

Hard work the philosophy of lifelong 'motivator'

Under David Kent's direction, the men's tennis program has produced 14 SWC Individual Champions.

By Kristina Buffin
THE BATTALION

After spending 37 years in a profession, most people are ready to retire but not Texas A&M men's tennis coach David Kent.

"I've never had a real job," Kent said. "I came from an athletic family, I started coaching right out of Texas Tech. I've been involved in tennis all my life, it's in my blood."

Kent, a native of Amarillo, began his tennis collegiate career playing for Tech where he finished second in the Southwest Conference in 1958.

After coaching at Amarillo High School and Midland for ten years, Kent began coaching Division I tennis at West Texas A&M University. Kent recorded a 200-62 match record and won seven Missouri Valley Conference titles.

After nine seasons at West Texas, Kent came to A&M to coach and has been here for 16 seasons.

"A&M is a great place to coach," Kent said. "It's a great place and team. It helps when you have a supportive athletic director."

Kent, 1994 SWC Coach of the Year, said that his longtime success has come from his coaching

philosophy of hard work.

"My first rule is that a player should compete hard in every match," Kent said. "My second is not to forget rule number one. I don't accept any excuses or whining. We have been successful because we work hard."

Kent's philosophy seems to work. In his career at A&M, his teams have produced 14 SWC Individual Champions and 17 NCAA qualifiers.

"At this level (college) you don't teach as much," Kent said. "You support, motivate and with good players you just stay out of the way."

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One of Kent's greatest strengths is his ability to recruit talented players and give them an opportunity to play for a top program.

"I was living in Mexico City when coach Kent recruited me," senior Ricardo Rodarte said. "He recruited me on references and gave me a chance even though I never took a recruiting trip out here."

Another part of Kent's success is his presence both on and off the court. He motivates his players to improve through en-

couragement and persistence.

"I've had coaches that some players did not respect," senior Bernardo Martinez said. "But he has gotten that respect. He is always wanting to help and is always trying to give the best of him to all the players."

It is Kent's love of the game and positive frame of mind that attracts players to his program.

"He is so energetic and positive," Martinez said. "That is one thing that I will not forget. You can tell how much he enjoys it and because he has had so much experience, he knows how to handle certain situations."

In his 26 years of coaching Division I, Kent is ranked sixth among active coaches with a record of 482-206. Perhaps Kent's greatest success came with last season's team. A&M finished with a school record 23-4 overall record and the SWC Championship.

"I want to do the same thing that we did in 1994—win the conference," Kent said. "It's the same goal every year."

Although his focus is on the rest of the season, Kent said retirement might not be that far off.

"My thoughts (of retirement) are in the near future," Kent said. "I enjoy coaching but everyone reaches a point. It's nice when you can stay for so long and (athletic director) Wally Groff has been very nice."



Robyn Calloway/THE BATTALION

Tennis head coach David Kent discusses this weekend's SWC tournament with assistant coach Charles Emley.

SPORTS BRIEFS

Men's tennis face Tech in first round

The third-seeded Texas A&M men's tennis team will face Texas Tech at 1 p.m. in the first round of the Southwest Conference Men's Tennis Championship Friday at the Omar Smith Tennis Center.

In the regular season matchup between the two teams, A&M handed Tech a 5-2 loss in Lubbock on April 15.

"It's great to play in the conference tournament at the Omar Smith Tennis Center," A&M tennis coach David Kent said. "I think we're very capable of winning this tournament. The problem is that there are several teams capable of winning this tournament."

Games against UTA cancelled yesterday

The softball doubleheader between Texas A&M and Texas-Arlington scheduled for today in Arlington has been canceled because of weather. The games will not be rescheduled.

The Lady Aggies will resume play Saturday in a four-game series against 13th-ranked South Carolina in Columbia, S.C.

Blinn guard signs to play basketball

The Texas A&M basketball team signed Tracey Anderson of Blinn Junior College to a national letter-of-intent yesterday.

Anderson, a 6-2, 185-pound guard, averaged 17.9 points, 5.7 assists and 2.5 steals in leading Blinn to a 19-11 record.

"Tracey is a combination guard who is a tremendous competitor," A&M coach Tony Barone said. "We really like his leadership potential and think he can step in and be a Big-12 player for us."

Women open tourney against U. of Houston

The second-seeded Texas A&M women's tennis team will open the Southwest Conference tournament against the University of Houston at 1 p.m. on Friday at the Omar Smith Tennis Center.

The Lady Aggies handed the Lady Cougars a 7-2 loss in College Station during the regular season.

"The entire team is healthy and in good spirits about the tournament," A&M coach Bobby Kleinecke said. "They know this is a great opportunity for them and they're excited about playing at home."

Who will wear the gold for U.S. as Dream Team III?

Speculation begins as to the makeup of the team that will defend Dream Team I's gold medal in Atlanta.

NEW YORK (AP) — Magic wants to be there, but what about Michael and Karl and some of the other original Dream Team members? Are they showing up in Atlanta next year for a shot at another Olympic basketball gold medal?

With the world's deepest talent pool at their disposal, the people who will pick and run the U.S. squad at the 1996 Summer Games were far from ready Wednesday to say just who might be chosen, even if their names are Johnson and Jordan and Malone.

"They will try to develop the best team possible," said Craig Miller, spokesman for USA Basketball. And when it comes to hoops in America, the best possible seems to get better and better.

With pro players allowed in the Olympics since 1992, the U.S. team already has been all but handed the gold in Atlanta, but recent developments have added intrigue to just who might be on Dream Team III.

Just this week, the captain of the '92 Olympic winners, Magic Johnson, said he wanted to go to the Games again, even though he hasn't played an NBA game in almost three years. Johnson retired from the Los Angeles Lakers in November 1991 after contracting the AIDS virus and, aside from the Barcelona Games, has limited his competition since then to his own international all-star tour.

And if Magic is in the run-

ning, what about Mike?

Michael Jordan's comeback from a 1 1/2-year pursuit of baseball means the man generally considered the greatest basketball player ever could be in Atlanta looking for his second straight gold medal and an unprecedented third overall.

"It's too early to speculate about any of that," Miller said. "I don't think anyone (here) has had contact with Michael or Magic or anyone else. Certainly, if you are seeking to create the best team possible, then Michael would certainly be considered. But I'm not even sure he'd want it."

Johnson's inactive status does nothing to affect his Olympic eligibility, however, Miller said.

"There is nothing to keep Magic from playing," he said in a telephone interview from the federation's headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colo. "Our selection procedure says essentially that any U.S. citizen is eligible for consideration."

Nor would concerns about Johnson's health or competitiveness cloud the picture, Miller continued.

"Magic's playing abilities are superb," he said. "It's not like a comeback by an old boxer. He's still in an elite status. He's healthy and playing very well."

Privately, U.S. Olympic leaders say they can't imagine not at least contacting Jordan to see if he's interested and building the team around him if he is.

Also to be weighed are marketing pluses — and minuses — for both His Airness and the Olympic community; remember that the Dream Team created a nightmare for the U.S. Olympic Committee in Barcelona when individual sneaker and clothing endorsements clashed with those of the full team.

Rockets fall apart against Jazz

Rockets' coach Rudy Tomjanovich ejected after disputing call.

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Karl Malone scored a season-high 45 points, including 13 in the pivotal third period Wednesday night, as the Utah Jazz rolled to a 115-96 victory over the Houston Rockets, their probable first-round playoff opponent.

Malone hit 16 of 24 shots and had 17 rebounds as the Jazz evened their season series with the Rockets at 2-2 and extended their winning streak to five games.

John Stockton had 19 points

and 15 assists, while David Benoit had 19 and 13 rebounds.

Hakeem Olajuwon had 30 points and 10 rebounds for the Rockets, who will try to avenge the loss Sunday when Utah travels to Houston for both teams' regular season finale.

Utah pulled within 1 1/2 games of the idle San Antonio Spurs for first place in the Western Conference.

Clyde Drexler finished with 17 points for the Rockets, who had won their three previous games, while Mario Elie had 13 and Kenny Smith 12.

Breaking a halftime tie, the Jazz used Hornacek's basket and Benoit's 3-pointer to stake a 64-59 lead with 8:21 left in the

third quarter. Four minutes later, another mini-run — capped by Malone's 10-foot jumper — pushed Utah's advantage to 10.

Then things really fell apart for the Rockets. In the third quarter's final 1:45, coach Rudy Tomjanovich was ejected on a technical for coming out to mid-court protest a call, and Olajuwon collected both a flagrant foul when he knocked Malone to the floor and his fourth personal.

After the resulting flurry of foul shots, the Jazz went into the final period with an 89-73 lead. The Rockets could get no closer than nine points after that, closing to 93-84 on Olajuwon's fall-away jumper with a little more than five minutes to play.

Age not a factor for freshmen athletes

Freshman success is hard to come by in the world of academia. But, in the sports world, there are different rules.

The 1991-92 Michigan basketball team, starting five freshmen, made national headlines in their bid for the NCAA championship only to fall short in the finals.

Their success drew enormous attention from across the nation and an array of coverage from Sports Illustrated and other national sports media.

The successes of some local freshman athletes give testimony to this fact.

Names like Kyle Kessel, Carey Owens and Kristie Smedsrud have graced the headlines at A&M and more than likely, their hometowns.

Kessel came in and led the Aggies at point guard, nailing the three point shot and assisting his teammates to the bas-

ket game after game.

The successes do not stop with Aggie men's basketball.

The ladies' squad dawned their own three-point specialist in freshman guard Carey Owens. The freshman standout was solid behind the three-point arc proving she could not only play, but compete at the collegiate level.

Basketball is not the only sport where freshman Aggies have displayed their talents this year.

Last fall, Kristie Smedsrud proved her athletic talents on the volleyball team with her contributions in the Lady Aggies' playoff bid. She went on to earn "Freshman of the Year" honors, making a statement that she can win on the colle-



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giate level.

These "new" Aggies follow greats from years past who burst on to the college playing field.

Many remember running back Leland McElroy's

freshman season.

The moves he made on defensive linemen opened the eyes of several veteran players and all Aggie fans. Not many athletes can say they were awarded the National Special Teams Player of the Year by Sports Illustrated because they led the nation in kickoff returns with a 39.3 average.

With all of these successes, it's no wonder that freshman athletes, both present and past, have had national recognition for their accomplishments.

So, what is it that causes many coaches and fans to

cringe when the rookie freshman is put into the game.

Perhaps, it's their lack of experience. Most coaches want to develop and build on the talent of standout high school athletes.

The freshman athletes who get to wear the Aggie jersey and sweat in it sometimes excel past their veteran teammates.

Maybe it's their attitude. Freshman know the athletic talents of their high school teammates and opponents. Perhaps the only exposure they have had to the kind of competition they will face at the collegiate level is at summer camps.

Freshman also, many times, have high expectations because of their successes at the high school level.

Whatever the reason, the freshman athletes who have impacted Texas A&M are fast becoming household names and ones that will be associated with A&M for years to come.

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