

TANK McNAMARA

by Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds



'War dance' suits Kellen fine

By Alan Lehmann

Of The Battalion Staff

Kelli Kellen watches the perfect set drift toward her, leaps into the air and pounds the volleyball past two blockers. She celebrates the kill by thrusting her arms over her head and dancing around in a small circle while the crowd and her teammates show their approval.

The "war dance", one of Kellen's more visible trademarks, sometimes angers or intimidates her opponents, but that's fine with her.

"A lot of people tell me it looks cocky, but I don't intend it to be at all," Kellen said. "It's just a means for me to celebrate."

"I think it helps our team, and I would hope that it would make other teams mad or intimidated, simply because we're confident in the things we do."

Yvonne Van Brandt, her co-captain and teammate of four years, said Kellen is a vocal team leader.

"She's always giving instructions and shouting encouragement," Van Brandt said. "It really helps the younger players to know Kelli's there. They know that if they make mistakes, she'll cover for them and encourage them."

Coach Al Givens, Kellen's coach since she was a redshirt freshman, says she is a positive influence on her teammates.

"Kelli is a role model on and off the court," Givens said. "She really loves playing the game, and younger players seem to catch her enthusiasm. Off the court,

she has a genuine concern for her teammates."

Kellen was named the Southwest Conference volleyball Player Of the Week last week. She's no stranger to awards. She's won the award once before, and she was named to the All-SWC second team after her sophomore season.

Kellen took the award in stride. "It's nice that I'm peaking in my senior year," Kellen said. "I started slow last year."

Kellen said that she loves the camaraderie of being on the team.

"I like the competition and the feeling of being a team," Kellen said. "You can't play the game unless the six people are playing together."

"When you do something right, it's celebrated with the six people on the team. Also, there are a lot of areas in volleyball to be good at, and I like that."

Kellen certainly is good at most things done on a volleyball court.

She's got the defensive part down, with 162 digs this season. She's ninth on the A&M career list in digs.

She's the team's most consistent blocker. Her 32 solo blocks this season are twice as many as the closest Lady Aggie. She's also second on A&M's career list in solo blocks.

Although she is a defensive standout, Kellen is also one of the team's leaders on offense as well. She had A&M's season game-high 22 kills against University Texas-Arlington this season.

Being a complete player hasn't come easy for her. Van Brandt said that Kellen works as hard in

practice as on the court.

"She just keeps practicing hard," Van Brandt said. "Kelli has improved a lot. She hits well from both sides of the court and has improved her serve tremendously."

Kellen said that the main improvement in her game has been adjusting to the opposing team.

"I see the court much better," Kellen said. "Knowing what's going on on the other side, and reading what they're going to do."

"Anticipating where the block will be was something I never even considered as a freshman. It makes you a smarter hitter to know where the other hitters are."

Despite her efforts, the Lady Aggies have fallen on hard times this season. They are 1-5 in SWC play and 9-13 on the season, and have lost eight of their last nine matches.

She said it's not easy to lose.

"It's frustrating to lose mainly because I know we have so much talent on this team," Kellen said.

"I can't stress it enough to the younger players not to get down, because we have the talent here to have a great program. We're only one match away from coming together as a team."

Still, even with the losses, her goal for the season is within reach.

"I want to beat Texas," Kellen said. "That's my main goal."

She'll get a chance to realize that goal on Nov. 14, when the Lady Longhorns come to G. Rollie White Coliseum.

Aggie fans hope to see her doing the victory dance a lot during that match.

Rasmussen

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machine in the Astrodome. Other tough games for the Longhorns include Baylor and Texas Tech.

With a 3-0 conference record, Texas stands to benefit from the A&M-Arkansas game on Nov. 24.

Aside from rooting for Arkansas because of its traditional hatred toward the Aggies, Texas would like the Razorbacks to win for other reasons.

Texas beat Arkansas earlier this year and in the case of identical SWC records at the end of the season, Texas would get the nod for the trip to Dallas because it's been longer since the Longhorns went to the Cotton Bowl.

Texas A&M, on the other hand, has a tough road ahead of them if they are to regain the SWC title.

"We still have both (Texas and Arkansas) left to play and we face them

back to back," Slocum said.

And that's no easy task.

The Longhorns are currently ranked 22nd in the Associated Press' poll and could easily rise higher than that before they meet the Aggies. They have upset Oklahoma and Arkansas away from home and showed they deserve to be at the top of the SWC.

Arkansas currently is ranked 11th and easily could move back into the Top 10 before its trip to College Station.

About the only advantage the Aggies have is the fact that their final three games all are played within the friendly confines of Kyle Field.

The Aggies have won 18 straight SWC games at home, dating back to 1984, when Baylor escaped with a 20-16 victory.

Hatfield and McWilliams also are quick to point out that A&M has almost three weeks off before it faces

Arkansas and Texas. The Aggies will have loads of time to get healthy before their final stretch.

However, Slocum sees the layoff as a double-edged sword.

Sure, A&M gets the time off to heal, but some motivation is taken away with a long layoff like that, Slocum said.

It's very possible the Aggies could lose some of their drive and intensity before their final two games.

And that's something the Aggies can't afford before facing Arkansas or Texas.

So, as far as being in the driver's seat, A&M, Arkansas and Texas all are fighting for the wheel.

Slocum isn't really comfortable putting the Aggies in the front seat. He sees the Aggies in a different position.

"I'd say we're back in the trunk some where."

Last Time

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players knew they had a chance to win but lost it.

"We should've won," linebacker Donald Allen said. "We were up by 10 and then we let them right back in and get the lead."

That was two years ago. A lot of things have changed with both the Mustangs and the Aggies.

A&M itself ran into problems with the NCAA last year, and there were rumors that the Aggies might become the second team in history besides the Mustangs to receive the death penalty. Instead, they were banned from a bowl game in 1988.

Sherrill resigned, and Defensive Coordinator R.C. Slocum was named head coach.

Both A&M and SMU have new coaches, new players and new direction. The Mustangs are coached by former Cleveland Browns and Cincinnati Bengals Coach Forrest Gregg. This is the Mustangs' first year back from the death penalty, and they field mostly a group of freshmen.

But Slocum isn't taking the 2-5 Mustangs too lightly. They run an offense similar to Houston's Run-and-Shoot, and are led by Mike Romo.

However, the Aggies are heavy fa-

vorites for the game. After dismantling the Cougars' potent offensive attack earlier in the year, Slocum's Aggies aren't expected to have much trouble against the undermanned and undersized Mustangs.

"We will come out and do everything we can to win the game," Slocum said. "I will never take a chance to jeopardize winning the game by pulling out my players too early."

"On the other hand, I owe it to our younger players if we get out ahead. As trying to teach values and sportsmanship, I would never take advantage of an opponent's defenselessness just so I can embarrass them. I just won't do that."

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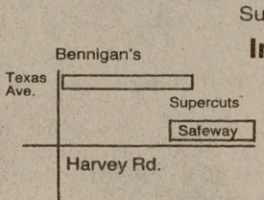
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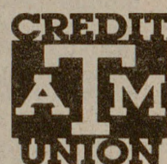
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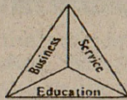
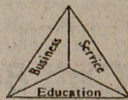
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