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Volleyball team ready for next level

Coach says team looking for conference title, ranking in Top 20

By Jeff Osborne

Of The Battalion Staff

Several key ingredients are involved in the 1989 Lady Aggie Volleyball program: confidence, an exciting and aggressive style of play, a never-say-die attitude and a dedication to winning.

The Lady Aggies have built a winning tradition, finishing second in the Southwest Conference behind the Lady Longhorns every year in the 1980's except 1987, when the team finished fourth.

This year, Coach Al Givens says they are ready to step up to a higher level.

"We sat down with our returning players last January and asked, 'Where do you want to take this program?' " Givens said. "The program belongs to the players and they must have the effort and commitment to pursue their goals."

"They said they wanted to win the conference - which we have never done - and be one of the top four teams in the region. Our nationally set goal is to finish in the Top 20."

"With our returning experience and new players, I feel like that's an attainable goal."

The Lady Aggies finished the 1988 season with an 18-15 record and in a tie for second place in the SWC.

One of their goals is to return to the NCAA playoffs for the first time since 1986, Givens first year as head volleyball coach at A&M.

"This season, we'll play some high quality opponents," Givens said. "We're not ducking anyone. . . . We play the best competition we can. You can make your schedule to win 20 games a year against weak sisters, but that's not the way you build a good program."

"Our players have that tenacious Aggie attitude, a never-say-die attitude. The ingredients to be successful are present, it's just a matter of blending them together."

One of the high notes of last season, Givens said, was how much the team learned.

"Anybody that competes hates to lose. The players are ready to pay back some old debts and reach for the challenge."

In addition, the team has a new motto, "Whatever it takes to get the job done, just do it."

"One of the things I've noticed this year that wasn't present last year," Givens said, "is that this team will go for the jugular. . . a killer instinct. They won't give opponents anything, and will make them pay for mistakes."

"Texas has won the conference every year and there was a psychological hold bearing in the match. Last spring we beat Texas for the first time (in Givens career at A&M) and we took a big step forward at that point."

The team features four returning starters: Yvonne Van Brandt, a senior setter from San Antonio; Krista Hierholzer, a junior setter from Boca Raton, Fla.; Amy Cummings, a junior middle blocker from Midland and Kelli Kellen, a junior middle blocker from Conroe.

Also returning are senior Lynn Ponder, an outside attacker from Dallas; Moniki Daniels, a sophomore

middle blocker from Yuma, Ariz.; Sheri Hermesmyer, a sophomore outside attacker from Amarillo; and Alysia Gonzales, a sophomore outside attacker from Camanche, Iowa.

Freshman players include Elizabeth Edminston, an outside attacker from Kingwood; Raychell Michalke, an outside attacker from Schulenburg and Kim Mitchell, a middle blocker and outside attacker from Marshall.

Also freshmen Barb Bella, a middle blocker and outside attacker from Oak Forest, Ill. and Sheila Morgan, a middle blocker from Houston.

"We have an awful lot of depth, flexibility and different options," Givens said. "Right now, I'm very optimistic with what I've seen in the first week."

"In my 14 seasons of coaching, this group of young ladies collectively is the most cohesive group I've ever coached. The chemistry on the team is so good and this team is very goal oriented."

"We have a 3.2 team grade-point-average and a good cross section of majors. I really get excited when they do well in the classroom as well."

In addition to the players, Givens said he is fortunate to have Cindy Alvear as assistant coach.

"Cindy has been excellent for our program. She's by far the best assistant coach I've ever worked with."

The team learned a lot last year about what it takes to win, Givens said.

"There's about four matches that stick out in my mind," he said. "In last year's Reebok/Hampton Inn Invitational, we lost to Colorado State at home. I'm convinced if we had more people we would have won. The Spirit of the 12th Man, or in our case the seventh, really makes a big difference."

"We lost to Arizona State in the same tournament. They were ranked 15th in the nation, and a win would have catapulted us into the Top 20 and really boosted our confidence."

The Lady Aggies also lost a match to the University of Santa Clara that Givens says was because of injuries.

"The most bitter loss was in the fifth game of the match against Houston at home. It was late in the season and this could have made the difference in getting an at-large bid (to the first round of the NCAA Regional playoffs) if we had won that one."

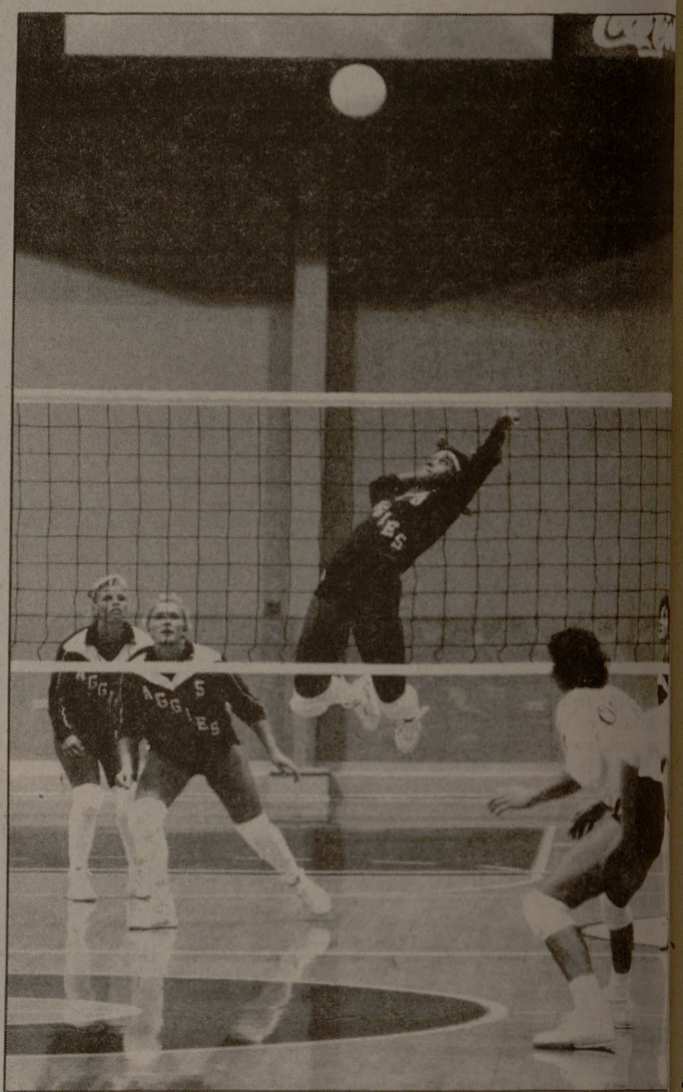
Givens said he is looking forward to great things in store for the program. "The facilities are phenomenal, the fans are very enthusiastic, supportive and loyal and A&M has an air of confidence."

"Fans expect you to win and you expect to win. Everytime I hear the Aggie War Hymn, I get goosebumps and I'm fired up. Our program is going vertical because of the quality of people involved."

Givens said he has been pleased with the fan support, but would like to see more Aggies come to the games.

"We'd like to see a thousand or 2,000 fans at each game. It should be a happening, an event."

"I'd like to see the Dunn Bleacher Bums back at the games. In the past, Dunn Hall has supported us and



Battalion file photo

The Texas A&M volleyball team has been a perennial runner-up to Texas in the '80s. Coach Al Givens says this could be the year the Aggies break through.

really adopted the team. This has brought excitement to the matches. From a coaching standpoint, this is something you really appreciate."

An added element of excitement is that D.D. Grubbs, who has gained fame for his unique style, will be announcer for the volleyball games.

"I'm sure D.D. will play music and really get the crowd fired up, and this is something else that's exciting."

Givens said he would even like to see a 20-30 piece band at the games.

"The women athletes work extremely hard, as hard as the males at perfecting their game."

"It would be nice to see female students support women's athletics more."

"If Colorado State, which only has 15,000 students can get 4,000-5,000 for games, why can't A&M with 40,000 students?"

"I envision G. Rollie White becoming very intimidating, a real holler house that makes opponents' knees knocking together. We have the potential to make it happen."

Numerous contests and promotions should also attract fans to the games. Whataburger is the official sponsor of SWC Volleyball, and will have contests in which mopeds and other prizes will be given away.

Also, during Beach Night on Nov. 7 against Florida, samples of waiian Tropic suntan lotion will be given away.

In addition, the six starters on the team will throw t-shirts to the fans at each game.

"We put out a quality product, get fans involved and come out and enjoy the games," Givens said. "The kids go out and play their hearts out, and I think we'll win a lot of games."

"If people come to see us, we won't leave disappointed. We will always win, sometimes we'll run out of time, but the effort and dedication will always be there."

The Lady Aggies will play home games this season, beginning with a match against LSU on Tuesday. Additional matches at home include games against Nebraska, Texas and BYU. Each of these teams finished in the Top Ten last year.

"Our overriding goal is to win last game we play, and if that happens, we'll be in Hawaii for the Four," Givens said.

"There's a lot of time between now and December and we can look past any opponents. The ingredients are present that we have and outstanding season."

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Think you're a trivia whiz? Did you know . . .

- Only three weeks before the Chicago Bears defeated the Washington Redskins, 73-0, in the 1940 NFL title game, the Redskins had beaten Chicago, 7-3.
 - In 1912, the great Jim Thorpe of Carlisle returned a punt for a touchdown against Army. The punter was Dwight D. Eisenhower.
 - In an exhibition pocket billiards match in 1954, the legendary Willie Mosconi reportedly ran 526 straight balls.
 - Joe Magrane of the Cardinals had a 5-9 record in 1988 but still led the National League in earned-run average with 2.18.
 - The Baseball Hall of Fame is located on Main Street in Cooperstown, N.Y.
 - Southpaw Bill Walker of the New York Giants led the National League in earned-run average in 1929 with 3.08, a record high.
 - Hall of Fame slugger Stan Musial of the Cardinals led the National League in hitting seven times but never in home runs.
 - For 10 years, 1921 through 1930, the Philadelphia Phillies were last in the National League six times and never got higher than fifth.
 - Connie Mack managed the Philadelphia Athletics for 50 of the 54 years they were an American League team.
 - Kenesaw Mountain Landis became the first baseball commissioner on Nov. 12, 1920, and served until his death on Nov. 25, 1944.
 - Through 1989, 14 major league batters had hit 500 or more home runs.
 - Home run hero Babe Ruth finished fourth on the all-time list of Boston Red Sox pitchers in earned-run average with a career mark of 2.10.
 - Protective batting helmets were made mandatory in the American League in 1971.
- See Trivia/Page 5

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