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# Sports

## A&M's Clifford looks for respect Aggies facing 'teeth' of conference schedule

By CHAREAN WILLIAMS  
Assistant Sports Editor

Texas A&M forward Mike Clifford could do a good Rodney Dangerfield imitation.

"No respect. No respect." The Aggies' 6-foot-0 starter gets more attention for what he doesn't do with the basketball.

His early season "teeth incident" has been one of the highlights of a rather blah Southwest Conference season so far.

Clifford chased down Pan American guard Michael Anderson, who had knocked out Clifford's two front teeth, and spit blood on him.

"I'll wear a mouthpiece forever now," Clifford said. "I've made over a dozen trips to the dentist and have had enough Novocain to last for awhile."

Losing his two teeth made him more aware of flying elbows.

"That would affect anyone," Clifford said. "When I first came back, I was very concerned. But you've just got to think that something like that doesn't happen very often. You just have to go play."

Which is just what Clifford has been trying to do.

After starting 16 games last season, Clifford worked on his shooting in the offseason to prove that he was more than just a defensive specialist.

"I worked real hard on my shooting," he said. "Then when we started to play, I found I didn't need to shoot with the four other people we have playing. I was disappointed at first, but now I've accepted and adapted to it."

"Maybe it will be different next year because we're losing so many people. But right now I'm happy with what I'm doing."

However, most people don't even notice his defense, assists (71), rebounds (4.0 per game) or his leadership. They read only the statistics — missed free throws and a low scoring average.

Last week against Arkansas, Clifford had three points, four rebounds and 13 assists in the Aggies' 81-67 win. However, the first question asked to A&M Coach Shelby Metcalf was about the one free throw Clifford *did* make.

In Saturday's *Houston Chronicle*, columnist Al Carter tried to make a point about the demise of the SWC by using Clifford's 1.1 scoring average, his 25.7 field goal percentage (9-of-35) and his 22.2 free throw average (4-of-18) as an example.

"The SWC has been noted as a weak conference," Clifford said. "A lot of people have underrated us. I may be (underrated) too. It doesn't bother me. If the other team misjudges me, it might give me an advantage."

"I feel comfortable with my role. If other people don't respect me, it doesn't bother me one bit."

Metcalf isn't one of those who overlooks Clifford's importance to the Aggies.

"I don't know who all those people are," Metcalf said, "but we sure appreciate Mike. He's a fine de-

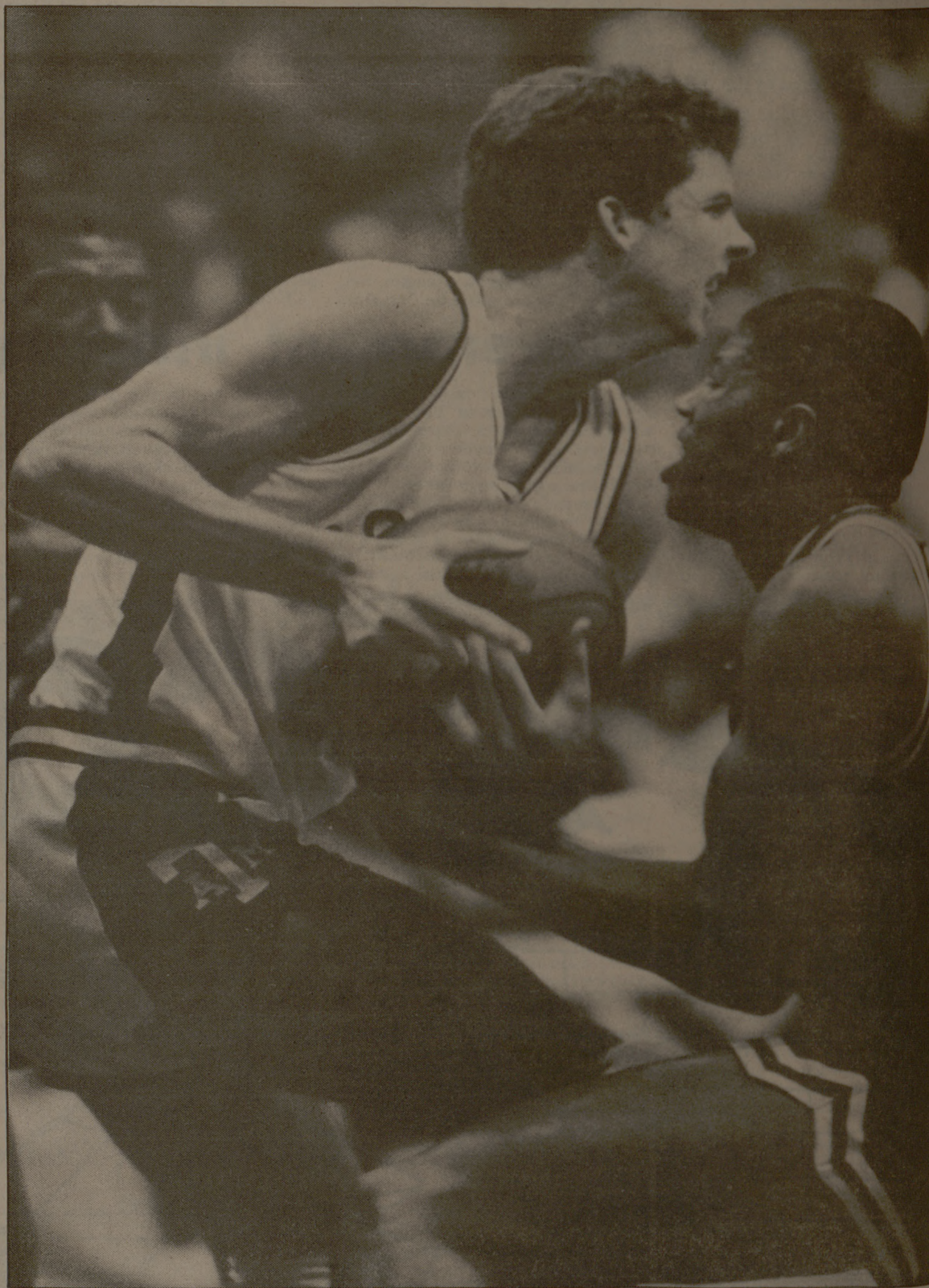


Photo by DEAN SATTI

A&M's Mike Clifford (left) tries his best to keep the ball out of reach of TCU's Carven Holcombe

earlier this season. Clifford leads the Aggies into Saturday's game against SMU in G. Rollie White

defensive basketball player and a gutsy guy."

Although his statistics don't read as smoothly as guard Don Marbury, forward Winston Crite or center Jimmie Gilbert, Clifford has been an

important cog in the Aggies' "Wheel of Fortune" (14-7 overall, 8-1 in SWC) so far this season.

The Aggies are alone in first place in the SWC, a game ahead of TCU and Texas. But A&M's next three

games, starting with Saturday night's 7:30 contest against SMU at Rollie White Coliseum, will be crucial in deciding its SWC fate.

"The next three games are the most important," Clifford said.

## Ag doubles team shocks No. 4 seed

HOUSTON — Texas A&M doubles partners Mark Smith and Russ Simmons scored a big win Thursday in the ITCA Nationals Tennis Tournament as they upset the No. 4-seeded tandem.

Smith and Simmons, unseeded in the tourney, defeated California's Chris Shoop and Steve DeVries 2-6, 6-4, 6-2 in the opening round of the

four-day event held at Chancellors Racquet Club in Houston. DeVries also is the No. 1-seeded singles player.

"It was just a fantastic upset for us," A&M Coach David Kent said. "We took the net away from them."

Smith and Simmons will play the winner of Thursday's Harvard-Houston match in the quarterfinals today.

In the women's division, A&M's Kim Labuschagne and Karen Marshall lost to Ros Riach and Kathy Richmond of Miami (Fla.), the No. 3 doubles seed, 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

Aggies' Vanne Akagi and Gaye Lynn Gensler, who were doubles alternates, got into the tourney on the draw, but lost to Arizona's Jill Smaller and Susan Russo 6-4, 6-3.

The losses drop the women to the consolation bracket, which will be redrawn today.

The remainder of the A&M tourney will host Stephen F. Austin at 11 today at the Omar Smith Tennis Center.

Both teams will be in action Saturday for matches with South west Texas State beginning at 11 p.m.

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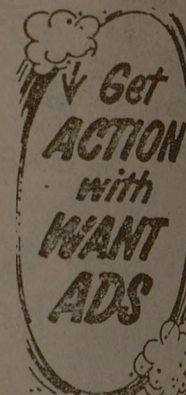
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