

A&M coach previews SWC title race

University of Texas, Texas Tech may be frontrunners, but A&M will contend

TONY BARONE

Men's Basketball Coach

This year's Southwest Conference race should be one of the most interesting in recent years. Clearly, Texas Tech and Texas are the two favorites going into league play. Both teams have real question marks and in my mind are not locks for the championship.

League races are decided by teams who take care of business on the road. I have always believed that you must take care of business at home and then find ways to win 60 percent of your league road games. Homecourt advantages are key once you get into your league season.

Texas A&M will be a contender.



"This basketball team has worked harder than any team I've had. I know how important it is for them to be successful."

— Tony Barone

We have eight newcomers who will have to play major roles for our team to win. Last season showed what can happen when a team pulls together and players produce in their roles. We must play with a good basketball I.Q. and tremendous effort every night.

Execution on both offense and defense is key to our success. We will have played nine of our first eleven games on the road. The schedule maker should be fired (me!) I think that we will benefit in the long run while we might go through some hard times early. We will count on the experience of seniors Tony McGinnis, Joe Wilbert, Corey Henderson and Damon Johnson to lead us.

Our newcomers will be a key role in our success. Replacing Chuck Henderson, Mike Smith, Tony Jr., Brett Murray and certainly David Edwards will not be easy. We will miss their mental toughness and tremendous enthusiasm in addition to their skill level. I firmly believe that we will be in the race. We must improve each game and we will be fine.

Texas Tech returns all of their starters and adds a point guard, Jason Martin, at the turn of the semester. Forwards Mark Davis and Jason Sasser and guards Lance Hughes and Koy Smith are tremendous players who all shoot well and have the ability to penetrate. Defensively, Tech is very aggressive but lacks a post defender with size. In early games, they have had trou-

ble defending post players. Martin will give them great quickness at the point. (Lubbock) might be the toughest place in the league to play. We beat them twice last year and always play well against them.

Texas loses two great players in B.J. Tyler and Albert Burditt. Terrence Rencher and Roderick Anderson might be the best guard duo in the country. This will be a typical Texas team in that they will play up tempo basketball by pressing and shooting the three. This style of game gives them a chance to beat anyone, but it also allows anyone to compete with them. Early season great showing in a two point loss at North Carolina and an 18 point loss (shooting 33 percent) at Florida show both ends of the spectrum. Handle their style and you can beat them.

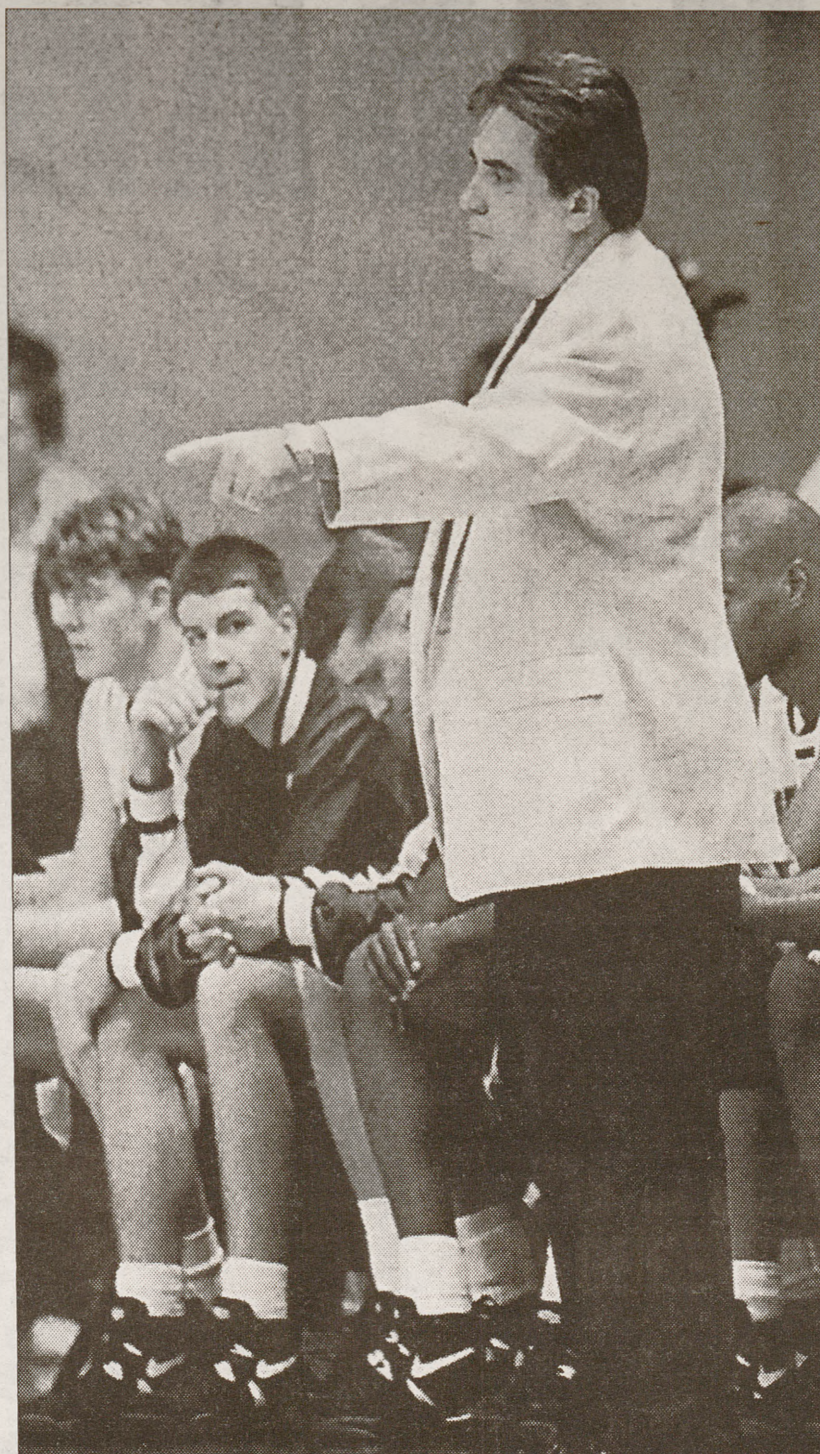
Rice is my pick as a dark horse in the league. They have been slowed by early season injuries. Senior forward Adam Peakes is their leader. Shaun Igo has a chance to be a fine post player. They have also added an outstanding transfer in 6-foot 4-inch guard J.J. Polk. This team is very disciplined and plays physical defense. For them to be a factor,

they must get help from Kevin Nanney and Scott Oliver. Thomas McGhee is the key to their backcourt. They have a great homecourt advantage. We have beaten them there in the last two years. They will play a number of home games in The Summit. Bad idea!

Southern Methodist is a team that has always given us problems. They play very physically on defense and run a very fine motion offense. They have a wonderful point guard in Troy Mathew who I thought was the best freshman in the league last year. They will count on newcomers Jeremy Brusey and Jamed Rich. They have brutal non-conference schedule including Oklahoma, Arkansas, Oklahoma State, Kansas, St. Louis and Seton Hall. We've played this type of schedule and it can be mentally destructive.

Texas Christian has a new coach, Billy Tubbs, and a new approach to the game. This will be a total up tempo team. The question will be defensively. Kurt Thomas has the ability to be a pro. While he is a dominant force inside, he also has great perimeter skills. Jeff Jacobs made an immediate impact as a freshman at point guard. Juan Bragg, a 6-foot 3-inch freshman, was highly recruited. The key to their team will be their ability to outscore you. They must guard you to be a factor. This team will win games because of their high-octane offense.

Baylor has had many off-court problems that will undoubtedly affect



Stew Milne/THE BATTALION

their team. My feelings are that they must get off to a good start or tough times will follow. Don't be fooled by Baylor's lack of depth. They have four outstanding players in their starting line-up. Senior guard Aundre Branch and sophomore center Doug Brandt are all-league players. Nelson Haggerty is a quality point guard who broke our backs with a three-point basket at the end of regulation that led to an overtime loss for us. Baylor has taken an up tempo approach and can score in bunches. They can be as explosive as Texas. They must find a way to play defense and stay out of foul trouble.

The Houston Cougars will be a greatly improved team this year. They have an all-star performer in Tim Moore who gave us fits last year. Tyrone Evans returns at point after having an injury-plagued season. The key to Houston's improve-

ment will come from the play of newcomers Kenya Capers, Tommy Davis and Kirk Ford. Damon Jones, a freshman guard, has played extremely well in early games. This team has great quickness. Coach Alvin Brooks installed a system last year and his players should respond well to it this year.

Our early league schedule will be critical. This basketball team has worked harder than any team I've had. I know how important it is for them to be successful. We've turned the corner after getting through some major problems. This group of seniors has been the reason this program has changed its image. We hope that you will come out and give us a great home court advantage. The "Aggie Spirit" is for real. Let's get it into G. Rollie White and show the visiting teams what a factor we are.