

Don't let the basketball blues get you down

Don't give up, sports fans, relief is in sight. Even as the Texas A&M men's basketball team struggles for a win, and a hint of respectability, a hint of hope looms on the horizon.

The Aggie baseball season gets underway this weekend when the team travels to South Texas to face UT-Pan American Friday and Saturday.



Alan Lehmann
Sports Editor

With all the problems and scandals clouding the basketball team, isn't it nice to look forward to baseball season? And there will be a lot of Aggie baseball to look forward to.

A&M will kick off their home slate with an eight-game home stand starting Tuesday, Feb. 12 when Southwest Texas State comes in for a 1 p.m. doubleheader. The Aggies face Mary Hardin Baylor Feb. 13 at 3 p.m.

Yes, I know that Aggie baseball ended on a sour note last season, as A&M lost five of its last six games and missed the NCAA tournament field, but this is a new year. The beautiful thing about spring is how it always brings a new baseball season, too.

And these Aggies are a year older, a year wiser and a year closer to winning the Southwest Conference Championship.

When the Aggies started 9-0 last season, despite losing virtually all of their 1989 position players, most people forgot that this team was not supposed to compete for the SWC crown.

Bittersweet season

The team compiled a 43-17 record, much better than anyone dared expect before the season.

"If you would have told me before the season that we'd win 43 games," said Aggie head coach Mark Johnson, "I would have said, 'fine, we don't need to play.'"

As hitting carried the team in 1989, pitching was the backbone of the 1990 squad. The A&M pitching staff turned in a stellar season, setting team records for the best team ERA (2.80) and shutouts (12) in a season.

Unheralded junior transfer Rich Robertson came from obscurity to being the ace of the staff. Robertson went 10-1 with a 1.77 ERA and struck out an amazing 106 batters in only 91.1 innings.

And the way the Aggies hit in 1990, they needed good pitching.

The Aggies managed only a .252 team batting average, but still led their opponents in every extra-base hitting category.

Unfortunately, the Aggies' hitting woes caught up to them in the home stretch and they failed to make the four-team SWC tournament.

Brave new season

But this season will be different and, we hope, bring better postseason results.

The Aggies return experienced players at virtually every infield position and have made several valuable additions via transfers.

Travis Williams, a junior, will anchor the infield from his third base spot. Jason Marshall, who gained strength and 10 pounds with an off-season weightlifting program, will start at shortstop and be backed up by Mike Hickey, a highly-touted sophomore from Oklahoma.

Sitticoke Huckntod, a senior transfer from Central Missouri State, apparently has forced Trey Witte into a bullpen job. First baseman Conrad Colby, a junior transfer from Rancho Santiago JC, has the inside track on the job and should bring needed power to the middle of the order.

Senior co-captain Blake Pyle will be called to duty as the catcher, but transfer Ben Blake has shown promise.

Competition for the three outfield spots will be fierce, but two favorites have emerged: Brian Thomas and Dan Robinson. Both played extensively last season.

Others who could fill the outfield spots are Chad Broussard, Tim Holt and Cornelius Patterson.

The key to this season will be the A&M pitching staff. Junior Ronnie Allen and senior Steve Hughes will provide leadership for a staff that was decimated by the pro draft and graduation.

Allen, a former member of Team USA, is the only proven starting pitcher on the Aggies' staff. Hughes and Jason Bullard both performed well out of the bullpen last season, and may work into the starting rotation.

A&M boasts seven lefthanded pitchers on its roster, though none of them have game experience in an A&M uniform. The missing piece in the pitching puzzle may well be the found in this multitude of new Aggie lefties.

Lefthanded true freshmen Kelly Wunsch and Jay Hogue have impressed

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Aggies can't hold off Horns, fall 83-74

**By Douglas Pils
Of The Battalion Staff**

Even in a season when the Texas A&M men's basketball team is winless in the Southwest Conference, G. Rollie White Coliseum is still tough for SWC opposition.

In five SWC games played at G. Rollie this year, the Aggies have taken their opponents to the final minutes in all but one.

Sunday, A&M (5-15, 0-9 in SWC) played perhaps their best game of the season, only to come up short in the final minute against the University of Texas in an 83-74 loss in front of 3,237 (the second-largest crowd at G. Rollie this year).

The Aggies tied the ballgame at 65 with 6:49 to go on Brooks Thompson's three-point shot. With 4:45 remaining, Texas (14-5, 7-1) led by five at 71-66.

A&M closed the gap to one and was within three at 75-72 after an Isaac Brown layup with 1:18 left. The Longhorns polished off the stubborn Aggies with an 8-2 run for the final margin of victory.

The Longhorns led 39-30 after a tough defensive first half. In the second half A&M, led by Thompson's 12 points, fought back to take a 48-47 lead with just over 15 minutes left in the game.

By the time the 11-0 Aggie run was over, A&M led 53-47. The Longhorn bench took over from that point as forwards Dexter Cambridge and Albert Burditt led Texas on a 14-5 tear.

Thompson was the fuel that powered the Aggies. He set a school record hitting his first nine shots, en route to a career-high 25 points. The sophomore from Littleton, Colo., committed a season-low one turnover, while playing the entire 40 minutes.

After the game Thompson said he wasn't frustrated with the outcome and that things are looking up for the Aggies. He attributed the change to fan support.

"It (the crowd) was the high-point of game," Thompson said. "They got loud and we got pumped up and the defense kicked in."

"I can guarantee a better second half (of the season). I think we all know what we can do now."

"This is encouraging and we feel great. We've got to keep our heads up and go get a win this Wednesday in Lubbock."

Thompson credited the Longhorns' ability to go to the bench as their biggest asset.

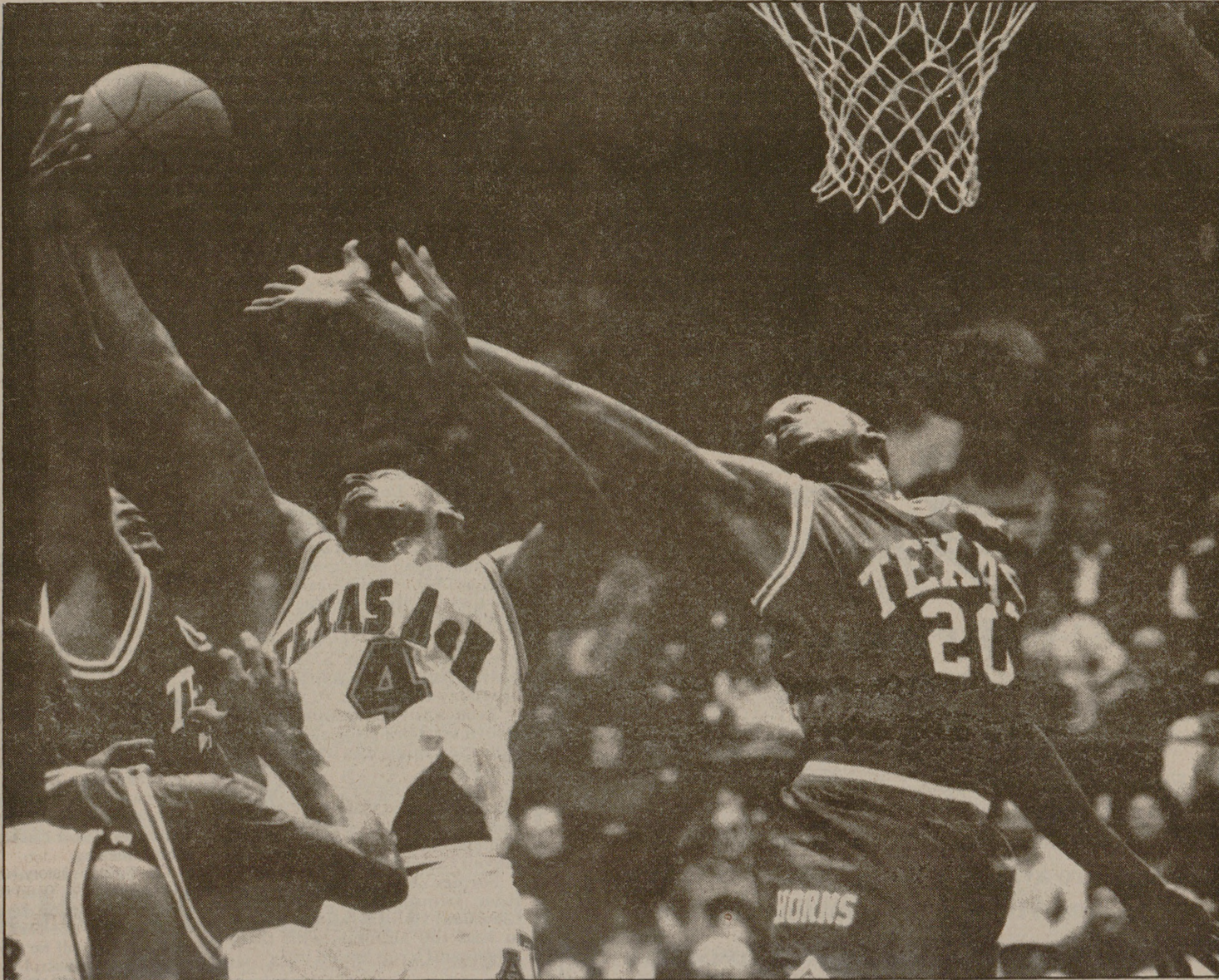
"We played a lot harder than they did," he said. "The whole deal is that we just get tired. They can play some more of their players, so their starters can get some breathers and we're out there playing 40 minutes."

Rebounding and free throws doomed the Aggies' chances in this game. A&M was outrebounded 38-18 as Texas' Benford Williams, Guillermo Myers and Cambridge each grabbed seven boards. The most devastating statistic was the 'Horns' 17 offensive rebounds.

Texas sunk its last 20 free throws, hitting 90 percent for the game (27-30), overshadowing the Aggies best shooting night of the season. A&M shot 60.7 percent from the field, surpassing the 60.5 mark set in the Centenary game.

A&M head coach Kermit Davis Jr. said the main problem was the Aggies' not boxing out under the basket and A&M just getting tired.

"Down the stretch we just couldn't get over the hump," Davis said. "I thought the big key was rebounding and free throws, but the really big point was rebounding. We made them miss the first shots, but they got



Texas A&M forward Rashone Lewis grabs a rebound between Texas Longhorns Dexter Cambridge (left) and Albert Burditt (20) in the Aggies' 83-74 loss Sunday at G. Rollie White Coliseum.

HUY THANH NGUYEN/The Battalion

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the second and third shots.

"They wore us down. I thought we came out and played a tough man defense, but with the few players we have they got tired down the stretch."

The Aggies' play impressed Longhorn head coach Tom Penders, who said his team got what it expected from A&M.

"I knew it wouldn't be easy here," Penders said. "Texas A&M played with every ounce and they played hard. They were on fire in the second half and they are a difficult team for us to match up with."

"We didn't play badly at all, the Aggies just played well."

Overall, Davis was pleased with his team's effort and sees vast improvement in his club.

"Going in we thought we had a chance to win," Davis said. "We played with a lot of confidence. This was one of top two or three games we've played. We executed very well offensively."

"Our guys did everything in their power to try to win the game. If this team has a good week of practice and plays 40 minutes just like this we'll beat Texas Tech."

Lady Aggies lead at half, but 17th-ranked Lady Longhorns come back for 74-65 win

**By Steve O'Brien
Of The Battalion Staff**

The Lady Aggies were half way there Saturday night.

But the best 20 minutes of basketball the Aggies have played in head coach Lynn Hickey's tenure at A&M were not quite enough.

After taking a 38-36 halftime lead over the Lady Longhorns, the Lady Ags fell to the 17th ranked Lady 'Horns 74-65 in G. Rollie White Coliseum. The loss brought A&M's record to 9-10 overall and 4-5 in Southwest Conference play.

Texas took its record to 8-1 in conference play and 14-5 overall.

A&M forward Dena Russo, who led the Aggies in scoring with 17 points, said she was happy with the way the team played.

"This is the second time here, since my freshman year, that we've played like that," Russo said. "We played a tremendous game."

In the final seconds of the first half, Lady Ags' guard Sheri Dillard stole the ball and went the length of the court for a layup to put A&M in front by two.

For the first time in the history of the two schools' rivalry, A&M took a lead into the locker room at half time.

"The first half might have been the best half of basketball I've seen at A&M in seven years," Hickey said. "I was just extremely proud of them."

Dillard led the Ags in scoring at the half with 12 points.

"I was telling myself that I have to make myself an offensive threat and to do that I have to attack the basket," Dillard said.

The Lady Ags continued to play well in the second half, but after the intermission, Dillard was held to only two points.

"In the second half I was played more or less at the (point guard position)," she said. "That's a position where I'm looking to make the play for others."

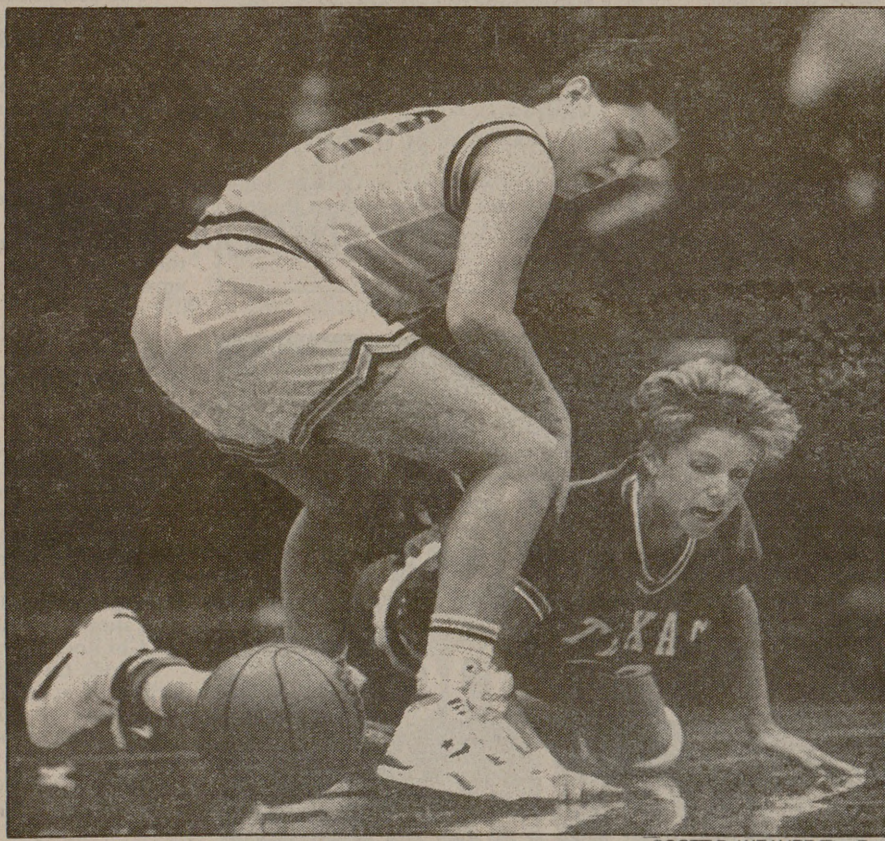
With the Lady Ags looking for someone to pick up the offensive slack, the 'Horns were looking for the momentum to shift to their side.

And it did.

Three minutes into the second half, Texas guard Edna Campbell sunk a driving layup to give the 'Horns the lead for the first time in the period.

After trading baskets, Texas went on an 8-4 run to take a 57-49 lead with 9:21 left in the contest.

Following a timeout by Texas, with 7:48 left the Lady 'Horns went on another run,



A&M guard Jennifer Fasnacht battles Texas guard Amy Claborn in the first half of the Lady Ags 74-65 loss Saturday.

SCOTT D. WEAVER/The Battalion

this one of 10-4, to build their lead to 66-56.

The loss took the Lady Ags' record below the .500, but their competitive play against the conference leading Lady 'Horns was a bright spot, following their disappointing loss to Houston earlier in the week.

Hickey was excited to see her team bounce back and play well.

"This was a tremendous effort," Hickey said. "After the game with Houston, we were concerned about what kind of effort we would come back with."

But to just play well doesn't make the game a success for Hickey and her ballclub.

"The last thing I want the fans to think is that we're accepting (the loss)," Hickey said. "Our expectation level is to win the game but at that time with a young group you want to be realistic and you want to set goals

that you can keep working toward."

Texas head coach Jody Conradt was impressed with the play of the Aggies.

"I thought they were an excellent ball club tonight," she said.

"I just can't believe that if A&M has played that well in conference play that they're not up there fighting for top spot."

Hickey said that with a clutch performance by her team in a big game, the team can have a good second half of the season.

"If we would play like this the rest of the season we're probably not going to lose a game," Hickey said.

The Lady Ags will begin a two-game road trip as they play the Texas Tech Lady Red Raiders in Lubbock on Tuesday. Tipoff is set for 7:00 p.m.

Loud crowd lifts Lady Aggies

**By Craig Wilson
Of The Battalion Staff**

The Texas A&M Lady Aggie basketball team experienced something abnormal for the first time this season: a decent-sized crowd.

The body count of 1,142 Saturday night at the game against the Texas Lady Longhorns was a season-high for a Lady Aggie basketball game.

Although many of the fans had come from Austin, A&M was well-represented.

From youths sitting in the senior student section, to a few faithful Aggie elders sitting in the reserved section, the Lady Ags enjoyed their most vocal crowd of the year.

Although Texas pulled away late and won, 74-65, Texas coach Jody Conradt was impressed with the crowds' intensity.

"We're used to big crowds," Conradt said, "but the big crowds are usually for us."

Lady Aggie junior guard Sheri Dillard said the different crowd was nothing new.

"The crowd was pretty much what I expected," Dillard said. "Their (Texas) fans are pretty loyal and they always bring a big group with them."

Texas forward Vicki Hall, who scored eight points for the Lady Horns, said that G. Rollie White Coliseum was not the easiest place to compete.

"This is a hard place to play," Hall said. "They play really well at home."

Lady Aggie coach Lynn Hickey said those who come to watch the Aggies play will usually not be disappointed, but that the fans need to give the team a chance by attending the games.

"The fans that came here tonight were real excited about going and participating with Lady Aggie basketball."

The students seemed to have a good time at the game, and some said they would try to bring friends with them to more Lady Aggie contests.

"This has been lots of fun," said Lisa Tavares, a junior from Buffalo, New York. "The fan rivalry is as hot as the Texas and A&M rivalry."

Despite the excitement at Saturday night's contest, Lady Aggie sentiments seemed to be on trying to get more fans into the arena for games other than Texas.

"With more people in here (G. Rollie) we tend to play better," said junior forward Dena Russo, who led the Lady Aggies with 17 points.