

Sports

Women's sports lack support of fans Hickey: Strong teams mean better attendance

By Tom Mulos
Reporter

At Texas A&M, like many other college campuses across the nation, there is a lot of excitement going on that many people don't recognize or don't even know about.

It's called women's spectator sports — the sports like basketball, softball, and volleyball.

The reasons for the lack of involvement:

- Some people say the games just aren't exciting.
- Simply put, not many attend the games.
- Especially the students.
- Need to have a winning program.
- It will come in time.

Women's athletics at A&M Part one of a two-part series

First, people claim that the games just aren't as exciting as the men's games. They say that the guys can dunk the ball and pass the ball better.

"Our style of basketball is a lot different from the men," said Lynn Hickey, assistant athletic director for women's athletics and head basketball coach. "We have a 30-second shot clock opposed to the men's 45-second clock. We might not be able to dunk the ball, but our game is quicker and just as exciting."

Associate Athletic Director John David Crow said, "Anyone sports-minded would believe that the men could beat the women, and they could. The level of competition might not be the same, but the competition is definitely there."

Second, why don't people come to the games?

Hickey said, "They simply don't know how exciting the games are. Our style of basketball is a lot different from the men. We might not be able to dunk the ball, but our game is quicker and just as exciting. Just ask the people that do come to the games and they'll tell you that it's pretty exciting."

Women's athletic departments all over have had problems getting people to attend their games. One would think that the community would rally behind their local teams, but they don't.

At A&M, last year's basketball home games averaged 363 people with a total attendance of 4,174 in 13 home games. Volleyball is much the same. This year, it averaged 339 from 5,424 total people in 16 games. The largest crowd this season was 930 for the game against the University of Texas.

"Texas had over 17,000 people in Austin last year for the women's Final Four which says something for women's athletics," Charlie Fiss, assistant director for media relations



The women's basketball team celebrates their first tournament win

Photo by Robert W. Rizzo

for the Southwest Conference, said. "That proves that there is an audience out there."

UT's total attendance at volleyball games was 13,705 for an average of 914. Its basketball team averaged 6,639 a game with a total attendance of 92,947.

Hickey said, "Texas' women outdid everyone in basketball attendance except the men at Arkansas."

On the other hand, Rice's volleyball team averaged 192 this year and their basketball team averaged 296 last year. The University of Houston averaged 215 for volleyball this year and 445 for basketball last year.

"We have to compete with three professional teams: the Rockets, Oilers and Astros," Rick Poulter, women's sports information director at UH, said. "We do pretty well compared to other schools in the conference other than Texas."

Third, the students don't come to games. Most of the fans are local residents.

"I don't know why the students don't come," Patti Spring, Texas' women's SID, said. "We hardly have any students come out. Most of our fans are town people. I wish we knew the secret to getting students to come out."

Hickey said, "They (UT) have called us wanting to know how to get students to come out and we couldn't tell them. I don't know why they call us, it seems like they would have more student support than we do."

Associate Athletic Director John David Crow said, "The only reason I can think of is that they (the stu-

dents) have so many things to do and places to go that they have to make a decision of where to go. It's a shame because it's good competition and good entertainment. It's not a strain on anyone's budget because it is relatively inexpensive to buy a ticket."

Even with promotions aimed at raising the student attendance, the students come for the promotions and don't come back. Hickey has even made appearances to student groups.

Hickey said, "We have had so many promotional events. The students come out and don't come back. I go and give talks to campus groups and they seem real gung-ho while I'm there, but I never see them at games. We're staging a tug-of-war contest with the intramural department for this year. Not even one team has signed up."

Fourth, why is UT's attendance so good compared to the rest of the conference? They have established winning programs.

UT's volleyball team from 1982-86, has compiled a record of 151-43 and has won the conference and finished in the top 10 in the nation each year. The basketball team has done even better with a 155-9 record and a national championship in 1985. They reached the semifinals last year when the Final Four was in Austin but lost 76-74 to Louisiana Tech.

"When you have a winning program like UT's, the fans will start to come out," Hickey said. "They still don't have the students, but they do

get the local people. Hopefully, in the near future, we will get to the point where they are now."

With the exception of this year, A&M's volleyball team finished second to Texas in the conference each year since 1982 and amassed a 138-62 record. This year the volleyball team has a 15-20 record and is presently in sixth place in the conference.

The basketball team, however, has never matched the record of the volleyball teams. They have a 67-76 record in the same five year period.

The Lady Aggies are off to a good start this year, currently holding a 4-1 record after winning their first tournament trophy ever last weekend at the Converse-Hampton Inn Lady Aggie Classic.

Crow said, "Of course winning will help. Anytime you win the people will come out and watch. Like in football, when we started winning a few years ago our attendance grew and now we (had) the largest crowd ever at home when we play Texas."

Fifth, Hickey thinks that the growth in fans on a nation-wide basis will only come in time.

Hickey said, "You look at the growth of men's basketball during the past ten years. It has grown immensely because of television. I think that the women's programs will only grow in time. We are still fairly young."

Fiss said, "You go back 50 years and the men were going through the same things. In due time the women will evolve too."

Astros acquire shortstop Ramirez from Braves

DALLAS (AP) — The Houston Astros acquired shortstop Rafael Ramirez from the Atlanta Braves on Tuesday for two minor league players.

The 28-year-old Ramirez batted .263 in a reserve role for the Braves last season. He had been Atlanta's starting shortstop for nearly six years before losing his job to Andres Thomas. Ramirez led or tied for the most errors in the National League from 1981-85.

In addition, the Astros received cash with Ramirez for third baseman Ed Whited and pitcher Mike Stoker.

Officials said Ramirez will fill Houston's need for a starting shortstop, a spot that has been weak since

Dickie Thon was unable to recover from a beanball injury in early 1984.

Switch hitter Craig Reynolds platooned with right-handed Buddy Biancalana and Bert Pena last season for the Astros after Thon left the team following 32 games. Biancalana, Pena and Thon combined for only three runs batted in, all by Thon.

It was the first trade made by Astros General Manager Bill Wood, who had been promoted to the position one day before.

Ramirez, a career .263 hitter, averaged about 50 RBI as a starter. His best season was 1983 when he batted .297 with 58 RBI. He is currently

playing winter ball in the Dominican Republic.

"We've added offense to our ballclub," Astros Manager Hal Lanier said. "He's a good National League shortstop. Right now, I'm looking at him as our everyday shortstop."

Officials said Ramirez was on the disabled list from July 2 to Sept. 25 with partially torn ligaments in his left knee. Astros officials said they are confident he will be fine for spring training.

Since 1986, when Andres Thomas took over, the Braves had been trying to trade Ramirez. Ramirez played mostly at third base, along with some shortstop and outfield in 1986 and split time between short and third last year.

Atlanta had also wanted to unload Ramirez's \$875,000 salary.

Houston and the New York Yankees pursued Ramirez before the Astros got him.

Whited and Stoker played for Class A Asheville, N.C., in 1987.

The 23-year-old Whited led the South Atlantic League with a .323 average and 126 RBI. He was the league's All-Star third baseman.

Stoker, 21, was 13-5 with a 2.91 earned run average in 25 starts.

"We've changed the direction we're going," said Braves Manager Chuck Tanner. "We've revamped our thinking. We're going with younger players."

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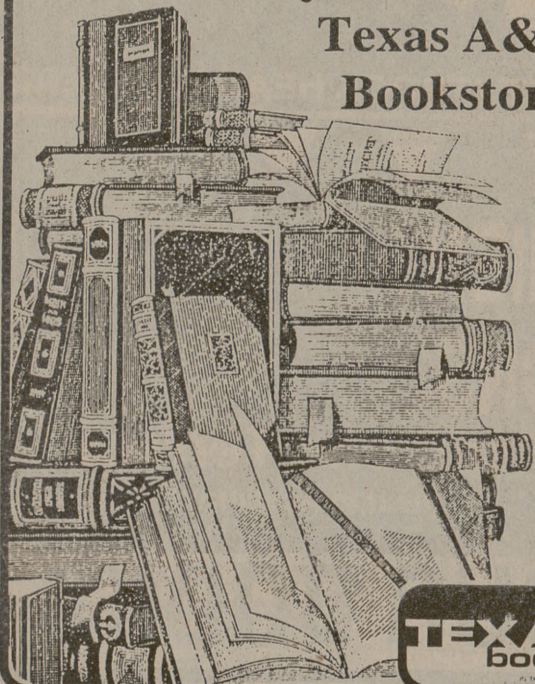
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