



A&M swimmers Rachel Benzel (left) and Suzanne Fiori smile during a break in practice at the

P.L. Downs Natatorium. The A&M men's and women's teams host Texas at 2 p.m. Saturday.

Photo by MIKE SANCHEZ

## A&M 'fish' making splash on women's swim team

By KEN SURY  
Assistant Sports Editor

Swimming for a nationally-ranked women's team can put a lot of pressure on anyone, but two Texas A&M freshmen have begun their collegiate careers smashing.

As in, record-smashing. Rachel Benzel and Suzanne Fiori, freshman roommates, already have set A&M records in freestyle distance events on the depth-thin Aggie women's squad.

Much of last semester the pair took turns breaking the 500-, 1,000- and 1,650-yard (considered the mile) freestyle marks. Benzel currently holds A&M records in each of those events, while Fiori is just a few seconds behind.

Although Benzel comes from the nearby Woodlands and Fiori is from Clearwater, Fla., both said they chose A&M because it offered what they were looking for.

"I really liked the (swimming) program a lot," Fiori, a bioengineering major, said. "(A&M's) a combination of good academics and good athletics. I didn't want to go to a school where I swam all the time."

Benzel, a marketing major, said, "I just got along with the people here. I really felt comfortable here, and I felt like I could swim fast with the type of training at A&M. And like Suzanne said, it's a perfect combination of athletics and academics."

The A&M women's team began the year ranked No. 15 in the country, but has fallen on lean times due to injuries and swimmers leaving the program. A&M has only five women swimmers and one diver, too few to win a meet as a team.

But Benzel said she feels the Aggie swimmers actually have benefitted from the smaller group.

"I think it's really helped to bring more out of everybody," Benzel said. "If you've got a lot of people on the team, you can just kind of hide behind the people. This situation makes you want to do your best, but it's not a pressure situation just because there are less swimmers."

"With only five girls, we get a lot of attention from the coaches. With the student assistant coaches, Coach (Mel) Nash and (assistant coach) Tracy Johnston, it's about (a ratio of) one-to-one. That's a real big change for us because we both came from teams (in high school)."

Fiori added, "It is a little disappointing knowing you can't win a meet as a team, but I think everyone understands and we work on individual performances."

Saturday, top performances will be required if the women hope to defeat an always-tough Texas team. Both the men and women will compete in the dual meet scheduled for 2 p.m. at the P.L. Downs Natatorium.

"Texas is the best — they're No. 1 (in the nation)," Benzel said. "I'm not expecting to beat anyone, but all depends who they put up in their events."

Fiori said, "Whoever we swim against, it'll be a great meet before conference." The women's Southwest Conference Championships will be held at the P.L. Downs swimming center in Austin Feb. 27-Mar. 1.

Although Benzel and Fiori are merely freshmen this year, next year they, along with sophomore swimmer Kelley Johnston, will be the veterans of the team. The other three A&M swimmers, Edlyn Bell, Jody Moir and Jody Tanner are seniors.

"It won't be more pressure on us," Benzel said. "It's just more responsibility."

Fiori quickly added, "It'll probably keep us in line, too."

## A&M track teams try to play spoiler in SWC meet

By TOM TAGLIABUE  
Sports Writer

Arkansas, Southern Methodist and Houston are the heavy favorites to win the Southwest Conference men's indoor track and field championships Saturday in Fort Worth.

The top contender for Texas A&M is freshmen shot putter Randy Barnes, who is trying to unseat defending champion Marty Kobza of Arkansas.

Kobza has the best put (65 feet, 4 inches) so far in the SWC, followed by SMU's Lars Nilsson and Barnes, who has put the shot 63-3/4. Barnes beat Kobza last week in Oklahoma City, although neither had their season's best puts.

One of the better events of the meet, to be held in the Tarrant County Convention Center, should

be the 60-yard dash.

SMU's "Robot" Roy Martin was the most heavily recruited track athlete in Texas last year, but he has only the second fastest 60 in the SWC. LeRoy Burrell of Houston has the fastest time of 6.17 seconds.

A&M's Floyd Heard has the SWC's third best time in the 60-yard dash at 6.24 seconds. Aggie Stanley Kerr has the fifth best time and Lawrence Felton the ninth. Felton also has the fourth best time in the 60-yard hurdles.

Aggie high jumper Ernie Mendez is ranked third in the SWC with a jump of 7 feet, just 3/2 inches less than the leading jumper in the conference, Bill Jasinski of Arkansas.

Two Aggie long jumpers have a chance for points — Ian James and Chris Walker. James, who qualified

*"I try to make a mental picture of the race. The (key to the) whole race is getting off to a great start. If you get out real slowly, you're in the back of the pack and it's really hard to make up ground."*

— A&M runner Matt Dunn

for the NCAA nationals two weeks ago, has the fourth best jump in the SWC (26-2/4) and Walker the seventh best.

The Aggies' mile relay team of Kendrick Wesley, Gary Purvis, Maurice Holt and Heard have the fourth fastest mark in the SWC, trailing SMU, Baylor and TCU. The Aggies, who ran 3:14.55, are less than two seconds off the second best time.

However, A&M Assistant Track

Coach Steve Silvey said the Aggies will not use Holt this weekend. Holt has been bothered by a nagging injury and will be replaced by freshman Matt Dunn.

Dunn will also compete in the 1,000-yard run for the Aggies. He has the SWC's 10th fastest 1,000 this season. Silvey said Dunn also could compete in the two-mile relay if he does not qualify in the 1,000.

Dunn said he has to picture the

race and likes to talk to someone to relieve the tension before a race.

"I try to make a mental picture of the race," Dunn said. "The (key to the) whole race is getting off to a great start. If you get out real slowly, you're in the back of the pack and it's really hard to make up ground."

While Dunn is competing in his first SWC meet, senior Francisco Olivares will be competing in his second and final SWC track meet.

Olivares, an All-American triple jumper from Mexico, will compete in the long jump as well as the triple jump, where he ranks sixth in the SWC with a jump of 50 feet, 10 inches.

Olivares said his goal for his last SWC meet is to jump 54 feet and help the team win the championship.

"I think (the team) is pretty good

this year," Olivares said. "I think everybody will try to do their best, but I'm pretty sure the team thinks we can win the (SWC) championship."

Olivares' triple-jumping partner Terrence Strong, will not compete in the meet. A&M Head Track Coach Charlie Thomas said Strong has injured foot and the Aggies will get Strong redshirted as a hardship case.

The A&M women's team will be looking to place and score points for the first time in two years during Saturday's SWC meet.

The Aggies' top contender in the triple jump is Brandy Stubblefield. Stubblefield has recorded the third best jump in the SWC at 5-6 1/2. Silvey also mentioned Kelly Dunn, Kathy Craig and Beth Bell as possible point producers for the Aggies.

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