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Lady Aggies have hands full with tough weekend competition

By SCOTT WUDEL
Of The Battalion Staff

The Lady Aggie volleyball team has not had a hard time finding stiff competition this season. A&M has played four of its first eight matches against nationally ranked teams and continues to support the tradition this weekend.

The Lady Aggies travel to Baton Rouge, La., to compete in the Tiger Classic. A&M will face No. 11 Penn State today, then play 17th ranked Louisiana State University and preseason hopeful Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo Saturday.

Coach Al Givens says playing a high level of competition is a great tool to help the team improve on mistakes and get ready for the rest of the season, especially the conference schedule.

The Lady Aggies are 2-6 before last night's game against Lamar.

Penn State has a record of 10-0 and has yet to lose a single game this season. This weekend's tour-

namment will be the first road competition for the Lady Lions who posted a 37-9 record last year and won the Atlantic 10 championship. The Lady Lions are converting 40 percent of their kills this year.

Ironically, the only time A&M and Penn State have met on the volleyball court has been in tournaments played in Baton Rouge. The Lady Lions have come away with victories all three times with their last meeting in 1987.

LSU is 5-4 and ranked 17th in this week's poll. The Tigers have three of their losses from teams ranked higher and the games were played on the road.

Five LSU starters return from last year's team that was 30-8 and won the Southeastern Conference championship before reaching the semifinals of the NCAA South Regional.

A&M holds a 17-6 advantage in the series against LSU.

The Mustangs of Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo received consideration for the Top 20 rankings in

the preseason but posted a 4-8 record this season — falling from the list of the nation's elite volleyball teams. Craig Cummings is in his first year as head coach of a team that went 19-13 last year and advanced to post season action.

A&M has not beaten the Mustangs in their three previous meetings.

Junior co-captain Sheri Hermesmeier, who had arthroscopic surgery on her right knee this autumn, began practice Tuesday and may see action in this weekend's tournament.

Raychelle Michalke and Amy Kislung lead the Lady Aggies with a .317 and .245 hitting percentage, followed by Amy Cummings with .226.

Diane Robertson leads the team in digs with 53 and is ninth in the conference in dig average. Genny Wood ranks sixth in the SWC in assist average, leading the team with 135 assists.

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"He's played in games like this before and he's played well."

Slocum has tried to convince A&M not to look past UNT and start thinking about next week, when the Aggies face their first biggest test of the season so far against Louisiana State.

"I've seen teams before that tried to do that," Slocum said. "Kids sense that and think, 'Well, we've got this one in the bag,' and then you take a step back as a team. Staying at a performance level is a mental thing."

"We want to be totally focused on North Texas. We'll take care of the next one as it comes."

While Slocum's preaching patience, Nelson's singing praises of confidence.

"I'm sure some of the young guys are going to go in there somewhat in awe," Nelson said. "But I don't think you can ask a player who's a starter and have him say we can't win."

The Eagles believe the key to beating the Aggies is playing a solid, aggressive game. Senior linebacker Byron Gross said UNT's defense must pressure the Aggies.

"We're not going to be able to shut them down," Gross said. "But USL's defense wasn't aggressive at all. We're going to attack them."

"The way I look at it, you don't go out there expecting to lose. You go

out there to win or you don't belong out there at all."

The Eagles' defense will be tested against a potent Aggie offense. A&M quarterback Lance Pavlas was a perfect 9-for-9, passing for three touchdowns and 192 yards in last week's blowout of USL.

The Aggies gained 774 total yards, the second highest offensive yardage total in Southwest Conference history. A&M is second in the nation in total offense, averaging 558.0 yards per game, and fifth in scoring offense, averaging 45.5 points per game. Three Aggie runners, Darren Lewis, Robert Wilson and Randy Simmons, rushed over 100 yards in the USL game and all should see playing time against UNT.

Lewis rushed for 141 yards Saturday, and has his eyes on the A&M record books. The senior needs 125 yards to surpass Curtis Dickey (1976-79) as A&M's all-time leading rusher.

"Lance is going through the second year running this offense and he's really developed some confidence running it," Slocum said. "Darren's making progress. He's still on a weight program trying to drop some weight but when he gets down to 210, we should see a quicker Darren Lewis."

Lewis weighed in at 216 this week. Slocum is relying on his famed Wrecking Crew to disrupt UNT's offensive attack. The spearhead of the Aggies' defense is linebacker William Thomas, whom Slocum says presents an even bigger problem opposing quarterbacks than former Aggie sack specialist Aaron Walker (1986-89).

"Aaron was a speed rusher and he'd get the quarterback or didn't," Slocum said. "William is jumping up and batting balls, getting his hands in the quarterback's face."

"He really affects your play when you don't get there on the blitz."

Slocum said it was imperative that Thomas and the linebackers pressure Eagle quarterback Scott Davis and running back Eric Pegram to successfully shut down UNT's running game.

"I'm sure North Texas will mix up with the run and pass," Slocum said. "They're not going to just sit back and let us sack them all night. They'll run on passing downs and pass on running downs."

Pegram has rushed for 306 yards in UNT's first two games. Davis is UNT's all-time offensive leader, averaging 153 yards through the air every game. He needs 32 yards to go over the 1,000 yard mark for career rushing.

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Friday, Sept

Simmons
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rushing for his as an Aggie, whurday's 63-14 wtern Louisiana.

Simmons, No chart behind Lev McAfee, said he chance to play offense.

"I'm not jealous," mons said. "Da and he's getting eny him because I want to be. So to be at the pla

Simmons ran coach Ron Poe's for 3,818 yards in high school. football close to rowed his collegas, A&M, Tex Baylor.

Simmons cho ing of signing da sion between the horns was so ha almost flipped a But Simmons dering if he ha choice. He reds year after knee s

He returned i only 19 times. switch him to fu the season backi Robert Wilson w ramble for 1,692 the nation behin Barry Sanders.

Simmons swit back, but didn't game of the 198 win over Texas he suffered a sho a routine pass p next five games.

He returned over Southern M been injured si said he'd like to k

"I didn't have (the TCU game) any injuries sin want any injurie to play in the big the ones where Any playing tim time. You get th go on."

But if it hadn Simmons would no experience — uniform.

His 1987 fre tough one. His close to 250 an slacked off. For said he started h his choice to p thought about tr

Once Sherrill Simmons redec practice, and rec ter teammates sta

"I had never b Simmons said. "ribbing from te start thinking th see you, then h see you? I didn't somebody that c scholarship. So harder."

"I was deter going to earn m going to just sit a body pay my way the skin of my tee

With Lewis g mons figures to just hanging on should be vying f A&M head for cum, who was a Southern Califor pared Simmons Trophy winner NFL's Los Ang cidentally, Allen site professional a

"When I wasn't didn't make a lot made a bunch o Slocum said. "I t capability. It's h going to slash or you to death. Th running back."

Simmons fina chance to play li ple placed expect he and Lewis fair because the ferent as night ar

"Darren's got kes," Simmons s hand, I figure th to run — north a the only ways I don't have that r try to fake anybo yards a pop is goe

Simmons onc yards in a game getting his 141 a game of a lifetim

"Games like t games you don't you're having th your career," Si more you play, t you build up.

"I never forgo ning back never Where once a man redshirt sub thoughts of tran now waits for th will come.

"It doesn't fru can't control any mons said. "The few setbacks he don't count me o I'm often-injure get to play, you you want, but yo call me a quitter.