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Tougher teams awai Metcalf's hurting Ags

By BRANDON BERRY

Sports Writer

The Texas A&M men's basketball team has been concerned with broken teeth, cartilage and bones through their first seven games. However, when A&M takes on Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Okla. Saturday night, it will be entering the meat of its schedule.

Following Saturday's game, A&M plays in the Gator Bowl Tournament in Jacksonville, Fla. (against No. 5ranked Georgia Tech in its opening game) and at the Sugar Bowl Tour-nament in New Orleans (against Pittsburgh of the highly competitive Big East Conference in its opener).

The Aggies won't play in the friendly, if not empty, confines of G. Rollie White Coliseum until they open Southwest Conference play

Jan. 2 against Baylor.

"This is probably the hardest nonconference schedule we've ever played here," A&M Coach Shelby Metcalf said. "We've played in some tough tournaments before, like the (Great) Alaska Shootout and the one up in Indiana, but the tournaments we've scheduled this year are all tough places to win. You could play great basketball and still lose both

So far this season, the Aggies have been more worried about losing

On Wednesday, sophomore forward Fred Burton and junior guard Steve Vandiver quit the team. Burton wanted to concentrate on academics while Vandiver wanted more playing time and a program more suited to his style of play.

"Steve (Vandiver) is a good stu-dent and he'll go someplace and play," Metcalf said. "He didn't have the quickness that we need from our guards and that limited his play

The losses leave A&M with just 11 players on the team, three of which are walk-ons, and only eight of which are healthy.

Two of the available players are recovering from nagging early-sea-son injuries — forwards Winston Crite and Al Pulliam with a sprained ankle and pulled knee ligaments, respectively. Forward Mike Clifford is playing with two reinstated front teeth and a pinched nerve in his

Reserve center David Thompson and back-up point guard Gary Lewis already are out indefinitely with broken hands.

At one point in the Aggies' 88-60 victory over Prairie View A&M last Wednesday, Metcalf used an all walk-on backcourt (Derrick Westbrook and James Pitts), with another on the wing (Paul Crawford).

"If there's been a bright spot in all of this, it's got to be Paul Crawford," Metcalf said. "We wouldn't have used him as much as we have this season if Winston and Al hadn't got-

'Paul's a good athlete with great jumping ability, but he's had to make the transition from a 6-(foot)-5 high school post player to a perimeter but he hasn't had time to learn court sense yet.
"Taking nothing away from Paul,

he still has to prove himself. He has to show that he can perform in a big game, that he can make a critical shot in a critical situation."

Crawford will probably start at forward for the Aggies against Oral Roberts if Clifford isn't back at full strength. Crite and senior center Jimmie Gilbert, who has shown more scoring ability this season, will complete the A&M front line. "I don't know of a center in (the

Southwest Conference) that I'd trade Jimmie for," Metcalf said. "I haven't seen that guy up at Arkansas (Andrew Lang) yet, but of all the centers coming back from last year, I think he's the best. Anderson at Houston might be better offensively,



Photo by ANTHONISE

By TOM 7

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A&M's Don Marbury (3) currently leads the Aggies and the Mark west Conference in scoring by averaging 26.5 points a game.

but I know Jimmie's the best defensive center in the conference.

"He's the hub of our defense. The other guys can gamble so much (defensively) because they know he's

The Aggies haven't been able to gamble as much as they wanted to defensively because of the lack of proven depth. Foul problems have already proven costly to A&M in losses to Alabama-Birmingham and Tennessee

Offensively, turnovers have been the most glaring weakness in the Aggie offense. Guard Don Marbury's one-on-one baseline drives and Crite's inside strength and jumping ability have been somewhat ham-pered by an inability to get the ball to them consistently.

When Kenny Brown (A&M's leading scorer last season) took his long-range jump shot to the NBA a year ago, the Aggies apparently lost and ago, the Aggres apparently tost and gained. They lost his point produc-tion and scoring ability in the clutchm but they gained a more-bal-anced, shot percentage-oriented of-

And an increased exposure to the 3-2 zone defense.

We can expect to see that (zone) defense until we prove we can beat it or shoot over it," Metcalf said. "Last

year, Kenny (Brown) lo defenses up for us outside to be a smarter basketball k it comes to beating that it when the numbers are again have to be more patie

A&M will face an On team with impressive in The Titans have three place stand at 6-foot-10 or above

However, Texas beat Old 66, and the Aggies have to lished as a 7-point favor odds-makers.

"They have a new coat of new players from las will take some time for the everything going up ther said. "But they have a coaching staff and we kno getting stronger the mor together - and we kno tough at home.

"Now isn't the time for All of our games from he games we have to play w a chance. Hopefully, conference starts, we'll more answers. Because 0 juries, these guys haven't to their full potential yet they do, things could get

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