

Lady Aggies face first-place Tech in finale

By Doug Foster
The Battalion

Although a Southwest Conference championship is out of reach, A&M head coach Lynn Hickey and the Lady Aggies have one chance left to change the outcome of the title race.

Hickey and her squad will travel to Lubbock today to take on the Texas Tech Red Raiders, who are in first place in the conference standings with an 11-1 mark. Tipoff is scheduled for 7 p.m.

A win by Tech, the 15th ranked team in the nation, would give them the conference title in front of their home crowd. The Aggies, who are 15-11 overall and 7-6 in SWC play, could finish in sole possession of fourth place with a

win over Tech and losses by SMU in their final two games to Rice and Houston.

Hickey said the Aggies would have to dig down deep to defeat the Raiders and go into next week's conference tournament on a winning note.

"Tech is going to have their final senior day, and as always they will have a great crowd there," she said. "If they beat us, they will officially win their first conference championship, so it will be a tough arena to play in. I guess we will see just how much intestinal fortitude we have."

In their first meeting of the season, the

Aggies fought back from a 14-point halftime deficit to come within one point of the Raiders, but couldn't get over the hump and lost to Tech, 70-69. Hickey said her squad showed it could play with the first place team, and with a good effort, A&M could pull out the victory.

"It's going to take a lot of guts to get out there and go after them," she said. "We know we can win, and we know we can play with them because we did that here."

Senior Dena Russo said A&M needs a win against Tech in order to give the team confidence going into the conference tournament.

"We just need to go up there and surprise them," Russo said. "They've only been beaten once. We need to go in there and beat them with a good game, then go into the tournament and win it."



Hickey

Softball team's home opener today vs. UTA

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Dana Mitchell a lot, but she has answered the call and pitched real well so far. But we will be much stronger when Missi gets back."

The Aggies competed in the Northeast Louisiana Mardi Gras Classic last week, and brought home a first place finish with a 6-0 run in the tournament.

Mortensen was named the tournament's outstanding pitcher, going 4-0 and giving up seven hits and no runs in 23 innings of work. The freshman is the top pitcher for the Aggies this year with a 6-1 record and a 0.62 ERA.

Brock said Mortensen was a player he thought the Aggie fans would be excited about watching during the next four years.

"I think a lot of people are going to really be excited about seeing her play this year," he said. "She has been very successful at just about every age level, and I think it's great that they're going to see a pitcher who can dominate like she can. As a freshman we are really excited about her."

Senior third baseman Rhonda Halbert, who is the Aggies' leading hitter with a .387 batting average, was named outstanding defensive player in the Mardi Gras Classic. She anchored an A&M defense that allowed only one run in the last 38 innings of the tournament.

Brock said Halbert is providing the leadership and solid play he wants from his seniors. He said he expects even bigger things from her this year than in years past.

"Rhonda right now is about as good as I've ever seen her," he said. "She is exhibiting a lot of leadership abilities so far. She was off for a while and this year is looking like the Rhonda Halbert of old."

"I think during her senior year she's going to go out with a lot of style."

Robinson's last-second layup lifts Spurs

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — David Robinson's layup with 1.4 seconds left, San Antonio's only points in the final 3:25, lifted the Spurs to a 103-102 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves on Tuesday night.

Minnesota rallied from a 17-point deficit to take a 102-101 lead on Gerald Glass' 3-point shot with 5.6 seconds left. The Spurs then fed the ball inside to Robinson, who muscled past Thurl Bailey and a collapsing defense for the winning basket.

Robinson's 25 points paced San Antonio, which got a season-high 19 assists from Rod

Strickland. Pooh Richardson led Minnesota with a season-high 27 points. Doug West scored 23 for the Timberwolves, who have lost 20 out of their last 24 games.

San Antonio is 14-7 since Bob Bass took over as the team's head coach from Larry Brown. The Spurs have won four in a row and eight of their last 12. They also swept all six games against the Timberwolves this season. Minnesota is 1-14 in three years against the Spurs.

The Spurs outscored the Wolves 17-6 to start the fourth quarter and take a 94-78 lead. San

Antonio sank its first 11 free throws in the quarter to reach its biggest lead of 97-80 with 6:46 left.

The Timberwolves rallied behind Glass, who hit two 3-pointers in the comeback as the Wolves outscored San Antonio 24-8 down the stretch.

The Timberwolves led in nearly every statistical category except free throws, where San Antonio outshot them 30-8. Minnesota had more baskets, rebounds, blocks and assists. But it could not stop Robinson.

"He just made a great move," Bailey said of the Spurs' center. "What can you do?"

Andro

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A&M certainly hasn't lacked effort this year. The Aggies have only won five games, but aside from a loss to Florida and a loss in their first game against Texas Tech this season, Barone was pleased with the effort of his team.

Most fans judge a season in terms of wins and losses. There are no moral victories for keeping games close, but if there were, the Aggies would have won each of them going away. Eight times this season, when the final buzzer sounded, the Aggies were within seven points.

What makes this season tougher to swallow is the fact that A&M was without their best player for 11 games.

Damon Johnson, a freshman forward, may be one of the best players ever to play for the Aggies, and he's still got three more years. He's built like Charlotte Hornets' forward Larry Johnson and plays the game the same way — strong and hard.

Johnson, combined with David Edwards and the Henderson brothers, Chuck and Corey, would seem to give

Barone optimism for next season.

"I think you have to be careful with that," Barone said. "Just because you have guys who are returning doesn't mean they are going to get any better. That's going to be a real commitment, which they are going to have to make. None of them have ever made (that commitment) because it's not their nature to do that right now."

"In order to be a better basketball player, you have to work on your weaknesses and not your strengths. That will be a true test for them."

This season has not only been a test for the players but for the fans, and Barone knows that.

There was talk of a new special events center, but the plans have been put on hold. Barone has said all season that student and community support could make G. Rollie White Coliseum a tough place to play. But the "Hollerhouse on the Brazos" has not had much to say so far this season.

In 14 home games, the average attendance at the Coliseum has been around 2,200. G. Rollie White seats 7,500 people.

But Barone doesn't blame the fans. Instead, he points to

A&M's unusual schedule this season.

"I think we've had some real glitches in the schedule," he said. "We've been away for quite a few games and the Baylor game wasn't even on the schedule. There's hasn't been a normal kind of schedule where you can count on some consistency in your home games."

Barone would like to see the fans show up tonight for the Aggies' final home game of the season.

"I think these kids have played with a tremendous amount of enthusiasm," he said. "I think we've made mistakes and haven't played well at times, but I don't think we've ever given up on the court. A nice crowd would be a great advantage for us in terms of us trying to get a win before we get into the SWC tournament."

In less than two weeks, this long season will finally come to an end... for most people.

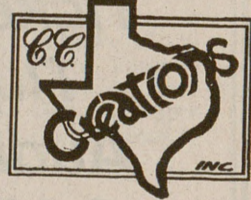
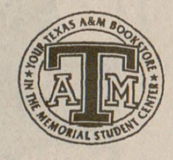
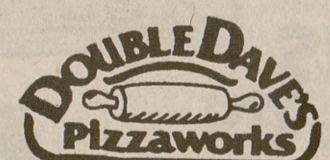
"When this season is over, we have to hit the recruiting trail," the coach said. "We have to get out and promote A&M basketball as much as we can."

For Barone, a little vacation time can't come soon enough.

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