

# Women's basketball team plagued with poor attendance

By JOHN BRASHER  
Sports Reporter

The place is G. Rollie White Coliseum, and the event is a women's basketball game between powerful, well-known Wayland Baptist and a strong Texas A&M team.

The interesting thing about this game wasn't the score, but rather the attendance. No more than 35 people turned out to see the game and the sad part of it is that it was a common scene throughout the women's basketball season.

Wayland Baptist has an enrollment of 1,300 students and is located in Plainview, Texas. The Flying Queens play their basketball games in the 3,200-seat Hutcherson Center and this past season averaged around 1,500 people at each home game.

In comparison, the Lady Aggies played all of their games in the 7,500-seat G. Rollie White Coliseum. With a student enrollment of 31,331, the women's team only averaged 75-100 people a game.

Eddie Owens, the sports information director at Wayland Baptist, said, "The attendance at our women's games has been the best so far, as a matter of fact, it's as good as the boys."

Owens said there are a number of reasons why the attendance is so high. "First, our program has been here for 32 years and is established, whereas A&M's is new and is still getting organized. Secondly, the interest in the men's program has been below that of the women's because the women have a reputation of winning and play some big name schools. Finally, we promote the sport as much as possible."

Owens said the school has giveaways at the door and tries to let some type of group get in free at each game so they can see what the team has to offer. An example was when the school sponsored a public schools night. Each teacher and administrative official in Plainview got in free.

Trying to put a finger on the reason why fan turnout at the Texas A&M women's basketball games is so low is very difficult.

One problem seems to be a lack of promotion and publicity. Trying to promote the sport has been a tough job for those who have attempted it. According to Cherri Rapp, head coach of the Texas A&M women's basketball team, the University didn't officially go co-ed until 1970, and the women's athletic programs weren't recognized as part of the athletic department until 1975.

Trying to promote women's basketball at a school that used to be all-male has made the job complicated. "I think that in past the sports information office was biased and leaned more towards men's athletics because it was a men's school and everything pertained to men. They did what they had to do for the women and didn't bother to do anything extra because they didn't have the time. It's starting to change now and it's slowly improving," Rapp said.

Kay Don, the assistant athletic director for women's athletics said, "We do have a problem with the publicity of women's basketball, but

it's better."

On the other hand, Jerry Arp, the assistant athletic director for promotion and publicity, says this is no of a problem for the women than it is for the men.

"You could have walked across the campus during basketball season and the students couldn't tell you when the men's basketball team played," Arp said.

Where is the publicity supposed to come from?

"The sports information office has the job of getting the publicity out and this is where the problem lies because there isn't enough manpower to handle the enormous workload," Arp said.

The sports information office at Texas A&M consists of one sports information director, one assistant SID, and three students. The University of Texas, which has the same number of varsity sports as Texas A&M, has two separate staffs to handle the men's and women's athletic programs. Each staff consists of one full-time SID, two assistant SIDs, one full-time secretary and a lot more student help.

"I can't imagine," Arp said, "any thorough office anywhere working without a secretary. We have 16 sports at A&M and there isn't the manpower without a secretary. There isn't the manpower or the hours in the day to cover them (the

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sports) thoroughly like we should with the small staff we have. Texas doesn't have this problem, but A&M does and it's a very serious problem. It gets to the point to when you're burning the candle at both ends and pretty soon it's going to burn out."

Arp, Rapp and Don all agreed that a possible solution to the problem would be to employ a sports information director, with a full staff, to handle the women's athletics. As of now, most of the major NCAA Division I universities have this type of setup, which consists of a separate SID for both men's and women's athletics.

Rapp said she would like to see this system installed at Texas A&M because it will take a lot of the burden off the coaches, and women's athletics would be publicized more. "Sometimes I have to do the publicity for our basketball team although I really don't have the time for it because of my other duties."

Marvin Tate, the athletic director at Texas A&M, said he doesn't feel the university needs an SID for women's athletics at this time.

"We need to do a better job with the people we already have," he said.

Tate continued to say that if the University had an unlimited amount of money to spend, the university would possibly look into it.

"With the limited amount of money we have now," he said, "we need to direct our attention to other areas such as salaries and scholarships."

Tate explained that at the University of Texas, the budget for women is over \$1 million and only \$225,000 of the money is donated by the athletic program. At Texas A&M, the women's program receives around \$750,000 from men's athletics and the sport which pays for all of the athletic programs at the University is football.

"The problem comes from the fact that people really don't understand the workload that is put on the SID," Arp said. "The lack of knowledge that our superiors have with what goes on in the sports information office is the number one hindrance that will keep us from having a women's SID."

Tate said the athletic program will hire a secretary in September for the sports information office to ease some of the workload, but hiring a complete sports information staff was out of the question.

Another problem the women's team faces is they aren't as popular as the men's programs and the people aren't interested because football dominates every sport in Texas.

"Our women understand they're not going to take the campus by storm," Arp said. "Women's basketball just isn't as popular as the men's program right now. It's going to take time. Let's face it, in Texas, football is the basic sport. We even have a tough time selling men's basketball."

One university which isn't faced with this problem is Old Dominion, a university with 14,000 students located Norfolk, Va.

The Lady Monarchs play their games in a 5,000-seat facility and Debbie Harmison, the assistant SID, said the gym was sold out three times this season and averaged around 3,200 people at each game.

Harmison feels that 75 percent of their fan turnout is credited to having a good team.

"Last season, we had 10,270 people show up to see the Soviet Union women's team play our team which was the No. 1 team in the nation, she said. "Ticket sales were so great, we had to move the game to another arena."

Harmison gave several reasons why their attendance is high. "We do some promotion and we also expose our players to the media all the time. We are also successful because there aren't any pro teams in our immediate area, we are the only Division I school in our area, and this part of the country is basketball-oriented and not football-oriented."

Finally, the women's basketball team has a problem with getting media recognition. "A lot has to do with the fact that the news media 'really doesn't know how many people are interested in women sports,' Rapp said. "If enough people are interested and let the media know it, then the media will probably get out and cover it more."

Harry Gillam, station manager at KBTX-TV, said he didn't have the manpower to cover everything.

Don said she is very disappointed with The Battalion because she feels it's very poor in the coverage of women's athletics.

But once again, the problem is manpower. Mike Burrichter, sports editor of The Battalion, said, "I agree that we've been lacking in covering women's athletics but we don't have the people to get out and cover everything like we should. We have an extremely small sports staff that includes myself and two others and at the same time, we are full-time students."

One thing is certain: the women's basketball team doesn't stand

alone. Women's softball, track, swimming and tennis along with men's baseball, swimming, track, tennis and basketball are all suffering from low attendance.

No one really knows the answer to the problem or how to solve it. In this case, only time can tell.

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## Two Aggies ran in Boston

One Aggie runner finished the Boston Marathon Monday, but the other dropped out after 21 miles.

Charles Blumentritt, a 43-year-old employee of the Texas Transportation Institute, finished in 3:25, compared to his best previous time of 3:10.

Tinker Murray, a graduate student in physical education, had stomach cramps and stopped shortly after Heartbreak Hill, the last of four hilly miles near the end of the course. "Bill Rodgers of Boston won the race for the third straight time, running a relatively slow 2:12:11.

Blumentritt said the race was slowed by the 75-degree temperatures. Most runners consider anything warmer than 50 degrees as uncomfortable marathon conditions.

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