

# SPORTS

## One last chance for A&M Aggie baseball team is ready to open road show

### Aggies looking to parlay role as conference spoiler into berth in the NCAA Championship Tournament

By DAVID WINDER

The Battalion

At the beginning of the Southwest Conference season Texas A&M just wanted to be competitive and maybe play the spoiler in this year's championship race.

It accomplished both by going 5-9 in SWC play and beating Rice at Autry Court to deny the Owls a part of the SWC championship.

The Aggies will once again try to play the role of spoiler in the first round of the SWC classic against the Houston Cougars today at noon in Reunion Arena in Dallas.

The Cougars took both games earlier in the season by scores of 81-69 and 78-51.

"Houston is a very physical team," Head Coach Tony Barone. "In both games this year we were only down by five at the half, we just couldn't get over the hump."

Forward Damon Johnson, who scored 23 points in the first game but was held scoreless in the second, said that the Aggies would have to play differently against the Cougars to be successful.

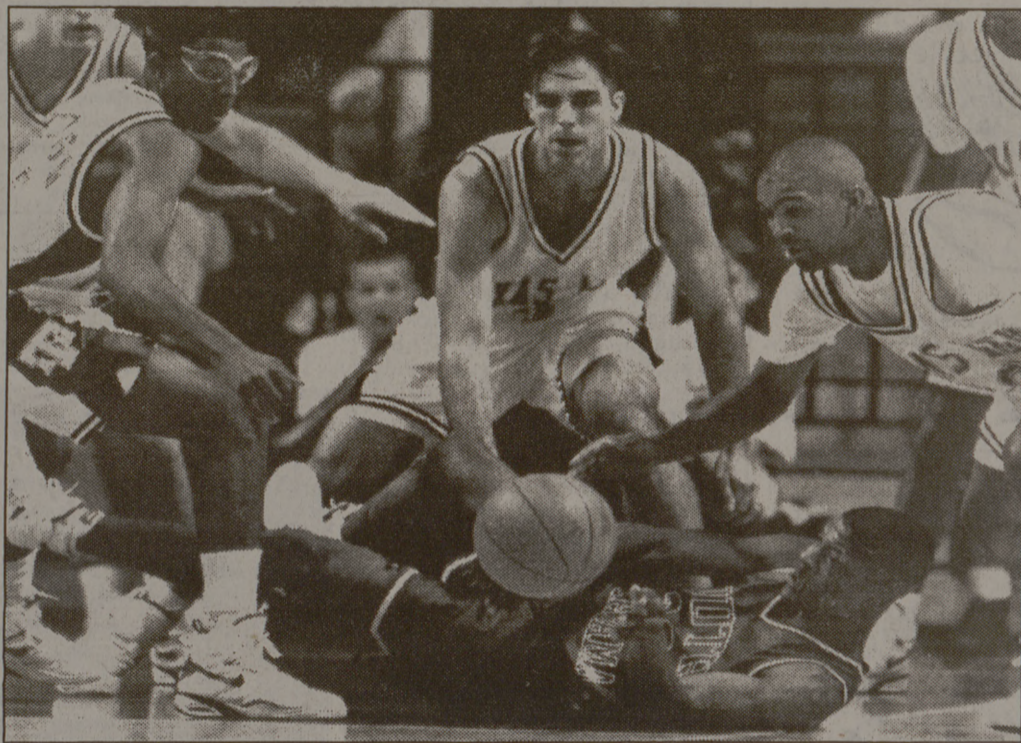
"This time around we are just going to have play them like we played Rice," Johnson said. "Controlling (Charles) Outlaw like we did (Rice's) Brent Scott is going to be key."

This will be the third straight game in which the Aggies have played a dominant center.

Against Texas Tech we shut down Will Flemons then we shut down Scott," Barone said. "We need to do the same against Outlaw by taking the ball to him and trying to get him in foul trouble."

Outlaw, the SWC player of the year, recorded a triple-double last time he faced A&M, scoring 10 points, grabbing 14 rebounds, and blocking ten shots.

David Diaz is scoring 18.3 points a game followed by Anthony Goldwire with 15. Goldwire is also third in the conference in assists handing out six a game.



Aggies Brett Murry (center), Chuck Henderson (left), and David Edwards scramble for a loose ball earlier this season against South Alabama. A&M plays Houston today at noon.

"We have to execute our game plan perfectly," Point Guard David Edwards said. "We can't allow Outlaw to intimidate us. Their starting five is awesome but I don't think they have that great of a bench. We just have to come out playing with great enthusiasm or they will just rip us apart."

A&M ended its regular season last Saturday with an 82-76 upset of Rice, preventing the Owls from tying SMU for the SWC title.

"We knew we were going to be playing Houston in the tournament no matter what happened against Rice," Barone

said. "So we told our guys to treat this game as a championship and they went out and did it."

Their performance did not surprise Edwards though.

"I knew we could beat them, I mean they only beat us at home on a last second shot. So I knew if we contained their shooters we would have a chance to win."

Edwards also likes the Aggies chances against Houston.

"We are due against Houston because we've suffered too long. We've just started to play really well and I don't see anything stopping us."

By WILLIAM HARRISON

The Battalion

There will be no spring break for the 20-2 A&M baseball team, which begins an eight-day road trip through Louisiana before coming back in-state to Fort Worth to finish the stretch with its first Southwest Conference series against Texas Christian.

The Aggies, ranked third, fifth or eighth in the nation - depending on which poll you favor - open with three games against the University of New Orleans, then one game against Southeastern Louisiana, one at Tulane, and then finishing with three at TCU.

A&M baseball coach Mark Johnson said the team is looking forward to its first extended road trip of the season that could help solidify the team and give them added experience before they get in the thick of the conference race.

Johnson said that the trip would be taxing on the team's pitching staff, with some teams laying in wait to throw their number one pitchers at the Aggies' reserve starters. However, he said, the trip will prove to be a good preparation overall for their SWC opponents.

"It's time to get on the road," Johnson said.

"It's something that sometimes can really help a team come together - we can see how well we can adjust to different playing surfaces and different facilities, so that will be a good experience for us."

Johnson said that his pitching staff has proved the strength of the team as expected and the team was generally hitting the ball well, averaging almost a home run a game with 21 dingers in 22 games. The Aggie sluggers are on track to easily outpace last year's long ball total of 23 home runs in their 61-game season. However, Johnson said his crew has still looked rough and needs to polish their game.

"We're making some mistakes that we won't get away with when we play conference games, but we're also doing some things very well," he said.

A&M pitcher Jeff Granger, an early nominee for "Player of the Year" by the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association along with Aggie center fielder Brian Thomas, said the trip was an opportunity to bring out the Aggies' potential.

"The main thing we want to do is to get confidence, not only with the record, but with ourselves. That's what this trip to Louisiana is all about, we're going to try to get it fine-tuned and keep winning," Granger said.

Granger said that the team is improving gradually, citing his improvement in control and the middle infield's better fielding as examples.

"I'm on the road to getting to where I want to be," said Granger, who has amassed a 4-1 record with a 3.34 earned run average while holding the A&M career strike out record with 281 K's.

"I'm not there yet, but I'm making progress and that's the main thing. My strikeout percentage is not as high as it was in previous years, but I feel I'm a better pitcher overall," he said. "We've got to go into these games like we're playing Texas or anybody else, we've got to go in there thinking that they're the best team in the nation. We can't just go out there and play around with them."

Aggie outfielder Scott Smith said the team is beginning to become more consistent throughout the line-up and is expecting to keep winning on the road.

Smith said TCU is not to be underestimated in a conference that has gone 11-25, to force TCU's lofty 21-4 mark into sixth place.

"Look at our records - every team is a legitimate, real challenge," Smith said.

Johnson agreed, saying there is no tougher conference to be found.

"The conference has got to be ranked the number one conference in the nation in baseball. Everyone is doing well, everyone has started off strong, (but) I don't see anybody just totally dominating it right now, there is too many good teams out there," Johnson said.

"TCU has certainly beat some very outstanding opponents. They (TCU) lost 2-1 on games up in Arizona State in Tempe, they beat Oklahoma and Oklahoma State, and they're just rolling by everybody."

The Louisiana teams have plenty of credentials, too. Southeastern Louisiana is 14-3, and was an NCAA playoff team last year, and Tulane was ranked in the preseason as high as 16th in the nation, featuring a preseason All-American pitcher, Mike Romano.

## Aggie Sports Briefs

### Men's Tennis

FROM STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

The Texas A&M men's tennis team will host the University of Illinois in a dual match at the Omar Smith Tennis Center this afternoon at 1:30.

The Aggies, ranked 24th in the nation will be looking to get a fast start against the Illini in the hopes that it will carry over during a tough spring break road trip.

A&M will face Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. next Wednesday, March 17, and then the fifth-ranked Tennessee Volunteers on Friday, March 19, in Winston-Salem, N.C. The Aggies will wrap up the road swing against Wake Forest on Saturday, March 20, also in Winston-Salem.

A&M coach David Kent thinks that a good match against Illinois might be the key to success on the road.

"We want to start the road trip with a good head of steam," Kent said.

Kent said that he expects Illinois should prove to be a tough match.

"This will be a tough match and that's exactly what we need before the tough road trip," Kent said.

### Women's Softball

FROM STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

The Texas A&M Lady Aggie softball team swept a twin-bill from the University of Tulsa Golden Hurricane, 9-0 and 6-2 last night at Bee Creek Park in College Station.

The first game was run-ruled in the fifth inning with the Aggies ahead by nine runs after pitcher Kim Gonzalez had allowed Tulsa only one hit while posting three strikeouts. Lady Aggie Jennifer McFalls was the hitting star of game one after going 3 for 3 with two triples, a run batted in, and two runs scored.

The Golden Hurricane proved to be a scrappy opponent in game two as the score was tied 2-2 into the fifth inning when A&M scored six runs on five hits.

Gonzalez again pitched in the second game, holding Tulsa without a hit over the final four innings. Gonzalez got the victory to improve her record to 9-1.

The Lady Aggies improved their record to 11-3 on the season while Tulsa fell to 0-8. A&M resumes play this evening at 5:00 as it plays host to Indiana at College Station's Central Park.



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