

ALTERATIONS

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the sports

Ags eye SWC crown

By KURT ABRAHAM
Battalion Sports Staff

In the bizarre position of having to defend a record it already earned in regular season play, the Texas A&M Tennis team travels to Corpus Christi to play in post-season competition at the Southwest Conference Tournament being held this Friday through Sunday.

Whereas the basketball and baseball tournaments mainly exist to give teams other than the conference champion a chance to qualify for the NCAA playoffs, this does not necessarily hold for tennis. The big

difference is the fact that the performance of a team in the tennis tournament is directly figured into its conference record for the season.

For example, look at the situation the Aggies find themselves in. With conference standings figured on the basis of all individual matches, the Ags currently are 29-43 with a 403 winning percentage. That puts them in sixth place, seven points behind TCU at 36-36, and four points ahead of Rice at 25-47.

Those numbers have a lot of meaning for Texas A&M Coach David Kent. "Let's face it, we're by no means safe where we are," Kent said. "While we certainly have a chance to catch TCU, we also find ourselves in danger of sliding even farther down in the final conference standings if we allow Rice to catch us by not playing up to our potential. What makes it all the more important is the fact that how our players do in this tournament will determine whether or not some of them get to go on to the NCAA playoffs."

There are at least two Aggies who have a good chance to go to the NCAA competition. Although number one and number two seeds, Reid Freeman and Alberto Jimenez have suffered poor matches lately that saw both their records fall to 9-12, they still can make up for it by playing strongly during the tournament.

But that may not be as easy as it sounds when one looks at the competition Texas A&M will play.

"We really have a tough time of it because so many of the conference schools have strong tennis programs," said Kent. "For instance, look at the five teams above us in the conference standings. SMU, Arkansas, Texas and Houston rank second, fourth, eighth and ninth respectively in the nation. To top it off, TCU is currently 16th in the country. That's some kind of competition to go up against."

What makes it worse for the Aggies is that they have no way of knowing who each player will face until the tournament begins. With all matches determined by random

draw, the choices range from someone on the SMU team to a survivor from Baylor's 4-59 outfit. But Kent has several reasons to be optimistic about the tournament.

"After the 8-1 win against Texas Tech, we really bottomed out when we played Arkansas and lost 9-0," said Kent. "However, I thought we played a better, more consistent game against Houston. Our two wins were fairly impressive. Trey Schuttz may have played his best tennis of the year when he won the number five singles match and Max King and Jim Grubert did well together as a pair in the number three doubles."

Kent's decision to use King and Grubert together was an experimental one, as Grubert had been playing alongside Hendrick Roller in the doubles competition for most of the season. Although King had just returned to playing after a lengthy illness, the experiment proved so successful that Kent has decided to go with that pairing for the tournament.

"It's just a fact that when he's healthy, Max is really one of the key players we need to win," said Kent. "Even though he hadn't played in competition for almost two months, I was impressed with his performance. I think now that he has the chance to play regularly again, he'll improve even more."

While many teams will finish their seasons with the tournament in Corpus Christi, the Aggies will return home to host one final match for the year when they play Michigan on May 2 at 1:30 p.m. In keeping with the large number of nationally ranked teams on its schedule this year, Texas A&M will face a Wolverine team that is ranked somewhere between tenth and 15th, depending on which poll one wants to look at.

On the other side of the coin, the Aggies have a powerful weapon on their side in the homecourt advantage. At home, Texas A&M is 32-22 in singles and 19-9 in doubles for a combined home record of 53-37. This includes the 8-1 and 7-2 wins against Baylor and Southern Illinois as well as the 9-0 loss to Arkansas.

Rangers win but Astros lose

United Press International

Al Oliver, who had three RBIs, scored the winning run from third base on Johnny Grubb's two-out single in the bottom of the 10th inning Wednesday night, lifting the Texas Rangers to a 4-3 triumph over the Toronto Blue Jays.

Consecutive two-out singles by Oliver, Oscar Gamble and Grubb helped Sparky Lyle, who pitched one and two-thirds hitless relief innings, to his second win in three decisions. Jesse Jefferson, 0-1, who relieved Mark Lemongello beginning the 10th, took the loss.

The Blue Jays tied the score 3-3 in the top of the ninth, preventing Texas starter Ferguson Jenkins from becoming the major-league's first five-game winner. Roy Howell hit a leadoff double off reliever Jim Kern, but was tagged out at third on Dave McKay's bounce to short. Rick Cerone doubled McKay to third and pinch-hitter Otto Velez walked to load the bases, bringing in Lyle. Bob Bailor then hit a slow roller to short as McKay crossed the plate with the tying run.

Oliver drove in the winning run with a pair of RBIs. The Blue Jays' second baseman, who doubled and scored Mayberry's single.

The Houston Astros as lucky as Bobby Murcer. Dave Kingman hit home runs in the fourth when he doubled and scored Mayberry's single.

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