

A&M wrestlers have firm grip on team's future

by Joe Tindel Jr.

Battalion Staff
Unlike other varsity teams at Texas A&M University, the wrestling team does not receive any financial aid from the Athletic Department.

But the varsity status the team acquired in February now gives Texas A&M's wrestlers the chance to qualify for national tournament competition.

Although the Athletic Department helps new team members register in the proper classes, the team has to raise its own money, Coach Joe DeBella said. Brent Gillespie, a member of the team, said the team makes most of its money for trips by cleaning up after baseball games at Olsen Field.

But he said most of the money for scholarships comes from a \$10,000 donation from Luther Jones, a Bryan businessman who wrestled on the Texas A&M team in the 1920s. The money is in a development foundation, and the team collects the interest from the donation.

The Texas A&M wrestling team is the first in Texas to achieve varsity status, and De-

Bella said he is very grateful to the Athletic Department for its support of the wrestling program.

"We're very grateful because nowhere in the last eight years have we ever been this close to becoming a full-fledged varsity team," he said.

DeBella said the Athletic Department granted the team varsity status for one year, which means the team will seek renewal of that status next February.

"No one has ever been able to get wrestling varsity status — not for one year. We accomplished that, and we accomplished that through our own dedication and through the people who felt wrestling deserved an oppor-

tunity."
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"We're hoping that it will eventually be given to us for a period of at least four years at a time because if we're recruiting, ... it's tough to have a youngster to come here ... and then find out that after a year we don't have varsity status any more," DeBella said.

But he stressed that the team is appreciative of the Athletic Department giving it the opportunity to do the administrative work.

DeBella, a native of Boston, came to Texas A&M this year after coaching wrestling and high school football in New England. Besides coaching the wrestling team, he teaches all the wrestling classes offered by the physical education department and is studying for a doctorate in physical education.

DeBella guided a relatively inexperienced team to a third-place finish in the state meet behind Richland College and the University of Texas this year.

Individually, the team had one first-place winner and seven third-place winners in that meet. In 16 other meets, the team never finished lower than fourth place.

A full varsity team consists of 10 wrestlers, and this year Texas A&M had two full teams actively wrestling.

Gillespie said next year's team will still be young, but could develop some top-quality wrestlers in the next two or three years. The wrestlers are presently involved in off-season training, consisting of weight training four times a week.

The wrestlers will return to school two weeks before the fall semester to continue training. DeBella said he stresses conditioning and technique during the off-season.

"During the off-season, we're involved with strength development," DeBella said. "We like them to lift three times a week. And the other three times a week we like them to ... develop techniques and new wrestling moves," DeBella said.

He said as the season nears, he'll reduce the weight-training program and work more on en-

durance. During the season he plans to work on technique three times a week and lift weights twice a week.

DeBella said next season he is looking for good performances from Jeff Collins, a first-place winner in the state meet this year. Other potential standouts are Joe Eazor, Tom Merriman, Damian Cook and Scott Windrow.

He said Eazor and Collins have a chance to qualify in the nationals if the Athletic Department renews the varsity status.

DeBella said his team competes on Saturday and, since most of the meets are in the Dal-

las area, the wrestlers work out with another team on Sunday to gain experience.

He said his team gradually gained strength this year because of the experience gained in the Sunday workouts.

"The way you build experience is to give them the opportunity," DeBella said. "So we got stronger and stronger as we went through the year."

The first-year coach referred to wrestling as both a team sport and an individual sport.

"When you're out there on the mat you're all alone — you can't say the tackle missed his block," DeBella said. "Like foot-

ball, it's man against man individual. Yet it's also cause you get so many winning the match."

Gillespie described it as a sport that takes more preparation than any other sport.

"When you're out there in the center of attention, first on your opponent then an ear is kept open for a coach," he said.

"Once contact is made, moves have to be instinct — you can't think cause if you have to think what you have to do, your opponent is already in his mind and you're at a disadvan-

Franco works to bring soccer success to A&M

by Frank L. Christlieb

Sports Editor

When Telmo Franco sees the accomplishments of established soccer programs like those at SMU, North Texas State and Alabama A&M, he doesn't sit and wonder why his Texas A&M team isn't basking in success.

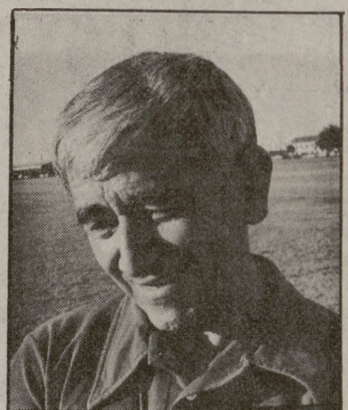
And Franco doesn't wait for the situation to fix itself. Not expecting miracles, the Aggie soccer coach goes out and makes the changes needed to bring prosperity to his program.

When the men's soccer team received varsity status in the October, Franco began a program to upgrade the quality of Texas A&M soccer. And with a few years' effort, he may be able to echo the words of his proposed brochures that say, "Soccer's a kick in Aggieland."

Although both the men's and women's soccer programs jumped to varsity levels last semester, that hasn't brought the teams the recognition or the support they'll need. Contributing funds from the Athletic Department have been slight, but Franco says he must regard the matter practically.

"If we get a little support," Franco says, "that's fine. That's the way it should be. It would be unrealistic to expect a fully-supported soccer program. If we show some indication that we are well-organized and have success, the University will offer us more money."

Without offering a single scholarship — since none are available — Franco has attracted



Telmo Franco

12 soccer prospects to attend Texas A&M in the fall. He expresses optimism about the program, which will expand to include a junior varsity next year.

Franco has already taken steps to ensure that Texas A&M men's soccer can give scholarships sometime in the near future. Having been associated with soccer since its start 14 years ago in Texas, Franco has been able to observe other programs and has learned a great deal from them.

The SMU soccer program has competed as a varsity for several years. One Mustang supporter, Franco said, donated \$12,000 to the program — just to put a wrought iron fence around the team's practice field.

"They have the support of the alumni because they have proven themselves and have been nationally ranked," Franco said.

Alabama A&M, the number two team in the nation, will host the Aggies during the fall. Franco said that playing a team of such prominence will be only one of the steps along the way to

success for his program. Franco has already lished what he calls "scholarship committees" funds for Texas A&M. These groups, in Bryan Station, Midland, Dallas and San Antonio, donations from those in supporting Aggie soccer.

Franco, a native of Texas, is a veritable line of young soccer prospects choosing Texas A&M.

And he said that if he promote Aggie soccer out the state, it could be well-known as those he's watched grow at North Texas State.

"If we get information about when we're more interested," Franco said, "we're more interested in the future of the program."

"We're shooting for prominence — not in four years. If we have a national standing, we'll be there."

"We will probably have some players from other countries," he said. "I believe I've lived in 10 years and I believe the great soccer players here are Peruvian, but I feel the live in Texas and move York, you'll still always be an. There's so much here you wouldn't believe."

The team's schedule fall has already been set and starting next January Aggies will play a spring season.

See FRANCO page 10

Softball team starts regional play today

The Aggie women's softball team, rained out of its opener Thursday in the Southwest Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, will play today at 4 in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Texas A&M, with a 74-8 combined record for the spring and fall, will play the winner of today's noon matchup between West Texas State and Stephen F. Austin. The Buffaloes are 29-32 and the Lumberjacks are 24-47.

Texas A&M coach Bob Brock said he feels that his team and Oklahoma State, the No. 2 seed at 53-12, will more than likely play in the championship game of the tournament.

The Aggies split two games with the Cowboys in the spring, defeating them 2-0 and losing to them 3-0 in what Brock called the squad's "worst game of the year."

Texas A&M received a bye into the tourney's second round by virtue of its position as the No. 1 seed.

With the national tournament slated for May 20-24 in Norman, Okla., Brock says the Aggies must win regionals to receive an automatic bid into nationals.

"It won't mean anything if we don't win this one," he said. "We should do well if we keep playing like we're capable of playing."

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