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Ag spiker aims for Olympics

Texas match Brinkman's last at A&M

By CHAREAN WILLIAMS
Assistant Sports Editor

There are two reasons Texas A&M middle blocker Sherri Brinkman stands out on the volleyball court.

One is that the 6-footer is one of the most dominating players in the collegiate game.

Brinkman can seemingly hang in midair, waiting for the set to get within reach. She can change hands and send the ball spiraling to the floor. She can go high above the net and, with one swing, send the ball traveling at supersonic speeds straight to the floor.

She'll finesse you one second and kill you the next.

U.S. National and Olympic Women's Coach Terry Liskovich calls Brinkman "one of the 10 best collegiate volleyball players in the country."

A&M Coach Terry Condon, herself an All-American at UCLA, said Brinkman is "an awesome player — one of the best."

And if you somehow miss seeing Brinkman on the court, you will certainly hear her.

Whenever she blocks a ball back into the spiker's face or smashes a ball onto a wide open floor, you can hear Brinkman yell and laugh with delight.

"It's a great feeling when you see no one up there and an open floor," she said. "You hit the ball and say, 'Yeah.' That's excitement. That's what the game's all about."

"If you don't enjoy a sport while you're doing it, why do it? I believe in doing whatever you want to do, no matter what the cost, as long as you're happy doing it."

And playing volleyball is what makes Brinkman happy.

"I love volleyball," she said. "It hurts me not to play well though. When I play well, that's when I have fun."

But there haven't been many matches when Brinkman hasn't played well in her four years at A&M.

The Mt. Prospect, Ill. native led the SWC in almost every statistical category last season.

After earning All-SWC honors for the second straight year, Brinkman was named to the All-America team.

"I was excited (about being voted an All-American)," she said. "When I went out to accept my plaque, for the first time I felt like I had really accomplished something. I'm not one to expect things. I never believe I'm as good as people say I am."

As impressive as she is on the court, Brinkman is even more impressive off the court.

Easy going, excitable, outspoken and funny, Brinkman always has a friendly word and a warm smile, even for strangers.

"I would rather be known as Sherri Brinkman the person, not Sherri Brinkman the volleyball player," she said.

And Sherri Brinkman the volleyball player will have her last chance to play in G. Rollie White Coliseum tonight at 7:30 when the No. 19 Aggies (25-6 overall and 7-2 in Southwest Conference play) host No. 8 Texas (20-5 and 8-0).

"I'll be crying my heart out," Brinkman said. "People think of Sherri Brinkman as the big, strong player, but I have emotions, and I'll probably show them Wednesday."

"A&M has given me a lot of memories. I'm very lucky. I'll remember all the fun times I've had here."

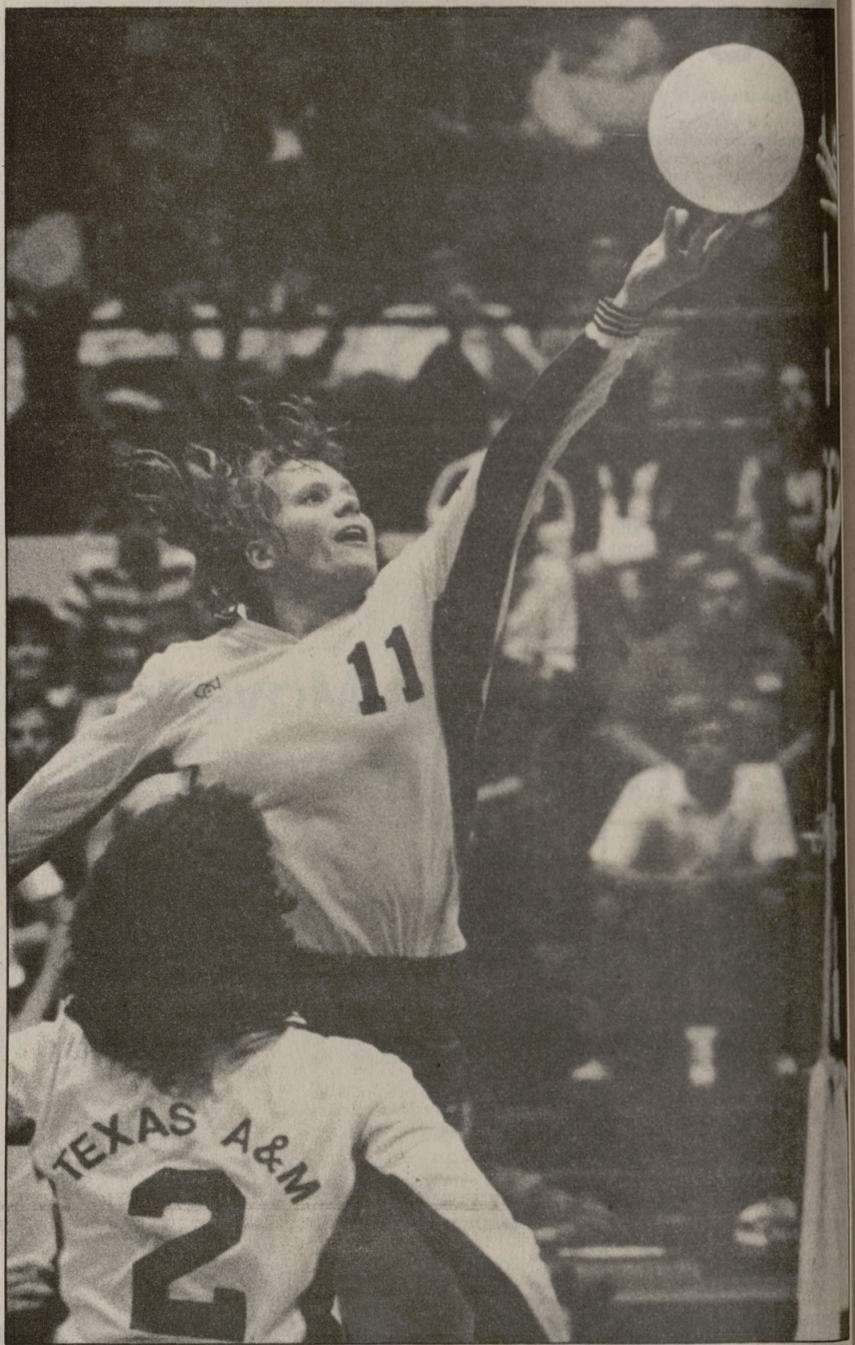


Photo by JOHN MAKELY

Texas A&M All-American Sherri Brinkman (11) will be setting her last ball over the G. Rollie

White Coliseum net tonight. The No. 19 Ags (25-6, 7-2) host No. 8 Texas (20-5, 8-0) at 7:30 p.m.

Brinkman said she has four things left to accomplish before finishing up her career in an Aggie uniform — beating Texas Wednesday night, winning the SWC, getting to play in the NCAA National Championship Tournament and winning the SWC Most Valuable Player award.

In Brinkman's four years at A&M, the Aggies have defeated the Longhorns only once — in 1982. And A&M has already lost to Texas once this season.

"We've always had the skill to beat Texas, we just haven't had the right mental attitude," Brinkman said. "Everyone makes such a big deal about beating Texas. They're no different than playing anyone else."

But Brinkman admits Wednesday's match will be different from any other she's ever played in. Not only will it mean walking off

G. Rollie for the last time, but Texas will win the SWC title with a victory over the Ags, denying Brinkman of a SWC Championship ring.

With a two game lead and only two games to play, the Horns have all but mathematically captured the title anyway. However, the Aggies need a win to help their cause in receiving one of the 12 at-large bids to the NCAAs.

"Everything is riding on this match," she said. "It's all or nothing. We have to play well to get an NCAA bid."

Even though she led the conference in hitting last season with a .360 and received the most votes for the All-SWC team, the MVP award went to Texas' Kim Larson. This season, Brinkman is again leading the SWC in hitting with a .357, and this time

she would like to win the award.

"Who wouldn't like to win it?" she said. "But it's politics, you know. It would be nice — but then a lot of things would be nice."

But she was more than ready to praise her teammates, "I love them. They've always treated me for who I am and not for what I've done," and Coach Condon, "She gave me everything I have now. She never gave up on me. When you have someone believe in you so much, you don't want to give up."

Brinkman, who was one of 12 players selected to represent the United States in last summer's World University Games, will know soon if she will make the U.S. National Team and the 1988 Olympic Team.

"I'll never stop playing this game," she said. "I love it too much."

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