

Lady Aggs backing up records

At the Inntower Invitational Tournament last weekend, the Lady Aggies led all three of their matches 2-0 going into the third game, but proceeded to drop the final game of each match. Only team Wisconsin was able to overcome A&M's early lead, winning the final three games of their matchup with A&M to win the championship.

"It was disappointing not to win (the match)," Head Coach Laurie Corbelli said. "But our team did not drop. We hit a few errors, and [volleyball] is such a momentum game."

Helping Hand
Junior setter Farah Mensik assists against Wisconsin to set school record, breaking Suzy Wente's mark of 79 set in 1995. Mensik moved into seventh place in career assists on the all-time A&M list during the Loyola Chicago match, surpassing the record of Frederick's total of 417. Mensik currently has 580 assists, while Wente leads Aggie setters with 5,511.

Smashing Away
Junior outside hitter Kristie Smedsrud also broke an A&M record against the Badgers. Her 35 kills surpassed the old standard of 34, which she set as a freshman. Smedsrud has a .313 hitting percentage this season, and after recording 74 kills last weekend, she has 141 total for the year. She has reached double figures in kills in all six matches this season, averaging 23.5 per match, and she has led the team in kills in each match. Both Smedsrud and Stacy Sykora were named to the Inntower Invitational All-Tournament Team. Sykora recorded 42 digs and 53 kills during the tournament, including 22 assists against Wisconsin.

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Setting the Stage Junior setter Farah Mensik makes a name for herself with stellar play

By **MATT MITCHELL**
THE BATTALION

Following in the footsteps of a legend is never easy. San Francisco 49er quarterback Steve Young faced high expectations after Joe Montana jumped ship. Likewise, Texas A&M quarterback Corey Pullig had the pressure of following Bucky Richardson.

The same situation looms this year on the Texas A&M Volleyball Team, as Farah Mensik takes over as starting setter, following the departed All-American Suzy Wente.

The comparison of the setter position on the court to a quarterback on the field is an accurate one. The setter is the focal point of virtually any offensive scheme in volleyball and she is expected to direct the offense

much like the more famous field generals of the gridiron.

A team's success depends on the setter's quality of play, which will certainly be a major factor this year for the Lady Aggies.

Mensik, a 5-foot-8-inch junior from Katy, acknowledges the expectations and the pressure.

"My coaches and teammates have really helped me a lot, and not put a lot of pressure on me," Mensik said. "I put a lot of pressure on myself to perform well and help the team as best I can."

It did not take long for the team to get used to its new setter, as evidenced by its early-season success with wins over Loyola Marymount University, Auburn University, Loyola-Chicago and the University of Maryland.

Senior middle blocker Page

White does not see that many differences between Mensik and Wente.

"They've both had the same coaches and have trained the same way," White said. "Farah is a little bit taller, which is nice for blocking purposes. The biggest change has been getting use to a different person. Obviously she's different, but it hasn't been that much of a transition."

Mensik waited patiently for two years before inheriting the starter's role. One might have expected her to get a little antsy backing up an All-American. However, that was not the case.

"It was a transition from high school, but I knew how great [Wente] was when I got here," Mensik said. "We competed hard on the court, but that helped me. We're very good friends, and I learned tremendously from her. She was a great mentor."

Now that her opportunity has at last come to fruition, Mensik is confident she has the skills to lead the Aggies to another NCAA Tournament appearance. In addition to the aforementioned height advantage, Mensik cites her work ethic among her finest attributes.

"I always work hard and try to give 100 percent," Mensik said. "I'm obviously not the tallest or quickest player, so I think my hard work has really helped me get to where I am today."

A&M Head Coach Laurie Corbelli says there are many other characteristics that make Mensik an exceptional player.

"She's extremely strong and has trained in our system for two years," Corbelli said. "She's very intelligent and understands the concepts and style of play that we use."

All of these skills were on display two weeks ago when Mensik was named to the All-Tournament Team at the University Park Holiday Inn Classic.

She averaged 13.83 assists and 2.42 digs per game in the three matches, including a 72-assist effort against No. 20 Loyola Marymount, the second best single-match total in A&M history. Last weekend, she followed up

Redshirt freshman Chandra Robertson waits in the wings

By **JAMIE BURCH**
THE BATTALION

As the Texas A&M Volleyball Team continues its tuneup for the inaugural Big 12 Conference season, backup setter Chandra Robertson has become one of the pistons aiming to drive the team back to the NCAA Tournament.

Recruited by numerous colleges as a senior in high school, the redshirt freshman said she chose A&M because she liked the environment and because she liked the greater level of competition.

"When I came here, I fell in love with the school," Robertson said. "I loved the traditions, the people, and I felt that A&M would give me more of a challenge volleyball-wise."

A&M Head Coach Laurie Corbelli said when Robertson redshirted last season, she had the opportunity to observe two talented players, Southwest Conference Player of the Year and All-American setter Suzy Wente and her replacement this year, sophomore Farah Mensik.

"Suzy was a natural," Corbelli said. "She was able to see the whole court, where the ball was coming from, who to set it to, and where the ball was going."

Mensik said Robertson profited from both her and Wente's different styles.

"I learned a lot from watching her (Wente) with the team, and when I was sitting off on the side," Mensik said. "Suzy and I have two different styles of play, so I feel that I have something to offer Chandra too."

Now that Robertson has

observed the team for a year, she will fill the role of backup setter this season. Corbelli said Robertson's 6-foot frame will give her a competitive edge.

"This game is getting bigger," Corbelli said. "Any time you can give the starters a rest and fill their spots with size, you're at an advantage."

As the heir apparent to Mensik, Robertson said she was glad she had the opportunity to redshirt her freshman year.

"I wouldn't trade it for anything," Robertson said. "It gave me the opportunity to concentrate on school and get used to college without any pressure."

Robertson said one day she hopes to be a starter.

"I think that's every new recruit's dream — to come in, start and play well," Robertson said. "But I'd like to say that I'm not a selfish player, and that during games, whether I'm on the bench or on the court, I'll give it all I've got."

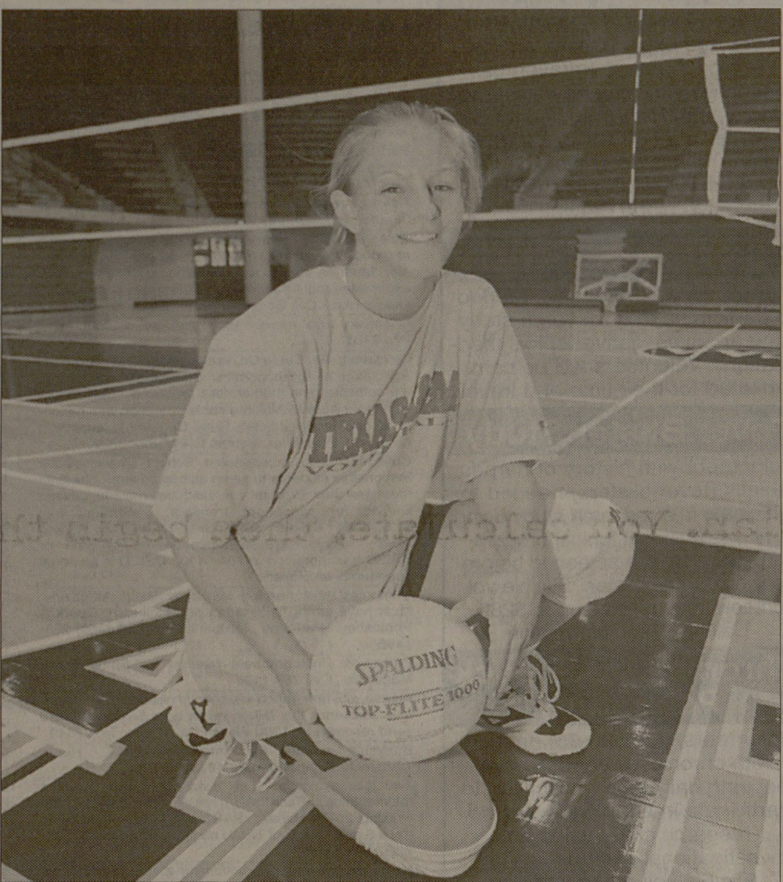
Robertson said her desire to start has only improved the relationship between herself and Mensik.

"We are both very competitive," Robertson said. "We push each other unconsciously. It's a good relationship because we push each other, but not to the extent that it makes either of us uncomfortable."

Corbelli said she enjoys the fierce competition between the two setters.

"We've talked about it a lot," Corbelli said. "Since they're both playing to be the team's setter, they push each other to perform. It's a coach's dream for healthy competition."

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Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Replacing former All-American Suzy Wente, junior setter Farah Mensik has already set an A&M record with 80 assists in one match.

See **MENSIK**, Page 11



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Setter Chandra Robertson works out Monday afternoon.

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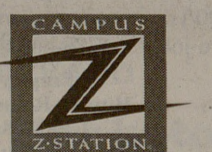
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