

1992 TEXAS A&M BASKETBALL

Barone continues with rebuilding process

By CHRIS WHITLEY
Sports Writer of THE BATTALION

In a school where football is king, Texas A&M basketball has been constantly striving to find its rightful place in the monarchy.

It has been a program trying to escape a past of NCAA violations and losing seasons while trying also to achieve a future of big-time recruits that will compete in the Southwest Conference.

This herculean feat was placed in the hands of Tony Barone in 1991 when he took over the head coaching job at A&M. Although he suffered through a 6-22 season last year, it did not come close to telling the whole story.

A&M plays home opener

Texas A&M will open its home season on Saturday night when it takes on the Missouri Tigers at 7 p.m. in C. Rolie White Coliseum.

Highlighted by a freak carbon monoxide accident in Baylor University's Ferrell Center that sent the entire team and coaching staff to the hospital, the Aggies also had to endure the death of Barone's mother, an injury to leading scorer Damon Johnson that kept him on the sidelines for 11 games and the knowledge that their dream basketball facility would not be built anytime soon.

Still, A&M fought through the adversity and held its ground with teams like Auburn and Alabama. In its final game of the season, the first round of the SWC Postseason Classic, A&M held a halftime lead over top-seeded Texas before eventually falling, 88-69.

This year, the quality of the Aggies' schedule increases dramatically. They

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A&M's Damon Johnson (34) snags a rebound while Anthony Ware (42) and Texas Tech's Lance Hughes (4) look on during a game last season.

Johnson returns from foot injury to lead Aggies

By DON NORWOOD
Sports Writer of THE BATTALION

Damon Johnson is ready to make up for lost time.

Texas A&M's sophomore forward might not admit it outright, but his quiet confidence and the way he carries himself oozes eagerness for catching up for lost opportunities. And who can blame him?

The 6-5 Johnson was on his way to earning Southwest Conference Newcomer of the Year honors last year, averaging 19.5 points and 15.5 rebounds per game against SWC opponents. But a foot injury that he suffered against Texas that appeared at first to be minor turned out to be a fracture, leaving him on the bench for 11 games while Texas youngster Terrence Rencher went on to be the conference's top freshman.

After his comeback late in the season, Johnson played well enough to average 15.6 points and 7.7 boards per game for the entire season. But the damage had been done, not only for the 6-22 Aggies, but also for Johnson, who was deeply affected by his injury.

"It hurt," Johnson said with a sigh. "The way I looked at it, God had a reason for it. I just tried to find the reason. I tried to look for the hidden good."

The good part of Johnson's broken foot proved to be extremely hard to find. Losing a player of his magnitude can produce one of two very polarized results for a basketball team.

The rest of the team can elevate themselves to new heights, or the team can fold like a worn-out pup tent, left wondering about

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Aggies put scare into New Mexico

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Cannon Neves hit a 3-pointer with 27 seconds left then blocked Texas A&M point guard David Edwards' shot with 3 seconds remaining Thursday as New Mexico scored a 71-69 win over the Aggies.

Neves, who finished with 16 points and Khari Jaxon — 21 points and seven blocks — led a late New Mexico (2-0) rally against an Aggie team that was making its season debut.

Damon Johnson hurt New Mexico's side with 25 points and 10 rebounds while Edwards scored 19 points.

Neves erased the Aggies' final lead with a rainmaker 3-pointer from the top of the key that put the Lobos up 69-67. Texas A&M center Brett Murry misfired on a 3-pointer with 20 seconds left, but Jaxon couldn't control the rebound and the Aggies got one more shot.

They got the ball to Edwards, who hit a pair of clutch field goals in the second half to keep the Aggies in front. Edwards pierced New Mexico's defense, pulled up in the key for a 10-foot jumper that Neves swatted away.

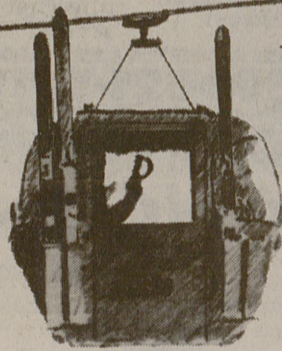
New Mexico guard Steve Logan grabbed the loose ball and hit a pair of free throws with 2 seconds left.

Johnson hit a layup at the buzzer for the final points.

Texas A&M, which was 6-22 last year and lost to New Mexico by 22 points at College Station, Texas, trailed by as much as 12 points (25-13) after the Lobos ran 15 straight points early in the first half.

The Aggies took their first lead at 43-41 with 13:00 left in the game on a backdoor layup by Tony McGinnis and had a 58-56 lead with 4:10 left after Edwards hit a 3-pointer with one second left on the shot clock.

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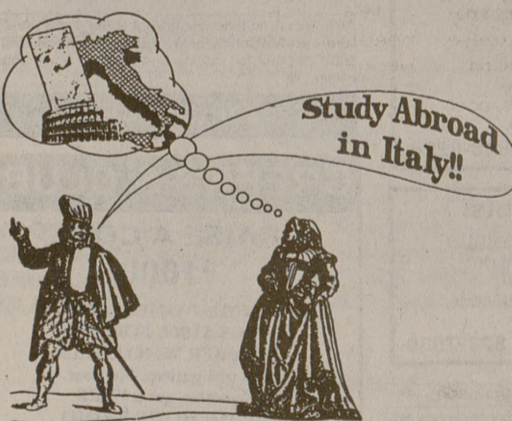
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