

A&M volleyball to face old foe in Big 12 opener

No. 20 Lady Ags face No. 5 Texas at home tonight

By ROSS HECOX
THE BATTALION

It's going to be big. The 20th-ranked Texas A&M Volleyball Team breaks into Big 12 Conference tonight against its biggest rival as the University of Texas rolls into G. Rollie White Coliseum at 7. The Longhorns bring a 6-2 record and a No. 5 ranking into the contest, and the Lady Aggies said they are expecting Texas to be as strong as usual. "UT is a really big team, probably the best blocking team we'll see (this season)," A&M junior outside hitter Stacie Smedsrud said. "They don't make many errors. But we're going into the match ready to win." Picked to win the conference this year by a league coaches' pre-season poll, UT has dominated A&M volleyball in recent years. Since 1976, the Longhorns own a 43-11 record over the Lady Aggies. A&M has not beaten Texas since the Southwest Conference Tournament semifinals in 1994. Last year, the Lady Aggies surrendered all three matches to UT, but nearly won the first match in five games. A&M Head Coach Laurie Corbelli said solid serving and blocking will be the keys to the match. "We have to serve-receive well so our offense can be deceptive against their

block," Corbelli said. "[UT's] serve-receiving has some weaknesses. We're going to serve them tough, and we also have to get our blocking going."

A&M owns a 9-2 record this season and a five-match winning streak after its 15-0, 15-6, 15-12 victory over the University of Texas at Arlington last week.

Through 11 matches, the Lady Aggies have improved as a team through experience against strong competition. In the season-opening University Park Holiday Inn Classic, A&M defeated 20th-ranked Loyola Marymount, and at the Inntower Classic, the Aggies lost to Wisconsin by only two points in the fifth and deciding game. The Badgers are now ranked 11th.

Junior setter Farah Mensik said A&M's tough schedule has helped the team and now it is playing well as a result.

"We've had strong competition (this season) and it has prepared us for the opening of the Big 12," Mensik said. "Our past few matches, we came out real confident and intense."

Corbelli said A&M has earned its top

20 ranking.

"We lost two matches and knew how close we were to winning them," Corbelli said. "I felt we achieved a top 20 level of play against Wisconsin, Illinois State and UTA, and on a given night anyone in the top 20 can beat anyone else (in the top 20)."

UT's strength lies in three players — senior middle blocker Sonya Barnes (34 total blocks, 70 kills), freshman outside hitter/middle blocker Sarah Butler (90 kills, 74 digs), and sophomore outside hitter Demetria Sance (144 kills, .325 hitting average, 100 digs). Texas as a team is hitting .251 and averages 4.7 blocks per game.

Mensik said playing Texas can only make the Lady Aggies play harder.

"I don't think [playing UT] will change our confidence," Mensik said. "It will raise our intensity. Beating t.u. is a big thing for A&M."

Smedsrud said A&M will have a clear-cut home court advantage over the Longhorns.

"Obviously, just being at home helps us," Smedsrud said. "We want people to come out and be loud. That really pumps us up, and we're going to play our hearts out."

It's going to be big.



Sophomore outside hitter Stacy Sykora digs a ball against Illinois State at the Post Oak Mall/Lady Aggie Invitational on Sept. 13.

"(Playing Texas) will raise our intensity. Beating t.u. is a big thing for A&M."

Farah Mensik
Junior setter

Profile

A&M netter Julie Beahm's career had early roots

By JAMIE BURCH
THE BATTALION

Harvey Beahm was a professional tennis player in Dublin, Ohio, when his daughter Julie was born. Julie Beahm, now a senior on the Texas A&M Women's Tennis Team, followed in her father's foot steps, learning the fundamentals of the game at the age of three.

Beahm's dad instructed her until the age of six while operating his own tennis club. But after several years of father-daughter disputes, the tandem split up.

"He started me out," Beahm said. "Later on, we got in so many fights and I'd leave the court crying. I ended up getting my own coaches."

Beahm began her victorious career by winning her first USTA tournament at the age of seven. Two years later, she captured her first national championship at the 1984 McDonald's Invitational in Lexington, Ky.

Beahm played professional tennis player Mary Pierce in the 14-and-under age bracket growing up in the junior ranks.

"I played her twice," Beahm said. "I played her once at the Fiesta Bowl, losing 7-5, 6-2, and again at the National Clay Court Championships in Planta-

tion, Fla. She won both of them, but I think I held my own."

After her first college recruiting trip in high school, Beahm said she knew where she wanted to go to college.

"I went on four recruiting trips," Beahm said. "Texas A&M was my first one. I just fell in love with the school. I took the other three trips, but after the first one, I knew this is where I wanted to go."

Since Beahm decided to make Aggieland her home, she has continued to dominate the game of tennis. As a freshman, Beahm teamed up with former A&M standout Lonna Logan to win the Southwest Conference No. 3 Doubles Championship with a 6-1 conference mark.

The next season, Beahm led the team in singles victories (21-11), while capturing the SWC No. 6 singles crown with a 5-2 record in conference play. She also won the No. 3 doubles title once again, this time with junior Monica Rebolledo.

Beahm said she enjoys playing doubles play more than singles, even though she spent the majority of her

youth playing solo.

"When I was in juniors, I really didn't play much doubles," Beahm said. "So I really enjoy playing doubles now. It's fun having a partner. You can talk to them and joke around when there's a lot of pressure."

As a junior last season, Beahm made history in capturing the No. 6 singles crown for the second straight season and the No. 3 doubles title for the third straight season. Her fourth and fifth career titles made her the only five-time SWC individual champion in A&M history — male or female — and only the second in SWC history.

She finished her junior campaign ranked second on the team with a 29-7 overall singles record, and third for doubles wins at 22-7.

After three successful years, Beahm has a tougher road ahead of her this season. The senior is recovering from back surgery in July.

"This summer, I hurt my back in a tournament," Beahm said. "So I haven't been playing a whole lot. I just started playing within the last

week or so."

Beahm played in her first tournament since the injury last weekend, when the Lady Aggies hosted the Texas A&M Five-Way Invitational. Beahm posted a 2-2 record in singles play and 2-1 mark in doubles.

Beahm said she was concerned about her back before the tournament.

"Going into it, I was a little nervous," Beahm said. "My game is a little off since I haven't been playing that much. But considering the problems I've been having with my back, I thought I did pretty well."

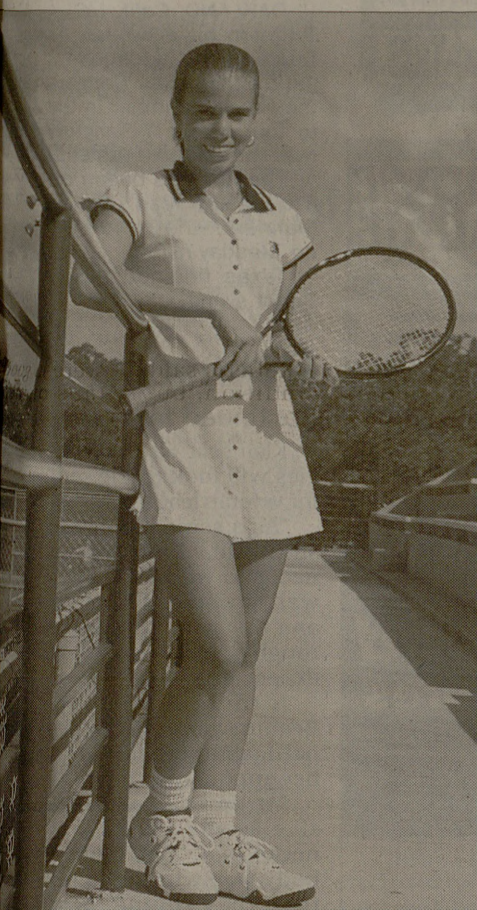
A&M Head Coach Bobby Kleinecke said the team is cautious concerning Beahm's health.

"There is a concern because you don't want it to get worse," Kleinecke said. "I haven't seen it hamper her any. I'm sure it is, and I'm sure she's in some pain where she can't go all out."

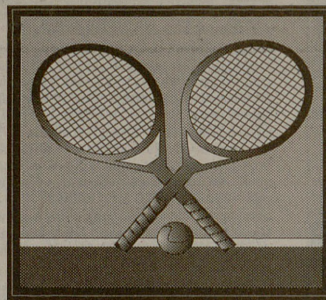
Kleinecke said that regardless of the circumstances, Beahm will usually find a way to win.

"She'll compete through anything," Kleinecke said. "It's strictly her competitive nature. She'll find a way to win the match. Sometimes you're wondering how she did it, but she finds a way."

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Ryan Rogers, THE BATTALION
Beahm



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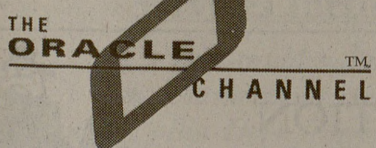
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