

# Aggie Soccer takes another step

**□ The Aggie Soccer Team posted its best record ever, winning 18.**

By Philip Leone  
THE BATTALION

In November 1992, then-Texas A&M Athletic Director John David Crow announced the Athletic Department's decision to elevate the A&M women's soccer program to full varsity status.

No one could have predicted at the time that the Lady Aggie soccer program would develop into a powerhouse in only three short seasons. But that is exactly what has happened.

After 15-win seasons in 1993 and 1994, Head Coach G. Guerrieri led his third Aggie squad to 18 wins and the school's first-ever appearance in the NCAA Tournament in 1995. Guerrieri sees A&M's first-round thumping of the University of Clemson as the high point in a season filled with success.

"The victory over Clemson proved a number of things not only to us but also to the rest of the college soccer community," Guerrieri said. "I think it proved that we deserved to be in the playoffs, and it also marked our initial arrival as a national power."

Although the Aggies emerged as one of the country's top teams this season, they could never shake their Southwest Conference rivals at Southern Methodist University. The Lady Mustangs proved to be more than just a thorn in A&M's side by beating the Aggies once in the regular season, once in the SWC tournament

championship and again in the second-round of the NCAA Tournament.

"That was the game that slapped us across the face and said, 'Hey, you gotta play hard every game or you're going to get beat,'" Bryn Blalack said. "After that, we really came together and re-focused on the rest of the season, which helped us pick up a lot of wins later in the season."

From the Alabama game on, the Aggies cruised through the regular season with one of the Central Region's most explosive offensive attacks. The front line of Blalack, Koop and junior forward Yvette Okler was devastating.

Blalack finished the season with 23 goals and 12 assists, Koop ended up with 21 goals and 10 assists and Okler added

play of the midfielders. They always tried to give us the ball in good offensive position."

A&M's defense also shined for Guerrieri this season. The speed and tenacity of junior defenders Tina Robinson and Sandy Edwards mixed with the consistency of junior goalkeeper Sunny McConnell served as a gauntlet for opposing offenses. McConnell and her defensive teammates had nine shutout games and allowed only 32 goals on 258 shots.

Another factor in the good fortunes of Lady Aggie soccer this season was good overall team chemistry, which Koop feels was essential in helping the team overcome adversity and late season fatigue. Blalack believes the strength of the A&M unity can be brought back to Guerrieri.

"The sort of loosened up," Blalack said. "We picked up on that as a team and played a little bit more relaxed. We all just had a good time this season."

The good times should keep on coming for the Lady Aggies next season. A&M will only lose three players to graduation and will return all of the big guns on offense going into their inaugural season in the Big 12, where A&M and the University of Nebraska should be the top teams.

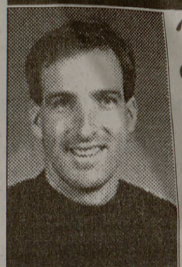
Guerrieri, who expects an fine recruiting class, feels his soccer program has only scratched the surface on the success that can be achieved.

"This season was a taste of what's to come. The journey has just begun for us."



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Sophomore midfielder Diana Rowe dribbles upfield against the Lady Longhorns in a SWC Tournament game.



**"The victory over Clemson ... marked our initial arrival as a national power."**  
—G. Guerrieri  
A&M Soccer Coach

nine goals and 11 assists. The offense became even more dangerous with the emergence of speedy freshman forward Nicole Shook, who knocked home 10 goals with limited playing time in her first collegiate season.

Koop credits the Aggie offensive success to good teamwork among the forwards combined with stellar play from the midfield.

"No matter what combination of players, the front line always seemed to work well together," Koop said. "And I think that's because of the quality and the set-up

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