

sports

Aggie cagers expected to improve

By TONY GALLUCCI
Battalion Sports Editor

The sleeping giant Aggie cagers can be expected to play better ball this weekend if head coach Shelby Metcalf's Utah educational trip proves as worthwhile as he seems to think.

The roundballers lost both games they played at the Cougar Classic hosted by Brigham Young University this past weekend — to LaSalle 72-57 in the opening round and 66-61 to Cal-Santa Barbara in the consolation game — and Metcalf learned a great deal about his team.

"Anybody can learn from Michael Brooks (LaSalle All-America Cen-

ter)," Metcalf said. "He's one of the best college players I've ever seen. I've never seen anyone work as hard."

Metcalf has made a few changes that he expects will turn things around. "We've given everyone a chance to show what they can do. We know what each player's role is," he said while stressing that the players need to become more involved in the game. "We're not playing with the intensity that an A&M team usually plays with."

In upcoming games the Aggie coaches will be looking towards experienced players with a few others expected to contribute significantly. The Aggies open up the Rebel Clas-

sic at Nevada-Las Vegas against North Texas State on Friday night with the NTSU Eagles expected to provide a fair challenge.

Other teams in action at the tournament include host Nevada-Las Vegas and Montana. Las Vegas, a perennial powerhouse under coach Jerry Tarkanian, finished strong last year with a 21-8 record, including a 101-99 loss to A&M in San Francisco's Golden Gate Invitational. The Rebels return only five lettermen, only one a starter, from last year's squad and are essentially an unknown quantity. Montana returns ten lettermen from a 20-8 squad of a year ago.

Against a strong Pepperdine team

last week NTSU led by as many as 17 points before losing by two points and the scouting report indicates they are no pushover. Starting for

the Aggies in the game will be guards David Britton and David Goff and "The Wall" — Vernon Smith, Rynn Wright and Rudy Woods.

Tony Franklin at home with Eagles

PHILADELPHIA — During a break in the action in the Philadelphia-Los Angeles hockey game the Spectrum message board lit up to say, "The Flyers would like to welcome Tony Franklin of the Eagles in Section A."

Before you could say "Bobby Clarke," the assembled 17,000 stood and applauded wildly, prompting the hockey players to check the other side of the plexiglass to see what the ruckus was about. And there, in section A, last row, a blushing Tony Franklin smiled meekly and waved.

It was nice to be recognized, but I had to leave my seat and sit somewhere else," Franklin recalled last week while relaxing in the Philadelphia Eagles' locker room. "Everybody wanted autographs, and I didn't mind that, but they were right in the line of vision of others who wanted to watch the game. I wanted to watch the game, too."

Franklin, who returned to his home state of Texas Sunday and helped the Eagles beat the Houston Oilers 26-20, has gained quite a bit of life and popularity in the short time since he traveled north from Texas A&M last summer, and that's something to say in a town highly critical of sports figures, no matter what their salary or reputation. While he certainly has merited this popularity, there is disagreement as to the exact reason.

It may be because he has given the Eagles the type of consistent kicker they've longed for since the heyday of Tom Dempsey earlier in this decade. It may be because he kicks barefoot no matter what the weather or game situation. It may be because of his impish grin and soft Texas drawl.

Whatever the reason, there is no denying Franklin has made a major contribution to the Eagles' second consecutive playoff effort. The 23-year old rookie has successfully boomed 23 of 31 field goals this season — including a 59-yarder, second longest in NFL history — and 34 extra points for 105 points, second in the NFC.

Anyone who remembers the Eagles' past track record with kickers can appreciate Dick Vermeil's relief to have someone he can count on.

"I was hoping when I first got here that I could go out and the fans would not dread an extra-point attempt," Franklin said. "I watched the playoff game against Atlanta last year when they (the Eagles) missed that field goal in the closing seconds. I wouldn't wish that on anybody."

But wasn't he worried that the fans would take out all their past frustrations with kickers on him?

"I felt like I had won the job, and that the job was mine to do regardless of what they thought," he said. "I missed an extra point (in the season opener), but then I came back and made a 46-yard field goal. I wasn't worried. I think they've accepted all of us. They haven't had a good team to cheer about in a long time."

I've been. It's been a thrill to play and compete for the Eagles. They've turned their program around and I'm thankful they picked me to be a part of that turnaround."

There was a minor problem in pre-season — "I made all the coaches mad by walking barefooted around training camp," Franklin says with a grin — but Vermeil decided to cast the team's fate with the confident, almost cocky rookie.

Franklin justified his coach's faith, barefooting four field goals against New Orleans and three in a pair of other games. The momentous 59-yarder helped upset Dallas 31-21 on a Monday night showcase game.

"I told coach I could do it," he said. "I just said I'd kick it as hard as I could. Funny thing is I always loved the Cowboys. Every kid in Texas dreams about playing for the Cowboys. I did, too, but I'm not interested in them anymore."

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