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New A&M natatorium holds water with swim recruits

By Drew Wasson

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Texas A&M's \$12.5 million natatorium, opening in fall 1994, is making the Aggie swim team more competitive and attracting more of the nation's highly recruited athletes, head swimming coach Mel Nash said.

"We've signed a few good kids that I don't think we would have gotten without the new pool coming," Nash said. "It's helped us go to a new level of recruiting."

Nash thinks A&M's recruiting impediments will be removed once the team begins swimming in the complex, located next to Olsen Field as a part of A&M's Student Recreational Sports Building.

"I don't think there is a program in the country operating under a bigger handicap as far as (the present) facilities," Nash said.

Nash said that the present options, Downs Natatorium and the Cain outdoor pool, are fine for workouts, but the antiquated 60-year-old natatorium and 32-year-old pool have hindered recruiting.

"Recruiting is the lifeblood of the program," Nash said. "When you bring in an impressionable 17-year-old high school kid and say, 'This is our pool,' he's going to say, 'You guys aren't giving squat.'"

"That's where we feel that (the current facility) has been the biggest letdown."

The pools have also prevented the team from operating a viable diving program, Nash said. The diving program was established in 1991, and, as Nash says, he had to "fake" it during the program's first year relying on him as diving coach until last year when Kevin Wright was hired to coach diving.

Nash said the three-year-old diving program will help the team score more points and win more meets.

Without diving, A&M was forced to forfeit points in past swim meets, but Nash said that despite that disadvantage A&M would sometimes lose competitions by only eight or 10 points.

Redshirt junior Robert Fleming said that he noticed the recent elevation in the Aggie swim team's status with prospects and overall popularity.

"We have had eight or nine fall visits by recruits so far," Fleming said. "In my first three years here we never had that many this early."

Fleming said the future natatorium has done more than attract superior athletes to Texas A&M, it has made the swimmers better by improving the morale.

"The whole team is excited about the new pool, especially the freshmen," Fleming said.

The swimming complex will include a diving well, a 50-meter long competition pool and a practice pool that will be housed underneath seating for 1,500 people.

Nash said that the long-term planning of the facility has the future success of A&M swimming set.

"We thought so far in advance for this facility that this should be a huge advantage."

Chelkowski

Continued from Page 9

unfairness. The stands that sit in the trees, high above the sight and scent of a deer, pose no legitimate challenge. Remember the last person left on one side of the court in a game of dodge ball, facing ten merciless children with rubber balls? There was no chance to win.

Then there are the people who call themselves hunters, but actually have no sense or appreciation for the lives they are pursuing.

Those who are not disciplined in the "sport" may overkill or kill without just cause, a patent abuse of nature. This is clearly apparent with exotic wildlife when hunting becomes a greed-driven rampage, as poachers kill for no more than a tusk, tail, or skin.

These "sportsmen" should live by the rules of the American Indians - kill only what you need.

But - despite moral misgivings - there are as many valid points in the defense of hunting.

As difficult as it is to admit, hunting does serve a valuable purpose for many people and our environment. The one time I went hunting attuned me to the many positive aspects of hunting.

Sitting back-to-back with one of my best friends one Thanksgiving in the woods of Southern Virginia endlessly waiting for an unsuspecting deer, made me appreciate the diligence and patience that hunting demands. Without saying a word for hours, I walked out of the woods feeling closer to my friend and more acquainted with nature.

It probably is the best way to experience the purest form of nature as you blend into the background and wildlife begins to emerge around you - although, this probably could be recreated without holding a gun and having the intent to kill.

For the experienced hunter, there is much more to hunting than just pulling a trigger. Many hunters even try to level the playing field, pursuing a more threatening animal or balancing the fight with different weapons.

And the main argument for the hunters' defense is the game population issue. In areas where deer or other game do not have many predators, the species can quickly overpopulate, causing starvation or extensive damage to the land.

The revenue generated from purchasing licenses and contributions from hunting organizations helps preserve vast tracks of land and the wildlife that live there.

But, the most passionate arguments come from those with a real love and appreciation of nature - those who see hunting as a test between the human intelligence and the animal's sense of survival.

Perhaps Henry David Thoreau said it best, summing up the proper form of the hunter in "Nature":

"(Hunters) ... spending their lives in the fields and woods, in a peculiar sense a part of Nature themselves, are often in a more favorable mood for observing her in the intervals of their pursuits than philosophers or poets ever, who approach her with expectation."

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