

## BACK ON TRACK



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Texas Aggie runners (from left to right) Billy Fobbs, Michael Price and Toya Jones compete in the 100-meter dash at the Aggies' meet against the University of Texas. A&M defeated the Longhorns in that matchup, but finished as runners-up to UT in the final Southwest Conference Meet in Austin last month.

### Men's and women's teams meet expectations Nelson: Long-time A&M "track man" takes honor

By Philip Leone  
THE BATTALION

If the Texas A&M Track Team's season had to be described in one word, it would be bittersweet. Sweet because both the men's and women's squads finished a surprising second in the Southwest Conference standings and combined to send a school record 22 competitors to the NCAA Track and Field Championships. And bitter because both sides struggled at the NCAA finals and suffered some major individual disappointments.

Despite the Aggies' troubles at nationals, Head Coach Ted Nelson said he was more than pleased with his team's overall performance throughout the outdoor season. "We go into every season looking to win the Southwest Conference, but realistically this season we set a goal of finishing in the top three," Nelson said. "I'm very proud of how consistent we were all season long and how well we performed at the conference meet — especially the women's team." At the final SWC Championships held in Lubbock May 16-18, the underdog Lady Aggies registered a school record 134 1/4 points to the University of Texas' 144. The 10-point margin was the closest any SWC team has come to beating the powerful Lady Longhorns since 1990. The women's team also tied a school record by capturing three individual events. Junior Rosa Jolivet won the 100- and 400-meter hurdles with times of 13.23 and 56.94 seconds respectively. Freshman sensation Stacey Szykora won the heptathlon, and five Lady Aggies had runner-up finishes. The Aggie men also challenged Texas for the conference crown. Senior Tim Bryant was victorious in the

long jump with a leap of 26.7 meters and Neryv Kennedy concluded his conference career by finishing first in the javelin event with a throw of 233.2 meters. A&M only trailed by two points in the team standings going into the final event, the 1,600-meter relay. Expected to finish first or second, the Aggies mishandled the first exchange and finished a disappointing sixth. Texas placed fourth in the relay to maintain its overall lead and win the conference team title. Unfortunately, the same kind of adversity followed the Aggies to Eugene, Ore., for the NCAA Championships May 29-June 1. The men tied for 19th place overall with 15 points, while the women finished with eight points for 25th place.

Expected to contend for the national title after placing first in the SWC, the Aggie men's 400-meter relay team was disqualified during preliminaries because officials said the third Aggie runner, Billy Fobbs, stepped on the inside line of his lane as he ran the curve. The team's time, 39.66 seconds, would have placed them third among qualifiers and put them in the finals. A&M lost more crucial points the following day when Danny McCray was disqualified from the 400-meter dash after stepping on the lane during his preliminary heat. His time of 45.85 seconds would have easily earned him a spot in the finals. Ironically, the disqualifications occurred at the same curve on the track by the same meet official. Nelson believes this misfortune was difficult for his team to overcome. "It did kind of take the wind out of our sails a bit," Nelson said. "It doesn't get called very often, but we accept the decision. Maybe the judge just didn't like maroon and white."

Seniors Neryv Kennedy and Tim Bryant, however, gave the Aggies some points with strong performances. Kennedy placed third in the javelin and earned All-American honors with a distance of 237.2 meters. Bryant also grabbed All-American distinction by finishing seventh in the long jump.

A&M Jumps and Hurdles coach Abe Brown said the cool weather conditions in Eugene did not prevent Bryant from ending his collegiate career on a high note. "He capped off a stellar career," Brown said. "The conditions made him tight in the calves, and I thought that might take away from his speed. He didn't let it bother him. He gave his best effort."

For the women, Rosa Jolivet rebounded from the disappointment of not making the finals in the 400-meter hurdles to place third in the 100-meter hurdles with a time of 12.97 seconds.

Jolivet entered the meet with the fastest 400-meter time in the nation, and Nelson said he was proud of how she overcame the let-down of not making the finals in that event.

"For her first time at nationals, I think she really handled herself well," Nelson said. "Rosa got her focus back for the 400 and kicked it in for us. You have to be pleased with that kind of maturity."

Sophomore Adrien Sawyer joined Jolivet in earning All-American honors for the Lady Aggies. Sawyer placed seventh in the long jump and finished among the top eight Americans in the triple jump.

Sawyer's performance at nationals came as no surprise to Brown.

"She's jumped well for us all season and just stepped up for us at the right time," Brown said. "I'm glad we have her for two more years."

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Nelson's modesty belies his success. In his six years as the "head man" at A&M after serving as an assistant since 1966, the program has produced two Olympians and 29 All-Americans.

Abe Brown, an assistant for the Aggies for five of those six years, said Nelson's steady disposition and dependability are the secrets to the 30-year Aggie track coach's success.

"He's a fair man — keeps things on an even keel," Brown said. "You can always count on Coach Nelson. He's not going to go 'left field' on you. You always know where he's coming from, and that kind of stability has really benefited our program."

Nelson believes he received the national coaching award, partially, because of the late season surge of the Lady Aggies.

Predicted to finish in the middle of the pack at the SWC Championships held May 16-18 at Texas Tech, the Lady Aggies accumulated a school record of 134 points to finish second, just 10 points behind powerhouse Texas.

"That was a great meet for our women's squad because no one really expected us to end up that close to Texas," Nelson said. "I'm very proud of what the girls were able to accomplish. It was a tremendous effort on their part, and without question, I think it had something to do with me getting the award."

In addition to the women's surprise performance at the final SWC competition, seven Lady Aggies qualified for the NCAA meet, breaking the previous school mark of five set in 1992.

The men's team also finished the conference meet in second place behind Texas, sending a school-record of 15 competitors to the national championships and finishing tied for 19th.

This kind of success is nothing new for Nelson. A high school track standout in his hometown of Andrews, Texas, Nelson was recruited to A&M by legendary Aggie track coach Charlie Thomas in 1961. Once in Aggieland, Nelson quickly established himself as one of the greatest sprinters in the school's history.

Nelson held 13 school records at the end of his stellar career, including times of 9.4 seconds in the 100-yard dash and 46.2 seconds in the 440-

yard dash.

So speedy was Nelson that first-year A&M head football coach Gene Stallings talked him into playing reserve split end and special teams for the Aggies before the 1965 season.

Though Nelson did not see much action on Stallings' 3-7 squad, he said his gridiron experience was not without benefits.

"We weren't real good, but I enjoyed that season a whole lot," Nelson said. "I had already decided that track was where I belonged."

Everyone involved with the A&M track program agrees that Nelson made a wise decision.

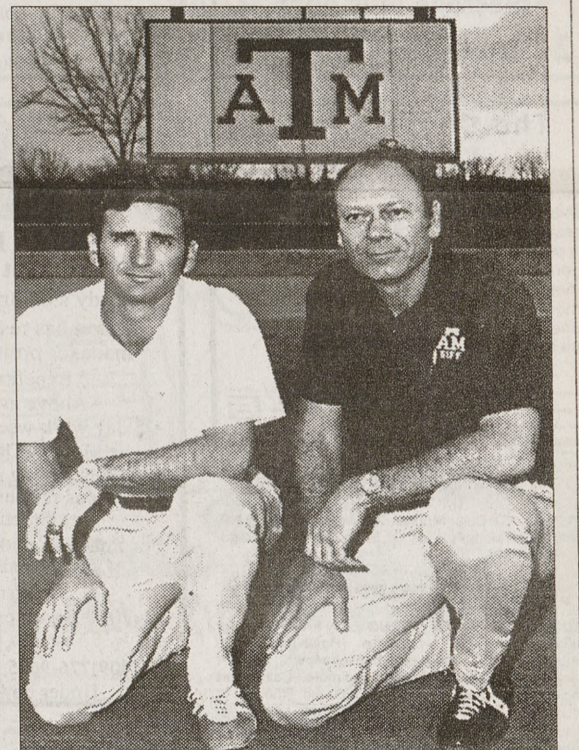


Photo Courtesy of Texas A&M Sports Information

Ted Nelson took over the coaching reins from long-time A&M coach Charlie Thomas (right) in 1991.

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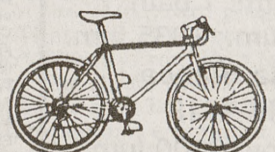
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