the first half, junior Bill Brown found 6'9" Ronnie Peret free under the basket for a layup and put the Ags ahead to stay, 25-23. Sophomore deadeye Bill Cooksey got hot in the remainder of the first half and hit three straight jumpers to give the Aggies their largest lead at 39-29. Cone then trimmed the margin to 39-31 with a last second 26-footer for the halftime score.

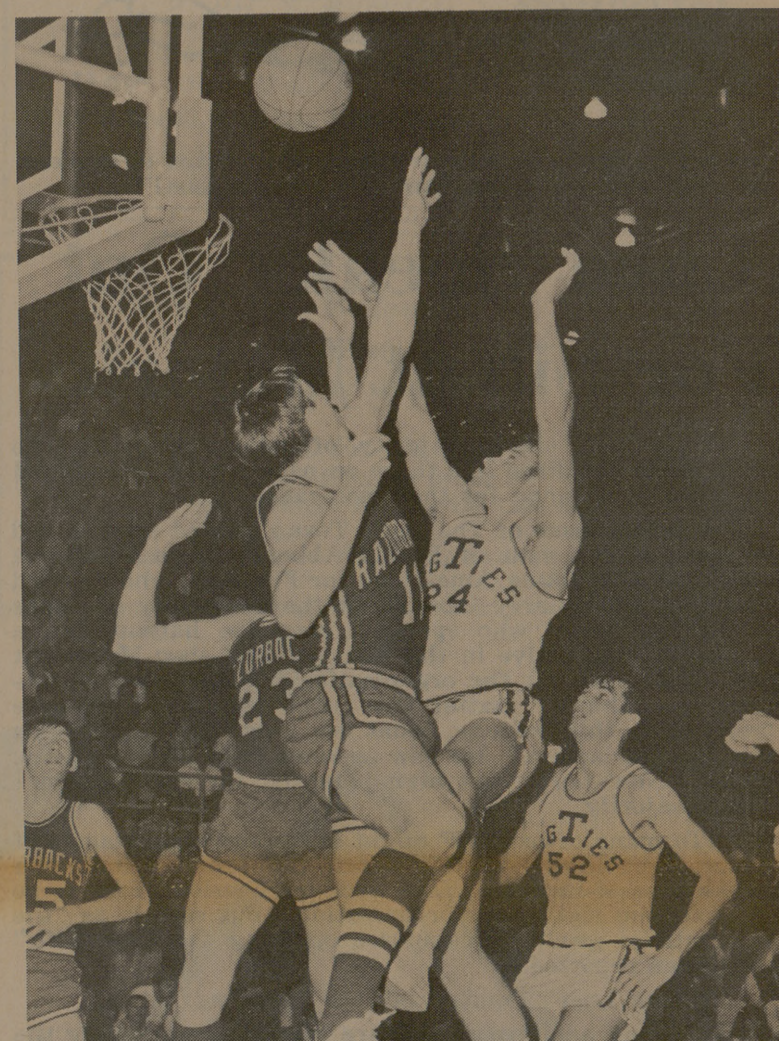
After the dust had cleared, the Ags had dragged down 22 rebounds to only nine for the visiting Hogs and had hit 16 of 31 from the field for 51.6 per cent to 13 of 28 and 46.4 per cent for the Razorbacks. The turnovers were tied at eight apiece and the free throws were close as the Razorbacks hit five of five from the line while the Cadets connected on seven of eight.

IN THE second half, the Razorbacks stayed within ten points and even trimmed the margin to eight with 12 minutes left and it looked like the Hogs might make a determined bid for an upset. But two ticks of the clock later, their chances all but went out the window when their leading scorer, 6'5" James Eldridge of Green Forest, Ark., fouled Cooksey and departed from the contest with his fifth personal foul. This spurred the Aggies to action and they proceeded to build their lead to 15 points on Cooksey's 27-foot jumper with 8:33 left.

But the sticky Hogs fought back on the outside shooting of sophomore Donnie Watts, who had to play with a heavily taped left knee which he injured in the first half, to pull within eleven at 63-52 with 5:46 left. After two free throws by Barnett, Robert McKenzie drove the baseline, made a layup, and was fouled by Barnett. He missed the free throw but Arkansas after another Watts shot had narrowed the gap to only nine points at 65-56. Fol-

lowing a timeout by the Aggies, Chuck Smith drove the baseline and was fouled by Watts. He made the bucket but missed the free throw and the Ags led 67-56.

ARKANSAS called a timeout to talk the situation over with 4:42 left and following that, Smith made another layup on an assist (See AGS WIN, Page 6)



CLEAR THE WAY

Billy Bob Barnett (24) clears his own way through the Arkansas Razorbacks as he scores two of his 21 points in last night's game. Getting ready for the rebound is Steve Niles (52) while Larry Grisham (23) and Ricky Tanneberger (11) attempt to block Barnett's path. (Photo by Mike Wright)

Water And Glee Flow Freely After Clincher

By JOHN PLATZER
Battalion Sports Editor

Immediately following A&M's 79-66 victory over Arkansas, Spec Gammon grabbed the floor microphone in G. Rollie White to announce that TCU had a six-point lead over Baylor.

The Aggie basketballers were quicker than the Aggie sports publicist, however, as Ronnie Peret and Oliver Biggers already had head coach Shelby Metcalf in hand and were heading up the ramps in the direction of the showers.

Before the celebration was completed, everyone within reach of the delirious Southwest Conference champs had been forced into a fully-clothed bath including assistant coaches Jim Culpepper, Johnny Underwood and Terry Trippet, assistant athletic director Marvin Tate, business manager Wally Groff and trainer Billy Pickard.

WHEN THE NEWS of TCU's

four-point victory was finally relayed to the dressing room, Metcalf retired to his office to relive the championship with the press corps.

"I just don't know which team is better. I believe that they're both good ballclubs," Coach Metcalf answered the obvious question of which of the championship teams he has coached was the better (1964 or 1969).

Back in the confines of the Aggie dressing quarters, the word "great" had become the most popular word in the English language.

"It's great! Just great! This is the greatest team in the world," sophomore guard Bill Cooksey exclaimed.

BILLY BOB Barnett, who has been A&M's top point maker throughout the season and continued as the big gun last night, emphasized the scope of the victory.

"This is the greatest win of

my life," the Brenham senior said. "Everybody on this club sticks together. Everybody fights to win and, as a result, everybody wins."

To senior Ronnie Peret the victory meant the ending of a long grind and the beginning of another.

"We've waited a long, long time for this. Since we have waited so long, I guess it means as much to us as a 'Super Bowl' would," the 6-9 Plainview native said.

"We've still got a lot of work ahead of us (the Midwest Regionals)," Peret quickly added.

SONNY BENEFIELD, the Aggie's playmaker from Sweeny, said that it was strictly a "team effort."

"It's the most wonderful feeling in the world," the 6-1 senior said.

"We've been working for this since we were freshmen. I'll tell you this, it's not just for five players either but is for every boy on this team."

"This is pretty good especially in your sophomore year," seven-footer Steve Niles chimed in. "It was a helluva win."

MIKE HEITMANN undressed slowly in front of his locker as he savored every moment of the triumph.

"We've worked and worked for this," the Houston Sam Houston junior said.

"There was a feeling that we were home free and then, all of a sudden, there it (the championship) is."

"IT'S GREAT. I just wish we could have been a part of it last year," Underwood, a member of last season's Aggie team, said.

"It was a tremendous team effort."

Trippet, also a member of last season's team, said that the championship "feels great."

"These guys really worked for it. They paid the price and you get what you work for."

"I HAD a feeling that this was going to be the longest week of the season and, yet, it's been the shortest and sweetest," Culpepper said.

Perhaps the least fazed by the celebration was sophomore Chuck Smith. The Odessa native was asked for his impression of the championship.

"It's different," the 6-4 West Texan deadpanned and then turned back to finish dressing.

Ags Battle Trinity For Midwest Berth

The winner of the A&M-Trinity game March 8 in Fort Worth will meet the Missouri Valley Conference champion, which has not been determined yet, on March 13 in Manhattan, Kan. At present, Louisville holds a one-half game lead over Drake and a one-game bulge over third place Tulsa, but they still have to play Drake in their home gym. If Drake wins the contest, there will be a three-way tie for the first place berth and a playoff will be in the offing.

The winner of the MVC-Southwest game will play the winner of the game between the Big Eight Conference and an as yet unnamed at-large team on March 15 in Manhattan. The leader thus far in the Big Eight is Kansas with a one-game bulge over both Kansas State and Colorado.

The at-large entries will join 15 conference representatives in the university division playoffs starting March 8.

Leading the list of squads se-

lected Tuesday were St. John's, N.Y., (20-3), No. 7 in the AP poll, and Duquesne (17-3) ranked No. 10.

Also chosen were Villanova, New Mexico State (21-3), No. 16, and Marquette (19-4), No. 18.

Other at-large teams receiving bids were Dayton (17-6), Notre Dame (18-5), Trinity (18-4), Colorado State (15-4) and Seattle 18-7.

Regional winners will meet for the national crown March 20-22 in Louisville, Ky.

UCLA is the defending NCAA university division champion, and this year's tournament field also includes Dayton, last season's winner of the National Invitational Tournament.

Boston College (18-3) became the first team Tuesday to be picked for the NIT, which begins March 13 in Madison Square Garden.

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—Adv.



SHOWER BOUND

Aggie Coach Shelby Metcalf was corraled by Oliver Biggers (left) and Ronnie Peret immediately following A&M's 79-66 victory over Arkansas last night and ushered off to the showers. The Aggies were celebrating their first SWC cage championship since 1964. (Photo by Mike Wright)

Jubilant Students Toast Champions

By JANIE WALLACE
Battalion Sports Writer

Ecstasy is not something you can describe in a few words, but Aggies attempted to describe it with their actions following A&M's coronation as the Southwest Conference Champions last night.

"It's out-of-sight, just out-of-sight," exclaimed Ronald Young, a sophomore from Church Point, La.

As the crowd tensely waited for the results of the Texas Christian-Baylor game, cries of "pull it out, TCU, beat Baylor" were heard from the anticipating fans.

"Since the Ags haven't flinched in the pinch, I think they deserve to win," James Gieb, a second-year vet student from Fort Worth, said.

After the score of the crown-

clinging Baylor game was announced three times, pandemonium reigned supreme at G. Rollie White Coliseum.

Scotty Taylor, a senior from Lufkin, wasn't surprised at the outcome, "I thought we had it won all the time—it's wonderful."

"I guess we showed t.u., we don't share our titles with anybody," boasted a proud Squadron 8 fish, Roy Rice of Port Arthur. Texas and Arkansas shared the conference title for football.

"I think it's about time for another championship, since the last one was five years ago," stated Stewart Sisco, a senior from Bryan.

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As the happy crowd milled out of the coliseum, a lone yell of "Texas Aggies, 1968-69 Southwest Conference Champs!" brought forth spontaneous "wildcats."

"Even though I'm with the Aggies, no matter how the season record looks, I think the basketball team makes up for our disappointing football season. Of course, it's only natural that we should have a championship title every year," said Tom Steiger, a freshman from San Antonio.

"We won the championship easier than I expected. Who would have thought TCU could beat Baylor?" a senior from Baytown, John Pavlas said. "It's great!"

"It's groovy we won, and that number 13 (Sonny Benefield) is so cute," quipped an anonymous A&M coed as she walked out of the stands.

"I'm so happy that we won, I think I'll celebrate," a junior yell leader, David Hoelscher from Alice, said.

All in all, "it's great" was heard from everyone, but a freshman from Dallas, Albert Clegg, summed up the crowd's sentiments with, "It's absolutely fantastic."

Yell Practice Set Tonight

Yell practice will be tonight at 7:15 p.m. in G. Rollie White Coliseum according to Head Yell Leader Bill Youngkin.

The Yell practice will be the first of the season for the newly crowned Southwest Conference champion basketball team.