

A&M wins big, strives for more

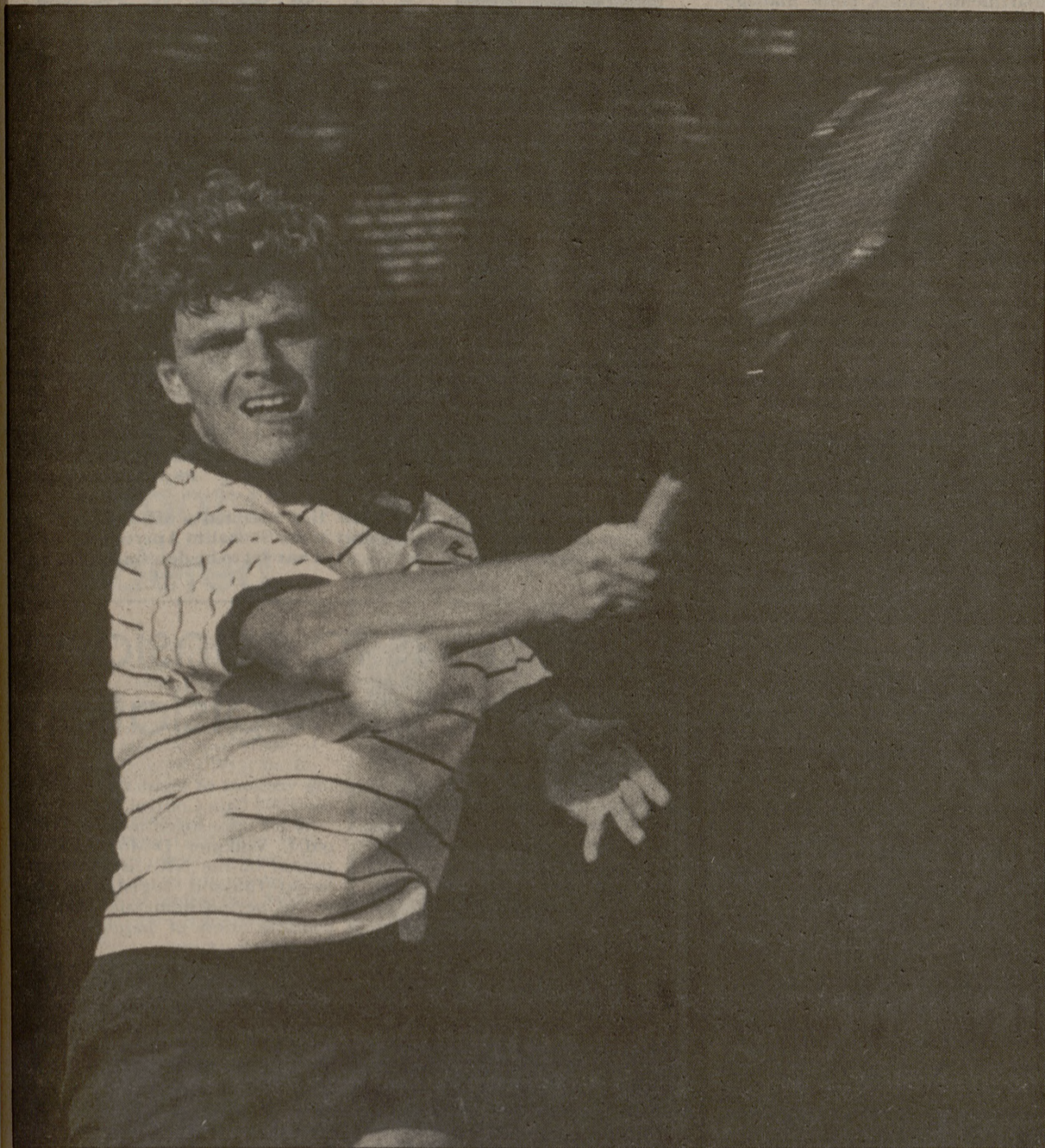


Photo by Dean Saito

A&M's Marcel Vos slams a forehand during a doubles match against TCU Saturday at A&M's Omar Smith Tennis Center. The 24th-ranked Aggies upset the No. 10 Horned Frogs, 6-3.

Ag doubles spur upset of No. 10 Frogs

By Ken Sury
Assistant Sports Editor

It was "buenos dias," for the 24th-ranked Texas A&M men's tennis team this weekend as it evened its Southwest Conference mark to 2-2 with wins over Texas Tech and No. 10 Texas Christian.

On Thursday, A&M Coach David Kent said it would be "a-dios, A&M" from the national rankings if they didn't beat the Red Raiders and Horned Frogs to remain undefeated at home in the Omar Smith Tennis Center.

But the Aggies did win both, a 7-2 romp over Tech and, despite a shaky singles outing, a 6-3 upset over TCU. The wins move A&M's home mark to 9-0.

"This is the break we've been looking for," Kent said. "It's one of the best wins for us in a long time. I'm just elated."

Saturday against TCU, the Aggies and Horned Frogs were deadlocked with three wins each after the singles play. It was the bottom half of the lineup, Dean Goldfine, Chris Stanich and Brent Haygarth, that provided the Aggie victories.

The No. 1 to 3 matches went to three sets, but A&M's Kimmo Alkio, Marcel Vos and Dean Johnson couldn't come up with wins.

It was A&M's solid doubles play, sparked by team captain Russ Simmons, that provided the margin of victory.

Simmons and Haygarth, the Aggies' No. 1 tandem, fought off inconsistent play after a strong first set to defeat John Baker and Scott Meyers, 6-1, 3-6, 7-5.

Alkio and Vos beat Neil Broad and Jose Marques-Neto, 6-2, 6-3, for the No. 2 doubles match win, while Johnson and Goldfine defeated Doug Gleason and John Sullivan, 6-1, 6-3.

Ags' duo looks for team effort in important SWC encounter

By Ken Sury
Assistant Sports Editor

There's a big match brewing. And if you talk to the No. 18 Texas A&M women's tennis team, they'll tell you just how important it is.

Ask anyone on the team. Better yet, ask Helen Christiaanse and Laura Liong, who A&M Coach Bobby Kleinecke has credited with consistently playing winning tennis while some of the other players struggled.

Christiaanse and Liong, who play in the No. 5 and 6 singles spots, both agree Tuesday's matches against No. 22 SMU could well make or break the Aggies' hopes of winning the Southwest Conference.

"It's gonna be tough," Christiaanse said. "SMU is one of those big conference matches. If we do against SMU what we did against Texas (a 5-4 win), we've got a great shot at conference — No. 1."

Liong mirrored Christiaanse's assessment of Tuesday's 1:30 p.m. matchup at A&M's Omar Smith Tennis Center between the only undefeated teams in the SWC (both at 4-0).

"It's gonna be like the Texas matches," Liong said. "It's gonna be close — probably 5-4. It's just a matter of wanting it more."

"If we want it more — which I think we do — we'll win it."

If the inside track to a conference championship isn't enough incentive to win Tuesday, it's also the final women's home match of the season. For seniors Christiaanse and Vanne Akagi, A&M's No. 1 singles player, it will be their last appearance on the Omar Smith courts.

Christiaanse is only in her second year of Aggie tennis as she played her freshman and sophomore years at Brigham Young University.

Among BYU's opponents during her stay was a less-than-formidable A&M.

"At BYU back then, if you would have mentioned A&M to us, we used

to laugh," Christiaanse said. "I think we've (A&M) gained a lot of respect (this year), but it's also tough because we're no longer the underdog."

She said problems with the BYU coaches led her to seek another tennis program, so she came to A&M, a move which she hasn't regretted.

Liong, Christiaanse's partner at the No. 3 doubles spot this year, has been a fixture at A&M's No. 6 singles position each of her three years.

However, she and No. 3 singles player Gaye Lynne Gensler were sidelined Saturday as their teammates blasted New Mexico, 9-0.

But both say they will be ready for Tuesday's showdown with SMU.

Kleinecke said the team looked a little flat against New Mexico, primarily because the SMU match was on the players' minds.

"We'll be up for the match though," Kleinecke said. "SMU's main strength is their singles. We need to get aggressive and gain the upper hand. We can control our own destiny."

While Kleinecke is concerned with the singles play, the doubles teams have been strong throughout the season.

Christiaanse and Liong, are 11-5 overall and 3-0 in the conference at the No. 3 doubles spot. The No. 1 team of Akagi-Gensler and the No. 2 duo of Kim Labuschagne-Karen Marshall have a combined overall record of 25-10, 5-2 in conference.

Christiaanse and Liong say they keep each other in line during their doubles matches.

"We're both pretty temperamental," Liong said. "We know we have to keep each other cool. We can relate to each other when you just want to let it out."

Christiaanse added, "We say we're our own cheerleading force."

The words of encouragement and cheerleading don't stop with Christiaanse and Liong, however.

"It's totally a team thing," Liong said. "There may be six people playing on the court, but there's 10 playing the matches."

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