

Right at home

Fernandez has become key force in A&M tennis fortunes

by Joe Tindel Jr.
Battalion Staff

Home is thousands of miles away for Liliana Fernandez — thousands of miles south of the border. But now that she's a senior at Texas A&M, she said she feels like an American.

And she plays tennis like an all-America. Although her strong Latin-American accent remains as a reminder of years passed in her native Cali, Colombia, Fernandez is now well into her role as an American tennis standout.

She's the number one singles player on the Aggie women's tennis team, and she's been the top Aggie Lady for the last two years in singles. She also pairs up with Teresa Landry to form the number one doubles team. But her high ranking expands beyond the boundaries of her team, for according to Coach Jan Cannon, Fernandez has potential to join the all-America ranks.

Fernandez had been around a tennis racket long before she came to Texas A&M. In fact, it was at age 11, long before her high school years, that the senior netter took to the court.

"I used to just practice one day a week, like Friday afternoons, for about an hour," she said.

The next year she went to her first Colombian national tournament, where she found she would have to allot more time to practice in the future.

But Fernandez got better and better. Her second try at the nationals saw her finish fourth, and by her third year, only one player stood in her way — but only for one year. The Colombian nationals produced the same junior champion, Fernandez, for the next four years.

Then, during her junior year of high school came Fernandez' decision to come to the United States.

A tennis pro from Iowa came to Colombia to teach tennis and talked Fernandez into coming to the United States. Fernandez said she narrowed her school choices down to those in Florida, California and Texas because of the favorable climates.

She finally settled on school in the Lone Star state, and fortunately for coaches David Kent and Cannon, the school was Texas A&M.

"A&M has a very good reputation in academics in Colombia, and there were about 15 more people from my same high school here already," Fernandez said.

"I didn't want to be on my own in another school." Like most international students, Fernandez had to survive all the complex paperwork it takes to become a student in the United States, she said, but Kent helped her get settled. She was soon swinging a racket again — and swinging it well.

It was by word of mouth that Kent heard about Fernandez. Alberto Jimenez, another Colombian who

played on the men's tennis team in 1978 and 1979, passed the word about Fernandez, she said.

Fernandez said she had some difficulty at first adjusting to tennis in the United States. For one thing, she missed playing on clay courts.

"It was the first time I played on hard courts," Fernandez said. "In Colombia, we had clay courts — that's all we had."

"The weather was very humid at that time, and everything built up — being away from home. But I've improved very much."

And improve she has. During her freshman year, she played number five and six singles and number three doubles, having been less aggressive than the Aggie coaches perhaps wanted in a top player. She had that problem licked by her sophomore year, when she soared to the number one singles spot.

"I changed some of my game," Fernandez said. "I didn't used to attack the ball as much as I do now."

Now she has high hopes for this season, and her play thus far has shown that those hopes aren't in vain.

Kent described Fernandez as "the class of the tournament."

Fernandez and the Aggie Ladies will compete in this weekend's Westwood Invitational in Austin.

staff photo by John Ryan

Aggie No. 1 singles player Liliana Fernandez hits a return during a match against the Houston Cougars during the spring season. Fernandez, a senior, has been one of the Aggie Ladies' top players since her career here began four years ago.

Holtz seeks consistency on offense

United Press International
LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Arkansas coach Lou Holtz expresses disappointment about the performance of the Razorback offense this season and says he hopes the unit will come together Saturday against Texas Christian University.

Holtz, in a telephone conference with reporters in Little Rock Wednesday, said the Razorbacks had exhibited effort on offense, but the team combination did not form in last week's narrow 14-12 win over Mississippi.

TCU coach F.A. Dry sounded more optimistic about Arkansas Wednesday, comparing the Razorbacks' two-quarterback offense to Southern Methodist's two-tailback system, saying fresh players in those positions keyed both teams' offensive attacks.

"There's not anything wrong with Arkansas," Dry said of Arkansas' victory over Ole Miss. "Arkansas has an outstanding football team. They have the best combination of the run and pass that I've seen at Arkansas in a long time."

Dry speaks with experience when he talks about SMU running backs Craig James and Eric Dickerson. TCU led 13-6 going into the final quarter against SMU last week but fell 16-13 to the Mustangs in a Southwest Conference opener for both teams.

TCU on Saturday will face Arkansas' quarterbacks Tom Jones and Brad Taylor, and Dry said he expected a similar challenge.

Jones, a senior, started in the first two Arkansas games, but a minor toe injury kept him from

starting against Ole Miss. Taylor filled in and hit 10 of 22 passes for 135 yards and a touchdown.

Jones and Taylor have combined this season to complete 34 of 66 passes for 512 yards, three touchdowns and three interceptions.

Dry said the Arkansas running attack puts pressure on the opponent's defense and opens up the Razorbacks' passing game.

Holtz also compared the defenses shown by last week's opponent Ole Miss and upcoming challenger TCU, and he suggested the Frog's defense probably was the better of the two.

"You've got to be a real good defensive team to control the line of scrimmage like they did against SMU," Holtz said, noting TCU did nothing fancy but

instead just lined up head-to-head.

"Look at them last year and look at them this year," he said. "They're a much better football team."

TCU comes into the Arkansas game posting a 1-2 record, including a season-opening win over Utah State and consecutive losses to Kansas and SMU. Arkansas, ranked 11th nationally, carries a 3-0 record into Saturday's meeting at War Memorial Stadium in Little Rock.

Arkansas had held a 22-game win streak over TCU, but the Frogs shocked the Razorbacks last season by taking a 28-24 come-from-behind win at Fort Worth.

Dry said the win over Arkansas last year was important, but he said every game against the Razorbacks is important to him.

Holtz said he would be seeking consistency on offense moving into the Southwest Conference portion of the schedule. He said injuries to the Razorbacks this season had been few, but critical.

Wide receiver Gary Anderson did not play in the Razorback opener against Tulsa and was not at full speed against Navy and Ole Miss. An inner ear in-

fection has affected his balance and vision. Wide receiver Derek Holloway, who started in Anderson's place against Tulsa, suffered a knee sprain in the Navy game and will not play against TCU.

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