

SPORTS

Cruel Summer

A&M soccer battles heat, training rigors in Big 12 preparation

By Colby Gaines
THE BATTALION

This summer is no walk on the beach for the Texas A&M Women's Soccer team.

Hosting mini-camps, striving for superb physical condition and surrounding the present-team nucleus with new recruits are just a few of the activities coach G. Guerrieri and players are involved in these days.

"The summer is just as important as any other part of the off-season," Guerrieri said. "The players have a sense of pride and that is a good motivator to stay in shape during the summer."

"Basically, it comes down to whether players view themselves as recreational players or as big-time athletes. Big-time athletes are hard-working, and that's what type of players we have on this team."

Since 1993, Guerrieri and his assistants have been booked from June to August. During this time, they host summer soccer camps for boys and girls interested in increasing their athletic potential.

Thanks to the help of some current A&M players, including former camp alumnus Sharon Pickering, soccer-crazed youths have a chance to learn fundamentals of the sport. In the process, determined individuals help lay a solid foundation to continue athletics at the college level.

"The skill at the camps is very high," Guerrieri said. "Most of the girls who want to come here make it a

point to attend one of the summer sessions. It's great fun for both the kids and the coaches."

Returning defensive starter Sandy Edwards said she sees the position as a positive experience.

"We help with the assistants and do a lot of demonstrations," Edwards said. "In essence, we're counselors that relate to the kids."

Coming off a season in which A&M reached the Sweet Sixteen in the NCAA Tournament, Guerrieri said he has not let complacency set in.

Guerrieri assembled a prestigious recruiting class he believes will make an immediate impact in the new conference.

"This could be the best class that I've had in my four seasons here," Guerrieri said.

"All seven of the newcomers, including Sharon Pickering, a transfer who started every game as a freshman at Clemson; Julie Pinkerton, the top recruit in Texas; Ashley Fender, the top defender in Texas; and Melanie Wilson, the top goalkeeper in the nation, have the ability to beat out the starters."

Senior midfielder Tania Castillejos said even when facing near-record heat, players must continue a rigorous workout schedule in preparation for the upcoming season.

Castillejos said after training hard

for nearly four years, she understands the concentration and determination athletes must have.

"It's hard, but everyone knows that if we don't workout in the summer, it will be harder to get in shape when the season comes around," Castillejos said.

Guerrieri knows the summer can make or break an athlete, but he is confident his players will stay in shape.

"Most of the players have clear-cut goals of what they want to achieve on the field," Guerrieri said. "They work hard because they want to win a national championship."

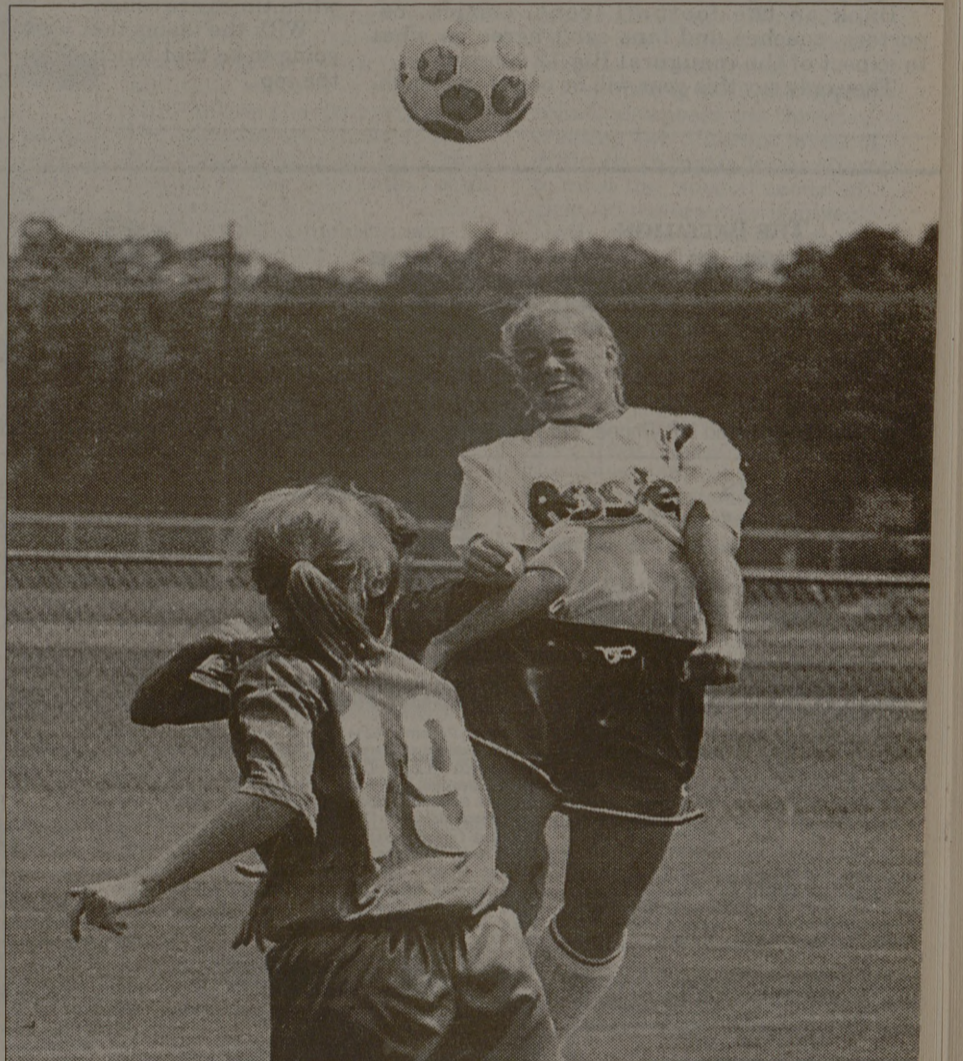
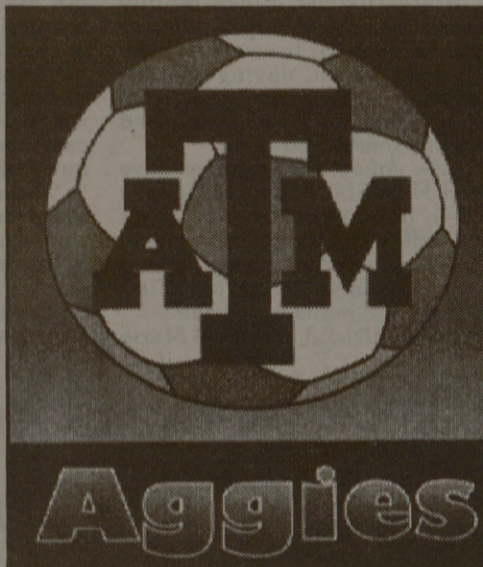
"They're in great shape year-round. It's just a matter of maintaining that shape with weights and speed work during the summer."

All in all, Guerrieri said he and the players are excited about the beginning of the Big 12 Conference and the introduction of new competition.

"The competition will be top-notch," Guerrieri said. "Nebraska will probably be the team to beat. Texas, Texas Tech and Missouri will also be tough. Our goal is to win the conference championship in its first year."

Edwards says with the return of 11 out of last year's 12 starters, the future of the team is bright.

"This team has been together for a while," Edwards said. "With most of us coming back, hopefully we have nowhere to go but up."



BATTALION FILE PHOTO

Returning defender Sandy Edwards heads the ball over a Marquette forward in a game last season at the Aggie Soccer Complex.

Early Retirement

"... everything happens for a reason, and I felt my health had priority over basketball."

By Philip Leone
THE BATTALION

Coming off two All-Southwest Conference seasons as center for the Texas A&M Lady Aggies, the sky was the limit for Martha McClelland's senior year. No one could have predicted that a bad back would cause the sky to fall on her.

McClelland, who was red-shirted last year after injuring her back during preseason workouts, accepted her doctor's recommendation and decided last week to forego her final season of eligibility with the Lady Aggies.

The six-foot-four-inch center from Duncanville suffers from discitis, a spinal condition resulting from a bacterial infection in the disc space that erodes the shock absorption mechanism between vertebrae. McClelland also has multiple disk herniations in her lower back.

Dr. Andrew Dosset of the Dallas Spine Group advised McClelland that continuing her basketball career would significantly increase the risks of additional spine problems.

Although Dr. Dosset's recommendation came as a tremendous disappointment, McClelland said future health considerations outweighed her desire to come back for her senior season.

"I wasn't expecting to get that kind of news, so it was a pretty serious disappointment for me and my family," McClelland said. "But everything happens for a reason, and I felt that my health had priority over basketball."

Lady Aggie coach Candi Harvey reiterated that McClelland's future health was her primary concern.

"Our main priority from the beginning was to keep Martha healthy and safe," Harvey said Thursday in an Athletic Department press release. "We want to make sure Martha leads a healthy and productive life beyond basketball."

McClelland, who earned All-Southwest Conference honors in

1993 and 1994, said not being able to take the court for the Lady Aggies in the debut season of the Big 12 Conference is particularly disappointing.

"I was really looking forward to the Big 12 because it offers a number of challenges to our basketball team," McClelland said. "There are a lot of people and teams I would have liked to go up against to see what I could do."

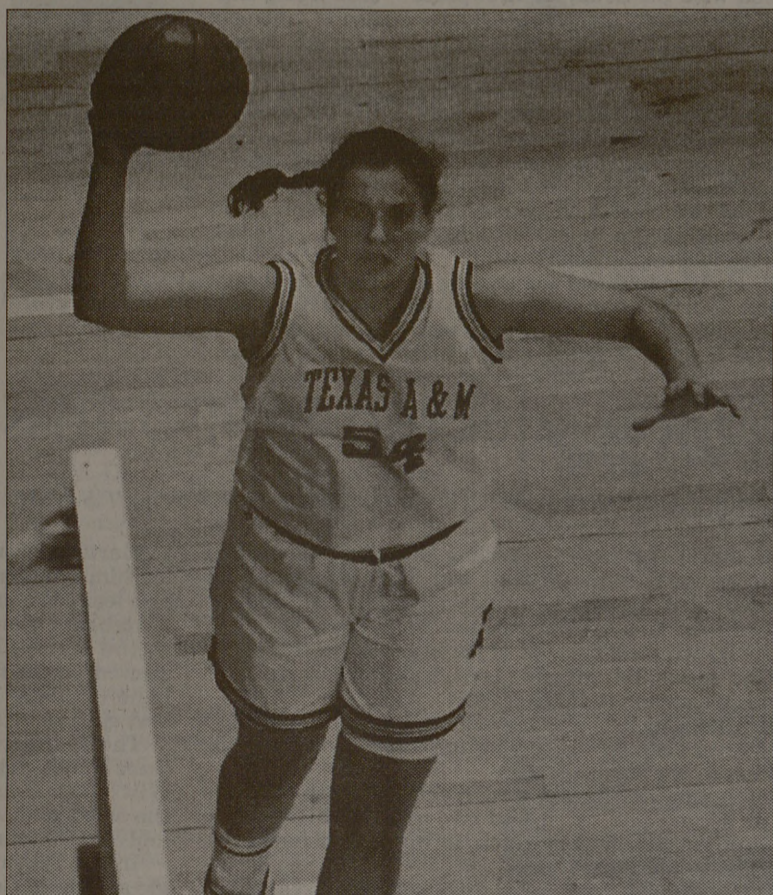
With the loss of McClelland and the graduation of Kelly Cerny, the brunt of the Lady Aggies' inside game will likely fall on the shoulders of senior Marianne Sevin. However, McClelland believes Sevin will have no

problem handling the chore.

"Marianne's done a great job for us the past couple of seasons and has really improved her game," McClelland said. "It's her time to shine. She'll step up to the challenge."

Though she will not be in uniform next season, McClelland said she will still be involved with the team in some capacity, possibly as a student-coach.

"I'm excited about helping out the team in that way," McClelland said. "I plan to coach after I get out of school, so it'll be a good experience for me. There's something that I can get out of this."



BATTALION FILE PHOTO

Senior center Martha McClelland goes for the lay-up in a 1995 game.

Big 12 could mean 'Big Hurt' for A&M athletics

The moment we've all been waiting for is finally upon us.

July 1, 1996, 12:01 A.M. — The first official day of operation for the Big 12 Conference.

The institution known as the Southwest Conference is finally gone, leaving us with fond memories of championships, Cotton Bowls and great Texas rivalries that will never be forgotten.

With the beginning of this new era in college sports, most people in the A&M community feel both anticipation and excitement.

But I hope this school realizes we are about to enter an entirely different realm of athletics — one this school hasn't seen since the days Darrell Royal and Shelby Metcalf paced their respective sidelines. The Aggies will be competing in a very tough conference.

Traditionally, the A&M student body has measured the Athletic Department's success by the play of its football team.

In fact, A&M's sparkling win-loss records in recent years have kept most people content.

But as A&M's different teams go face-to-face with different programs comprising the rest of the Big 12, we will soon realize the definition of a true athletic powerhouse.

I am not looking forward to the upcoming basketball season at all.

Last year, the Aggies had trouble competing with opponents that were barely .500 teams. Now they'll have to face the likes of Kansas and Oklahoma State — teams that produce NBA players and reach the NCAA tournament on a regular basis.

This is just the beginning.

The Big 12 will be stocked with schools that will give us problems in any sport.

For example, the Aggie volleyball team will have to deal with defending national champion Nebraska after it fends off Texas and Oklahoma, two of the better-known volleyball schools in the conference.



RAY HERNANDEZ
SPORTSWRITER

In a slump since the 1994 season, our baseball program will have the honor of playing each school in the conference on a yearly basis. This means playing Kansas (an A&M opponent in the 1993 College World Series), Oklahoma (the 1994 National Champions), Texas Tech (if they aren't on suspension yet) and, of course, Texas (28 College World Series appearances) every season.

Since the SWC did not have conference play in its store for the future as it began Big 12 play last spring, Enduring the conference's rigorous schedule, the Lady Aggies finished fifth, with a 39-21 overall record and a 12-12 conference record.

Despite their mediocre conference finish, the Lady Aggies' performance against tough conference competition was noticed by the NCAA Selection Committee and the team was rewarded an at-large berth in the NCAA Tournament.

Now, as the football season approaches the A&M campus is beginning to feel the familiar stir of energy. However, this season has a bit of a twist to it.

Instead of going into the year facing the criticism of playing a weak schedule in an even weaker conference, one hears just the opposite.

The Aggies' opponents are no longer the remnants of one-time powerhouses as their schedule is drawn from the strongest conference in the nation.

A&M must now deal with two-time defending national champion Nebraska, 1990 national co-champion Colorado and the emerging programs of Kansas and Kansas State at least every other year.

Everyone remembers what Oklahoma, Texas Tech and Texas have done to us in recent years.

The former Big 8 schools and four former SWC schools bring to the new conference a history of championship success in sports ranging from golf to women's basketball, track and field swimming and diving.

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