

A&M begins SWC season tonight

The volleyball team will play its opener at Baylor.

By Kristina Buffin
THE BATTALION

In the last year of the Southwest Conference, the Texas A&M women's volleyball team (5-1) has two simple goals: to finish conference play undefeated and to capture the last SWC crown.

The road to the crown will begin in Waco tonight when the Lady Aggies face Baylor (1-10).

"Our goal is to go undefeated (in conference play)," junior middle blocker Page White said. "This game is the first stepping stone. Playing at Baylor is always hard."

Although the Lady Aggies lost to the University of Houston in the final round of the SWC tournament last year, A&M is confident that this year will be different.

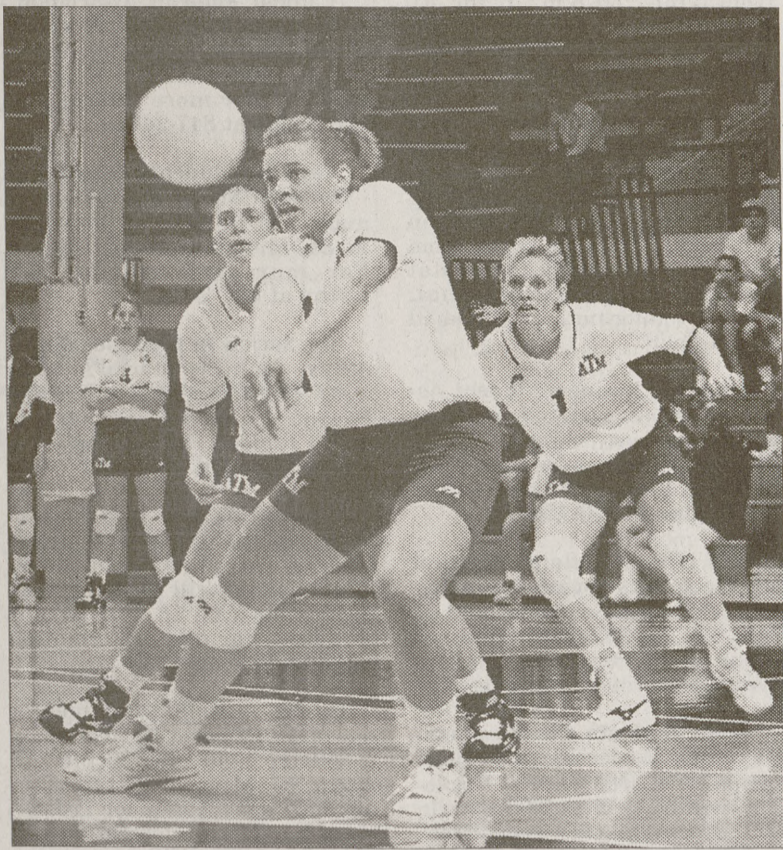
"We have another year of experience under us," A&M Head Coach Laurie Corbelli said. "We returned five starters this year, and last year we returned only two. We have more confidence and more 'teamness.' I think our new players give us more strength."

The athleticism and Lady Bears' big blocking plays worry the Lady Aggies.

"Baylor is a great start for us," senior outside hitter Dana Santleben said. "They are athletic, big girls. Their offensive blocking is big and athletic, but their weakest part is defense. We will move the offense around and play strong as we have been this season."

The Lady Aggies are coming off of a successful weekend in North Carolina, where they defeated the University of North Carolina, Louisiana State University and Duke University. They are hoping to carry their winning momentum into Waco and use it as an advantage over Baylor.

"We got a lot of confidence this weekend," Corbelli said. "We overcame a sluggish performance against Duke and had the energy to put them away. We have set our goals very high. We are focused on them at practice, and we definitely



Evan Zimmerman, THE BATTALION

Senior outside hitter **Andrea Williams** digs the ball during the Lady Aggies' win over Utah State two weeks ago at G. Rollie White Coliseum.

have the confidence and momentum."

The Lady Aggies will be playing without two of their starters, sophomore outside hitter Cindy VanderWoude and senior setter Suzy Wente. Wente did not play in two matches this weekend because of a stomach virus, and VanderWoude is displaying the same symptoms.

"It will be more of a mental adjustment," Corbelli said. "They are used to Suzy and the way she plays. We have the depth; we just need to have confidence in our backups."

A&M increased its confidence in the ability of the bench to contribute this weekend when Wente did not play against LSU and Duke. Sophomore Farah Mensik

made up for Wente's absence with 140 assists in three matches.

"Farah was fantastic," Corbelli said. "As a setter, she is one-third of the team. She has to organize and construct the offense — basically do it all. She has handled this maturely. The spring gave her a chance to set more, and she has carried that over to this fall. She was ready when we needed her."

The Lady Aggies are looking towards tonight's game to establish themselves in conference play and to illustrate they are intent on going undefeated and capturing the last SWC crown.

"We want to show other teams what we can do," White said. "Texas A&M should not be taken lightly. We're here and we're going to be tough."

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