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# Intense competitor, proven winner, bad loser

## A&M's Andaya still looking for elusive NCAA championship

By Hal L. Hammons  
Assistant Sports Editor

The game. A steady drizzle comes down and lightning flashes across the sky, but it isn't raining on Shawn Andaya's parade.

It rains on everyone else, though, as the Texas A&M softball team manages to complete 4 1/2 innings against Sam Houston State in the last game of the Lady Aggies' regular season.

But the rain doesn't chase the fans away. About 60 or 70 people — easily three times the normal crowd at an A&M softball game — stick it out through the rain, huddled underneath overhangs, under nearby shelters, or just suffering in the bleachers.

Many are not in a position to see much of the game at all.

But they want to be there when Shawn closes out her final season as a Lady Aggie softball player, so the dampness is worth it.

Andaya doesn't even seem to notice the rain, either before or during the game. Even afterwards, when there were no more pitches to throw or to hit, she ignores the drizzle that quickly is turning into a down-pour as she obliges a fan who wants her to autograph four or five softballs.

Coach Bob Brock: "The thing that best characterizes Shawn is that she gives everything, and she asks nothing in return. There's never a day Shawn doesn't give everything she has."

The mound. From the moment she faces her catcher, and without uttering a single word, Andaya is in complete charge of the game. In stark contrast to the jerky, crow-hopping style of the opposing pitcher, Andaya's motion is smooth and rhythmic, not even disturbing her trademark ponytail.

Quickly she gets ahead of the batter and goes to her knockout punch, the riser.

The pitch comes in high and hard, crossing the plate at eye level and landing heavily in the catcher's mitt. The batter, hopelessly and helplessly fooled, swats futilely at the ball that is already in the glove. Strike three.

Teammate and fellow-pitcher Julie Carpenter: "She's a very dedicated, aggressive pitcher. She just goes right at them. Her

best pitch is the riser. It looks like it's coming right at you, but it's not."

The practice. The girl in the light blue shirt that says "All-Star" is a picture of concentration at first base as the team takes infield practice.

Although Shawn says she enjoys playing first because it allows her to relax more, it does not show in her face.

At the plate taking batting practice, her mouth never opens. She stoically steps into the batter's box and promptly drives the first pitch about 230 feet to the base of the center-field fence at Bee Creek Park field 1.

"Great shot, Shawn!" her teammates cheer in their typically encouraging style. Andaya, already concentrating on the next pitch, doesn't react.

Only while shagging flies in the outfield does she relax. As a teammate hits a deep fly to her in center, she leaps for the catch that she ends up making at about shoulder level.

"Good one, Shawn," a teammate yells, and the team laughs. Andaya smiles.

Four-year teammate Judy Trussell: "She's so mentally tough. Sometimes we let ourselves slack off a little sometimes because we think, 'Shawn's going to do it.' She wants it more than anybody else. She plays to win."

The person. "Do you mind if I eat?" she asks as she eases into a booth at Mama's Pizza, a favorite hangout of the team. A long-time veteran of media interviews, she jumps right into conversation about her life as the star pitcher on the second-ranked softball team in the country.

It does not take long for the competitor in her to emerge.

When asked what she thinks about when on the mound, she smiles with a twinkle in her eyes.

"This probably sounds cocky," she says, "but each batter is a challenge. It's a one-on-one battle against the batter, and I want to see if I can win."

She usually does. In her four-year career at A&M, which includes two second-team All-America selections, her record is 106-27.

When the losses do come, however, the reaction is not pretty.

Shawn readily confesses she is not a good loser.

But she says that attitude makes the losses come with less frequency.

"A bad loser makes a winner," she says.

She says all losses are tough to swallow, but the ones that are most difficult to take are the ones that she worked hardest to make into victories, only to see slip away.

"If you get beat, you get beat," she says. "That's easier to accept. But if I've done a lot of things to get to a point and make a mistake, that's tough to handle."

But likewise, the sweetest wins are the ones that are toughest to earn. She relates the story of a College World Series game in which she pitched shutout ball for 23 innings. Unfortunately for her, the Lady Aggies were similarly unable to score.

After six or seven hours of play, the game was finally postponed until the next day.

She says she was surprised when, instead of coming back with the other Lady Aggie pitcher to finish the game, Brock wanted her to do it.

So, with an aching arm but seeing the game as hers to win or lose, Andaya took the mound again and held down the fort until A&M scored to win 1-0 in the 26th inning.

That was one of the two years Andaya and the Lady Aggies made it to Omaha, each time winding up as one of the final two teams in the Series.

Each year saw her chosen to the All-Tournament team.

Still, she says that honor just gets filed away in the back of her mind along with all the others she has accumulated over the years.

"For some reason, awards and all that stuff doesn't mean that much to me," she says. "A week later I forget about it."

And each of those years in Omaha, the Lady Aggies finished second. That's something Shawn Andaya does not forget about.

This year, the last in a distinguished career, Shawn wants more than anything else in the world to get the one honor that has eluded her. The one she wants more than any other.

A College World Series championship.

Is it really the most important

thing in her life? She is and emphatic in her reply.

"Yes, yes. Over everything she says.

She sees her last year slipping away and would one final piece of the puzzle put into place before she leaves.

"We have less than two weeks to make that dream come true," she says. "Everything else here for me, but that won't change."

The conversation turns to State-Fullerton, and less frequent on Andaya's mind.

"We don't like each other," she says, summing up in a nutshell the relationship between the team and the Lady Aggie No. 1 team in the country.

The rivalry came to a head last year, when Shawn beat her and her team in the national championship.

She says that as early as the fourth inning, when the Aggies scored their first run, she could feel the game slipping away.

With no score, a Fullerton was involved in a close game.

"We've seen replays," she says, "and we think she beat me, but that wasn't true."

Her conversation is animated, however, when she talks about a rematch in the future.

"I've beat them before," she says. "We'll be ready."

"I really hope it comes us and them in the final," she says. "It should be two teams in the championship."

But are the Lady Aggies ready for the challenge?

"Yeah, definitely," she says, "but we're better."

"I think we want it more," she says to elaborate. "I know I rect myself. I know I want it more."

"It's hard to explain, but we want it. We've been here twice. We've been so close."

What if Cal State wins? "Then they're better than we are."

But, as if she's still a softball during the conversation, she hurries to cover the bases by explaining the times the best team did the game.

"But if we win, we win," she says, and smiles again.

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