

# Sports

## Injuries don't stop Ag spiker

By CHAREAN WILLIAMS  
Assistant Sports Editor

Athletics and pain usually go hand-in-hand. However, in a noncontact sport like volleyball, one usually doesn't associate the two.

But Texas A&M setter Lesha Beakley has discovered that the two are closely related.

Beakley has been playing most of the season with a fractured right hand and a knot on her left kneecap, which the doctors call a "jumper's knee" — and all without the use of pain killers.

"I was going for a ball on the ground (in September at the San Diego State Tournament), and a teammate landed on my hand with her heel," Beakley said. "I thought at the time that it was just jammed or bruised. Then I started feeling a sharp pain."

After having it x-rayed, doctors gave her the option of playing with a splint or having it immobilized, meaning no more volleyball. Being a fifth year senior, the decision to play was an easy one.

"It's my senior year, so there was really no question what the choice would be," Beakley said. "I want it to be the best year. Go for the (Southwest Conference championship) ring."

Speaking of rings, it's that ring finger that gives her the most trouble.

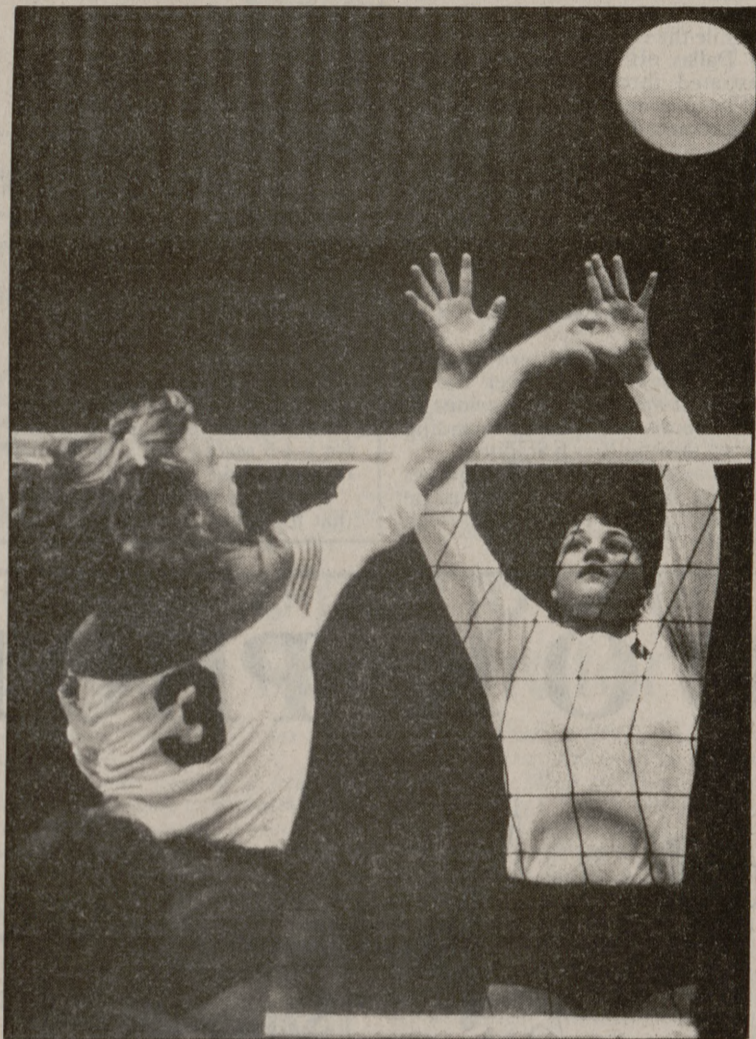
"It bothers me every time I set because that finger guides the set," Beakley said. "It hinders me some in hitting too. I can't control the ball very well because I can't feel (the ball) when I hit it. And sometimes the ball hits off the splint."

But not too many of Beakley's sets have gone astray this season.

With her .437 assist percentage, Beakley has ranked in the Top 20 in setting efficiency all year long.

The 5-foot-5 "David", playing a game with "Goliath's", has proven that volleyball's more than just a game of giants soaring above the net.

"We need her in there," A&M Coach Terry Condon said. "She provides stability for the team."



Battalion File Photo

Texas A&M setter Lesha Beakley (right) goes for a block.

We would be weak as a team without her."

Beakley's transformation at A&M could only be compared to the "Incredible Hulk". Her first three years with the Aggies, Beakley was a quiet, reserved and timid player.

Now as the team's quarterback, she is outspoken, aggressive and not afraid to give her teammates a little instruction.

"She has improved 150 percent

since her arrival," Condon said. "When she came here, she didn't know what was going on. Now she's become the team's leader. She's aggressive and takes control of the team. We need that. There's only so much you can do from the bench. You need someone on the floor coaching them during every play."

And Beakley said leadership is the area of her game she is most pleased with this season.

"I think the team looks to me for help and support," she said. "I'm pleased with that aspect of my game. But I have a lot of areas I can improve in."

Team-wise, Beakley said the No. 17 Aggies (21-6, 4-2 in SWC) can also show improvement.

"I have been a little disappointed with the way we've played because, and I think everyone else would agree, our expectations were higher," she said.

Before her freshman year, Beakley didn't have any dreams of ever saying anything like that about the Aggies.

"Ever since I was a little girl, I dreamed of playing for the Longhorns," Beakley said. "I went to some UT games in high school and felt I could play for them."

So the day after she graduated with her (Kerrville) Tivy High School class, Beakley headed to Austin to begin the transition to the collegiate game.

But after a summer with the Horns, Beakley was still without a scholarship and a little disheartened.

"I really enjoyed the program and the people," she said. "(Texas Coach) Mick (Haley) and I were having conflicts. I played in the Texas All-Star game and at that point was still unhappy with where I was at Texas. I talked with Terry again. Terry's always honest with you."

"Anyway, through a series of phone calls between Mick, Terry, me and my mom, I signed with A&M. My mom was a big influence on me coming here. She has always been an Aggie."

And after all of the heartache over signing, she broke her leg early in her freshman year and had to be red-shirted.

Beakley shatters the mold of the stereotypical athlete. On the Dean's List, she will graduate in May with an accounting degree.

"I work as hard at school as I do at athletics," Beakley said. "If I'm not playing volleyball, I'm studying. I realize that after volleyball is over, my education will carry me into the future."

## Top teams knock off Ag netters

Akagi, Gensler reach semifinals in doubles

By KEN SURY  
Sports Writer

The Texas A&M doubles team of Vanne Akagi and Gaye Lynne Gensler earned a semifinal berth in the Intercollegiate Tennis Coaches Association (ITCA) Regional Tournament this past weekend in Austin, but lost to a No. 2 seeded Louisiana State tandem.

Akagi and Gensler, seeded No. 7 for the tourney, lost in straight sets, 6-3, 7-6, to twins Dana and De Ann Watlington, who went on to win the tournament.

But even with that semifinal loss, A&M Tennis Coach Bobby Kleinecke looked at the team's tournament play positively.

"Getting to the semifinals (in an ITCA tourney) is the best we've (the women's tennis team) ever done," Kleinecke said. "In fact, we had a good shot at winning the match, but we couldn't pull it out."

In an ITCA regional tournament, the first and second place singles players and doubles teams earn automatic berths in the ITCA Nationals Tournament held in Houston on Feb. 6-9. But other players may earn an invitation to participate based on how well they competed in the regionals.

In other matches, A&M's No. 3 seeded doubles tandem of Kim Labuschagne and Karen Marshall made it to the quarterfinals, but were beaten by the No. 6 seeded team of Beverly Bowes and Robyn Field of Texas, 7-5, 6-3.

All eight Aggie singles players in the tourney were eliminated by the third round. But five of them lost to seeded opponents.

A&M's two other doubles teams also lost to seeded tandems.

Kleinecke said the doubles teams are consistently playing good tennis and that should carry into the spring season.

The singles players, he said, are on the verge of having solid performances.

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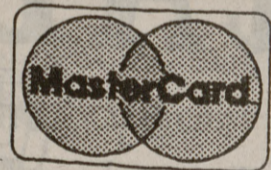
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