

Clash of the Titans

BY NICKI SMITH
THE BATTALION

The sixth-ranked Aggie soccer team will face the eighth-ranked Florida Gators in a battle of undefeated teams.

In a clash between two undefeated, national top 10 squads, the Texas A&M Soccer Team will face the University of Florida at the Aggie Soccer Complex Sunday at 1 p.m.

The Lady Gators are ranked eighth in Soccer America's Top 20 poll and have an overall record of 5-0, following a 2-0 shutout against the University of Central Florida on Wednesday.

While Florida has been impressive this season, the Aggies match them with a record of 7-0 and a No. 6 ranking in two national polls, including the NSCAA/Umbro Top 25 poll and in Soccer America's Top 20.

However, the A&M coaches and players are throwing out the rankings and statistics. They simply view Florida as their most challenging opponent yet.

"Sunday's game will be our toughest game so far," A&M Head Coach G. Guerrieri said. "They will come in with a chip on their shoulder after beating us 3-2 in Gainesville last year. In addition, they are a terrific team with a lot of talent deep into their bench."

The primary reason the Lady Gators are soaring high in the national polls can be attributed to one player — Danielle Fotopoulos.

The junior forward, a transfer from Southern Methodist University, has been coined by opposing teams as an impeccable force on the Gator offense. This is because in 1995, she led the nation in scoring with 83 points, and has helped the unstoppable Gator team this season.

The Aggies are wary of Florida's primary weapon.

"They are a very young team, but they always seem to come out very aggressive and confident," senior forward Kristen Koop said. "We played them last year, and they really surprised us at how strong they were. With Fotopoulos on the team, they will be very hard to beat."

To match the Gators' talent, A&M junior forward Bryn Blalack adds some maroon and white to the national scoring charts by leading the country with 13 goals and five assists.

On paper, Florida and the Aggies are neck-in-neck in almost every statistical category.

The Lady Aggies enter the game with three shutouts this season, while the Lady Gators come in with four shutouts against three top 20 teams, including the University of Virginia, the University of Kentucky and Vanderbilt University.

In addition, both teams are about equal in experience with the A&M team returning 18 letter winners this season and Florida returning 15.

The Aggie coaches and players say the home-field advantage will help them manufacture a win this weekend.

"Their coaches have brought together a strong team," Guerrieri said. "They have a similar style and attacking mentality that matches ours. However, we take pride in playing at home in front of our own crowd."



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Senior forward **Bryn Blalack** drives the ball upfield against SMUs **Shelby Stone** at the Aggie Soccer Complex Wednesday night.

Lady netters ready for first tournament

BY SARA DUESING
THE BATTALION

The energy and excitement can be condensed no longer. Even the dreary weather has loomed over the College Station area and not slowed it down.

The 1996-97 Texas A&M Women's Tennis team has had just a few weeks to prepare for its first tournament, and now it is ready to compete.

With three new faces on the team and a new conference to compete in, the Lady Aggies are excited and anxious to start off their new fall season. It all begins this weekend at Pebble Creek Country Club, where they will host the A&M 4-Way Tournament Friday through Sunday.

Competing with Rice University, the University of Southern Louisiana and the University of North Texas, the team members are confident going into the competition, but are being careful not to underestimate their opponents.

"We cannot overlook the potential these teams have," senior team captain Nancy Dingwall said. "It is important to keep a strong frame of mind throughout the tournament."

Having lost only one player from last season as opposed to A&M losing three, the Rice team appears to be the Lady Aggies' biggest threat. Last spring, Rice was only one of two teams in the Southwest Conference, the other being the University of Texas, to beat A&M women's tennis.

"Rice is a very strong team this year," women's tennis head coach Bobby Kleinecke said. "They're going to make this a high regional tournament to start out on."

Because it is early in the season, Kleinecke said the competition will show areas the team needs the most work on, but it will not be used to determine the team's future success.

"Coach told us that we don't need to wear ourselves out or get too nervous," freshman Kathryn Scott said. "We can use this [tournament] to give us a good idea of how well we can work together."

Although the players have only practiced for two weeks, Kleinecke said his team should be ready to play.

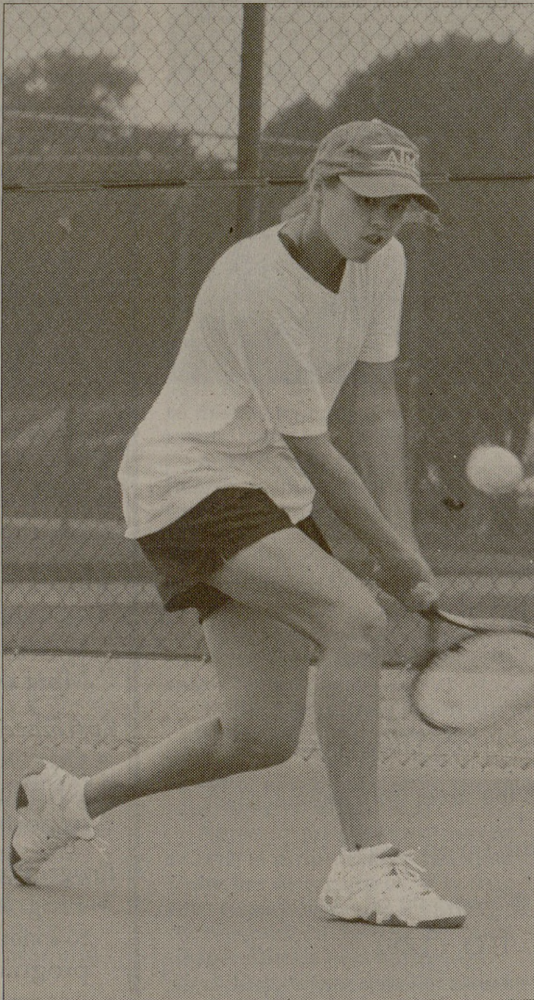
"We're pretty far along in our workouts," Kleinecke said. "But we're going to concentrate on keeping the ball in play and remaining consistent. We don't want to be too flashy."

The team wants to focus on establishing a strong foundation that it can build upon as the season progresses. As a young team, the Aggies view it important to take one competition at a time to avoid becoming overwhelmed.

"I want to focus on winning as many matches as I can this weekend, and just see how I can do at the college level," Scott said. "Mental preparation is going to be important. Everyone competing has the physical ability to play, so my psychological approach may be the determining factor."

Although there is not a lot of pressure on the team, Dingwall stresses the need to begin the season with a positive attitude and confidence.

"We need to get a good experience under our belt," Dingwall said. "If we don't establish a high level of self-confidence in the beginning, it will become a constant struggle and search."



Rony Angkriwan, THE BATTALION

Senior **Nancy Dingwall** practices her backhand at the Omar Smith Tennis Courts Wednesday.

"If we don't establish a high level of self-confidence in the beginning, it will become a constant struggle and search."

Nancy Dingwall
A&M tennis player

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