

Aggie water polo team anticipates NCAA invitation

By SEAN PETTY
Battalion Staff

Texas A&M University may not have the best indoor swimming pool around but it does have one of the best water polo teams in the country according to head coach Dennis Fosdick.

The Aggies have a very good chance to go to the NCAA water polo championship in Long Beach, Calif. on the weekend of Nov. 24.

The championship is set up as an invitational tournament in which eight teams are invited from around the country. Although it is an invitational tournament, California colleges have a monopoly on it because four of the eight invitations go to California schools. This is because over half of the schools that are in the NCAA and play water polo are in California.

"We think we (Texas A&M) have one of the top three teams outside of California," Fosdick said. "Bucknell is number one, Loyola is second and we are third by records."

"The way a team gets invited to the tournament is by the teams they play during the year. That is why we played outside the state this year. We went to California and stayed with the best of them, we were not blown out by any means."

The Aggies have the best team in the Southwest because water polo is a club sport at most other schools in the area. At Texas A&M, it is a varsity sport and they are a member of the NCAA. In fact, the Aggies are so good, that it is hard to get teams to play.

"We play all these water polo clubs from the different schools and we sometimes end up beating them 20-4," Fosdick said. "It's just hard to keep the score down sometimes. The bad thing about playing this kind of team is that our team stops

having team unity because we don't need to.

"Our trip to the East helped us immensely. Each game we got better and better and the competition was good," he said.

The Aggies swept through the East coast undefeated winning six games. Five of the games were lopsided victories for the Aggies.

"The NCAA Committee will have a meeting Nov. 19 to decide on which teams will go to the tournament," he said. "I have already made reservations in Long Beach because it is over the Thanksgiving holidays. If we are invited, we will find out that Sunday and will have to leave Tuesday so we will be rushed, but I sure would like to be in that position."

Fosdick said the coach from Brown thought Texas A&M "should definitely go" to the tournament. The Aggies defeated Brown 8-7 in their only close game of the East coast trip.

"Our biggest problem is that we can't play the caliber of teams that are in California," Fosdick said. "Water polo is a big sport out there and they have good programs."

"Our program is very good, also. Our redshirts (players who are not playing varsity) have been winning tournaments over other clubs. In fact, we are having a tournament here this week and our redshirt team will be in it and our varsity team could end up playing our redshirt team for the championship."

"Our girls are doing very well also. According to one of the water polo magazines, our girls are fourth in the nation. So I am very pleased with the program," he said.

The Aggies carry a 16-3 record into this weekend's tournament and have had some outstanding play from several individuals.



Water polo team member Mike Newsom in action for the Aggies.

Battalion photo by Pat O'Malley

"I think that Vincent Tavarez is the best goalie outside of California," Fosdick said. "He has played exceptionally well all year."

"Steve Sampson has one of the best shooting arms in the country. Mike Newsom and Bob Leland are both outstanding. I'm just pleased with the entire team, they have played great all year and deserve to go to the tournament."

So the Aggies are hoping to go to the NCAA tournament for the second time in three years. This week they host the Southwest Water Polo Championship which will start at 3:00 p.m. Friday and the championship should be at approximately 3:30 p.m. Saturday.

Will the Aggies win?
"Sure we expect to win," Fosdick said, "if we don't we don't deserve to go to the NCAA tournament."

Belcher faced tough fight to top

The athletic career of Texas A&M fullback Raymond Belcher is comparable to Belcher carrying the football for the Texas Aggies — he has to put his head down and plow forward for that tough yardage.

The 5-10, 200-pound senior has come a long way from high school dropout to starting fullback for Texas A&M. Along the way there have come many occasions when it would have been easy for him to call it quits but Belcher would not let that be the case.

"I played high school ball my sophomore and junior years at Houston Sterling," said Belcher. "My grades fell off, however, and I wasn't eligible to play my senior year. I transferred to Fort Worth Poly that year and just sat out."

After leaving high school, Belcher tried out for the football team at Cisco Junior College, which is located about 50 miles from Abilene. He ran into more trouble his second day there when he was dropped from the team for smoking a cigar in the dorm room.

"I thought I was a grown man and could do what I wanted," explained Belcher with a grin. "I guess I just wasn't too familiar with discipline."

Belcher nonetheless finished the fall semester at Cisco and transferred to Tyler Junior College in the spring. He was ineligible to play football the following fall but was allowed to participate in spring drills. During the fall he worked with his grandfather in construction in Fort

Worth. He sent out applications to various colleges and was accepted by Texas A&M.

Although he was without scholarship, Belcher came out for the Aggie football team in the fall of 1976. Again he was ineligible to play that fall but worked out with the team as a linebacker.

"I felt I was too slow to play running back so I worked at linebacker that first year," Belcher said. "A&M had some great linebackers then but I figured I'd get my chance sooner or later. I'd come this far so I wasn't about to give up now."

Belcher was moved to fullback last year but did not play in any games. Last spring, however, he was the leading rusher in the annual Maroon-White contest. By that time he was on scholarship, even though Texas A&M had a couple of good fullbacks in George Woodard and Eddie Hardin. After both Woodard and Hardin were lost for the 1978 season with off-season injuries, Belcher's role suddenly became more crucial. He started out the season as No. 2 fullback but when injuries befell the Aggie halfback corps, Belcher was moved to a starting position. His first start was against Baylor, a game the Ags lost 24-6.

"I was most concerned with just holding onto the football," said Belcher. "I was getting pretty tired because I was carrying the ball more times but when Curtis (Dickey) came in to play halfback, I got my

second wind. He had sat out the first part of the game with injuries but when he came into the game, it picked me up a little. All afternoon we kept believing we were going to put the ball in the endzone sooner or later but then the clock ran out on us."

The week that followed the Baylor loss was hectic and emotional time for the A&M team with the resignation of head coach Emory Belard.

"There wasn't any real tension

among the players after the loss to Baylor," said Belcher. "We were a little confused about why we weren't scoring more because we know we are a good team with a lot of potential. It was a trying week for all of us but we still knew we had a game to play Saturday and that we had to get back on the winning track."

Raymond Belcher is hard-set on making good as Texas A&M's No. 1 fullback — as if he's making up for lost time.

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