

All systems go for Kyle Field JumboTron

BY MATT MITCHELL
THE BATTALION

Fans attending last Saturday's contest between the Texas A&M Football Team and the University of North Texas discovered the off-season changes made to Kyle Field go way beyond the stadium's transition to natural grass. Spectators were treated to the newest addition to the Aggie stadium, a giant scoreboard known as JumboTron.

The Sony JumboTron system was installed after this month, as part of the old south zone scoreboard was removed and donated to the University of Houston.

The display system, which shows replays of game action, as well as live shots of the Aggie Band, the sidelines and the crowd, makes A&M one of only 10 schools with such a scoreboard.

The JumboTron screen stands 20-feet tall and 27-feet wide and is composed of a grid of individual cells. The bulk of the assembly consisted of connecting the iron supports and catwalks behind the structure. The catwalks make it easy to replace the 15 columns of 30 cell rows.

Project Coordinator Phil Hollingsworth said installing the system was not complicated.

"What really impressed me was how easy it was to take (the system) apart and put together," Hollingsworth said. "It only took four or five hours to install the entire screen."

But it took considerably longer for the production crew to prepare for the new system they faced.

"While the guys were out there painting the lines on the field, we'd use them to practice setting up our shots," cameraman Art Sobarzo said. "I'd say I put in about 20 hours of preparation work before the actual game started."

Four cameras and over 14 miles of cable are used in production during games. One

camera is a remote-controlled device, called Eaglecam, that gets wide shots of the stadium. Another is located on the photo deck and gets play-by-play action.

It stays with the ball at all times, while a third camera is on the back of a truck on the sideline and gets tight shots of players and coaches. A final camera at field level takes crowd shots.

The University of Texas installed a new JumboTron system earlier this season and was promptly greeted with problems, most notably the blaring of a commercial during the UT Band's playing of the school song.

"We heard about their problems and addressed them here," KAMU-TV Director of Operations Kyle Netterville said. "We used them as a springboard to figuring out what we needed to change."

"One of my concerns is that the people are there to listen to the bands, and they really don't want to see big commercials up on the JumboTron. There were still a few small glitches, but so far it's working out pretty well."

Netterville said he must stay aware of several technicalities.

"You realize that when a team on the field is facing toward the JumboTron, it can be real disconcerting once they get down to the goal line," Netterville said. "You don't want the kicker or the quarterback looking up and seeing his face. So we have to be cognizant of when we need to make the screen black."

"The same holds true where the band is concerned. We don't want to distract a member by doing a tight shot of him and making him fall out of step. With the band at halftime, we use one big wide shot so they won't get lost in what they're doing."

In addition to the close-circuit relays fed to the press boxes and luxury suites, monitors will soon be installed in the concession areas underneath the stands, and should be in place by early October. This will allow students standing in line for concessions to view the game as they would on any other television.

The JumboTron has been met with favorable reactions from students so far.

"The replays are the biggest advantage to having the JumboTron," senior management major John Ammons said.

"You don't always catch the plays, and it's great to be able to watch them again on the big screen."

Several students said the commercials periodically played on the screen were unobtrusive.

"They didn't bother me because I usually didn't even know they were on," sophomore bio-engineering major Susan Ramsey said.

"As long as they don't interfere with the band or the other traditions, I don't have a problem with them."

With the JumboTron taking up the majority of the space on the south end zone scoreboard, four new auxiliary scoreboards installed on the corners of the third decks display the time remaining, down, yards to go, and timeouts remaining.

Making the adjustment from one scoreboard to another was a short-lived problem, many students said.

"It took me awhile to get used to looking across to the other stands for information," sophomore mechanical engineering major Adam Walters said. "After awhile though, it was like second nature."

"There were a few small glitches, but so far it's working out pretty well."

Kyle Netterville
KAMU director of operations



The new Sony JumboTron system at Kyle Field shows replays of game action and live shots of the Aggie Band, the sidelines and the crowd.
Dave House, THE BATTALION

Power Play

Athleticism, stuffed clown keys to Sykora's domination

BY JAMIE BURCH
THE BATTALION

Fans glancing over to the Lady Aggie bench during a Texas A&M Volleyball match this season might see a little stuffed clown named Bozo. The clown is the good luck charm of sophomore outside hitter Stacy Sykora. The fiery, free-spirited sophomore from Burleson said she feels if the clown is present, the team will win.

"When we lost the two tournaments (at Colorado Aug. 30-Sept. 1 and at Wisconsin Sept. 6-7), he was in the locker room," Sykora said. "That's why we lost. If he was out there watching, we would have won." With or without the clown, Sykora made an immediate impact as a freshman last season. Usually the reserve player off the bench, Sykora played in 29 of the Aggies' 30 matches and 79 out of 109 games. She posted the top two single-match individual hitting performances in the Southwest Conference, hitting .750 against Louisiana State University and .706 against Southwest Texas State. Sykora also posted a career high 20 digs against Santa Clara.

Despite these distinctions, Sykora said she was pleased to advance to the NCAA Sweet Sixteen with the Aggies last season.

"That was great," Sykora said. "In high school, I expected a lot of my team. If I was on a team we were going to win, regardless of how big a role I played. I didn't play as big a role here last season as I did in high school, but I still wanted the chance to go."

Sykora has switched roles this season, earning a starting position in the off-season.

"I've started every match for A&M and have started in every game this year after starting just one game last season. Averaging 4.39 kills per game, she has reached double figures in kills in every match this season (including a career high 30 kills against Loyola Marymount University) and has reached 10 or more digs in seven of 11 matches, giving her a team-leading 2.97 dig average.

Her lofty numbers earned her a spot on the all-American teams at both the Inn Tower Invitational and the Post Oak Mall/Lady Aggie Invitational. A&M Head Coach Laurie Corbelli said it was her hard work during practices that earned her the starting role.

"She's been putting in a lot of time at practice to become more consistent," Corbelli said. "That was identified as her key weakness last year."

Volleyball is just one of the strengths of this talented athlete. Sykora also excelled in basketball, track and cross country throughout high school. Referred by several colleges for volleyball, basketball and track, Sykora came to Aggieland to play volleyball and compete in track.

Last season, Sykora captured the SWC championship title and was a Junior National automatic qualifier. She was also an NCAA provisional qualifier in the heptathlon in her first time to compete in the event. Her 5,212 points were the highest in the nation by an 18-year-old and second in the nation for a freshman. Sykora also placed third in the heptathlon and earned All-SWC indoor honors for her fifth-place finish in the high jump.

Even though she is a multi-sport athlete, Sykora does not prefer one sport over another.

"They're all equal," Sykora said. "They all offer different things. Volleyball is a team sport — you hit and set the ball by yourself. Track is an individual sport — it's all about how hard you work and



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Sophomore outside hitter Stacy Sykora has reached double figures in kills in every game this season.

how hard you want to play."

Corbelli said it is Sykora's energy that makes her a threat on the court.

"Athleticism and explosiveness are crucial parts of the game," Corbelli said. "She beats blocks with her speed, quickness and her jumping ability. She is by far the best athlete in the gym. When you have an athlete like that, you find a way to get her on the court."

Corbelli also said Sykora's defense has been a key to the Lady Aggies' early season success.

"Along with her passes and kills, she ranks at the top for digs per game," Corbelli said.

Sykora's athleticism and talent are not the only reasons she stands out in a crowd. Redshirt freshman setter Chandra Robertson said Sykora's personality and humor lift the team up emotionally.

"She is our inspiration," Robertson said. "She gets us pumped up when we're all having a bad day. She's always smiling and in a good mood."

Corbelli said Sykora's teammates like her free-spirited demeanor.

"They love her to pieces," Corbelli said. "She adds personality to the team. She is able to relax on the court, and it helps other players see that if you can be relaxed and play, that you can be more successful. She also gives us a lot of laughs in what would otherwise be tense situations."

Along with a little stuffed clown, Sykora and the Lady Aggies begin their assault on the Big 12 against the University of Texas Wednesday night at G. Rollie White Coliseum. Sykora said she has high expectations of the team.

"We want to go to the Final Four or the Sweet Sixteen," Sykora said. "I want a Big 12 Conference ring. I've wanted a ring for so long. I wanted a state championship ring in high school and didn't get it. So, I'm going to get my ring."

► Junior forward
Bryn Blalack leads the nation in scoring with 13 goals and five assists.

BY NICKI SMITH
THE BATTALION

The sixth-ranked Texas A&M Soccer Team can attribute its program-record 8-0 start this season to several contributors.

But the most visible player in A&M's ascension in the polls can be found at the top of the NCAA individual statistics leaders' list — A&M junior forward Bryn Blalack.

A tremendous force on the Aggie offensive line, Blalack leads the nation in scoring with 13 goals and five assists.

Prior to her sophomore year in 1995, A&M Head Coach G. Guerrieri described Blalack as one of the best players in America.

"She is one of the most technically gifted athletes you can find," Guerrieri said. "The team respects her, and we all respect a lot of what she does."

It is not hard to see why Blalack has earned so much respect.

Last season, she was the only A&M player to start all 24 of the team's matches, finishing fifth in the nation with 23 goals, including seven game-winning goals. The only two-time SWC Player of the Week in 1995, the junior was also named team offensive MVP and was selected to the NSCAA/Umbro All-Central Region first team along with teammate Kristen Koop.

Coming off her third knee surgery as a freshman, Blalack was the Aggies' leading scorer and a member of the 1995 Women's Select State Team and Region III Select Team Pool.

Despite her individual accomplishments, Blalack said she concentrates solely on the team's success.

"I never really have an individual focus," Blalack said. "All I try to do is play hard in every game and concentrate on giving 100 percent all of the time. If we are playing good, then that is excellent; but if we are playing together as a team, then that is even better."

The A&M team has risen to be

a national powerhouse this season and Guerrieri attributes much of the team's publicity to a lot of what Blalack does on the field for the Aggies.

"She was our first major recruit to our soccer program here at A&M," Guerrieri said. "Her presence gave an air of legitimacy to our program, and to our recruiting trails. She has earned so much respect for herself and the team because she pays it back 100 percent on the field."

Senior forward Yvette Okler, a teammate and friend of Blalack, said she has enjoyed playing alongside Blalack, and is glad to have her there in pressure situations.

"She is just incredibly awesome," Okler said. "She has great footwork and shots, and we know that when we give her the ball, it is usually going to end up being a goal. She is also an extremely positive person that you can talk to about anything."

With so many accomplishments under her belt, one might think Blalack would feel the

pressure of being a role model and leader.

"I don't really feel any pressure because, in my opinion, nothing is individual," Blalack said. "I try to make things happen and to work hard for my teammates. If we play hard for each other, then our team will play better."

With an endless list of high school and college soccer honors to her credit, Blalack contends that her most memorable experience on the soccer field was winning a club soccer title in under-19 competition in 1992.

Blalack describes herself with one word — "Determined."

"When I am out on the field, I am driven to try to achieve success whether it is completing a pass or scoring," Blalack said.

Guerrieri said Blalack has already made a lasting impression on the Lady Aggie soccer program.

"We recruit players to give them an opportunity to play alongside her," Guerrieri said. "Even after she is done with her education, a legacy will be left in her ability to score."



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Junior forward Bryn Blalack considers herself determined and always puts the team in front of her personal accomplishments.