

Aggies try to make most out of negative situation

By MATT MITCHELL
THE BATTALION

With November almost here, Aggies' thoughts turn to the marks of fall. Turning leaves, weather and the upcoming Thanksgiving holidays spring to mind. And of course, the Aggies wrap up another outstanding season and gleefully pick which game to attend come New Year's Day.

Whoops, not so fast. Following the Texas A&M Foot-



Dave House, THE BATTALION
Quarterback Brannndon Stewart is sacked by Tech defenders.

ball Team's disheartening 13-10 loss to Texas Tech on Saturday, the struggle to salvage a season gone wrong with a bowl berth is becoming more and more desperate. The players and coaches must refocus on attainable goals as the season enters its home stretch.

"It's going to be kind of a test for the team to see if we can stick together and pull through these last four games," junior quarterback Brannndon Stewart said. "I think it's important for the young guys to finish up strong this year and have something to look forward to in the years to come and learn from this season and learn that you can come back from hard times and misfortune."

A&M Head Coach R.C. Slocum said the carry-over effect of the next four games is important, and finishing the year in a positive manner could have a profound effect on next season.

"It would obviously be an asset for us to finish strong," Slocum said. "You'd like to show some signs that you have been

through a low spot and you're gaining experience and starting to come out of it. That's something that would be very positive. It would be positive in recruiting, positive in the kids' minds and it certainly is a goal."

Despite the team's hard luck, Stewart said the players have maintained a good attitude.

"If we finish up on a good note this year, I think it will help us go into the spring with a little more momentum," Stewart said. "But then again, I think that regardless of how the season goes, I think the guys will still bounce back. I think their attitudes have been good."

As the Aggies hit the practice field Monday, more than one player spoke with optimism concerning the team's frame of mind.

"I think we've had good practices," senior outside linebacker Keith Mitchell said. "We came out yesterday and went full pads, and I didn't know how that was going to go."

"But I got out there and I saw everyone still having fun and

showing a lot of effort and enthusiasm and things like that. I think we're still positive and we're going to keep it positive and like Coach Slocum said, take one game at a time and work toward that and to get some wins."

Stewart said the team realizes that all is not lost.

"I thought watching practice that the guys came out and they worked hard and they realized that the season's not over," Stewart said. "We have an opportunity to do well at the end of the season, and I think the guys are going to take advantage of that."

What makes losing all the more difficult for the Aggies is the way in which they have lost. In virtually every setback, the Aggies have hurt themselves with costly mistakes and penalties. Still, they have found that if they executed key plays, they may have had a chance to win more games, which makes defeat that much harder to swallow.

"It hurts you a little more because you realize that you could have won that game," Stewart said. "But then again, I think that it makes you feel not really confident, but you know the ability is

1996 Big 12 Conference Football Standings

	Conference				Overall					
	W	L	Pct.	PF	PA	W	L	Pct.	PF	PA
South Division										
Texas Tech	4	2	.667	143	99	5	3	.625	213	134
Texas	2	2	.500	162	82	3	4	.429	240	153
Oklahoma	2	2	.500	117	145	2	5	.286	186	247
Baylor	1	3	.250	101	143	4	3	.571	177	182
Texas A&M	1	3	.250	64	81	3	5	.375	241	164
Oklahoma St.	1	4	.200	86	199	4	4	.500	169	245
North Division										
Colorado	4	0	1.000	107	54	6	1	.857	205	127
Nebraska	4	0	1.000	175	20	6	1	.857	295	62
Kansas State	4	1	.800	124	118	7	1	.875	252	128
Kansas	1	3	.250	83	137	3	4	.429	212	209
Missouri	1	3	.250	86	148	3	4	.429	167	216
Iowa State	1	3	.250	114	132	2	5	.286	207	254

there to win and you're not just getting blown out by every team. But I think that losing by a small margin is definitely worse."

Slocum said there is both a positive and negative aspect to their recent losses.

"It makes it frustrating because you're so close, but you're so far in terms of the (overall) record," Slocum said. "Given the choice, I'd rather have it be like it is rather than us getting drilled every game and saying, 'Man, we have got a long

way to go. We don't have that far to go. We just have to get there."

Most coaches and players still say that where they need to be is not far away.

"You look at what you did wrong in the game," Stewart said. "You see areas where you can improve and areas you can take advantage of that you didn't in the game, and try to do that the next game and hopefully overcome that small margin that you had the game before."

Erath, Ondras lead Aggies into Big 12 Championships

Erath improves consistency, fitness through summer workouts

By DENNIS RAMIREZ
THE BATTALION

In order to run 60 miles a week and maintain a 4.0 grade-point ratio, one Texas A&M student's formula is "study, run, eat, sleep ..."

Stephen Erath, a member of the Texas A&M Cross Country and a sophomore psychology and pre-med major, is out to not only get the job done, but also improve himself.

"Improvement is a big motivator and my love for running," Erath said. "I really enjoy having the opportunity to challenge myself every week in a race, and trying to run faster in the week before. It's one of those things where you get the rewards when you run well and all the hard work is worth it."

Erath became addicted to running when he entered a road race in middle school. This propelled him into high school.

Erath competed for four years at the Brother Martin High School cross country team in New Orleans. While there, Erath led his team to a Louisiana state championship junior year, and finished second and third his junior and senior years, respectively.

He was also on the state cross country team for two consecutive years.

Despite his accomplishments in high school, Erath still faced

the problem of adjusting to college level running.

"It was a big step up," Erath said. "I knew it was coming, but it really didn't hit hard till that first meet. I did all right as a freshman, but I didn't do as well as I expected, it was more of an adjusting year."

With a top finish of 22nd last year, Erath committed himself to improvement. He worked hard all summer, as evidenced by a fourth-place finish at the Rice Invitational Sept. 21. Erath said he is anxiously awaiting the Big 12 Conference Championships this weekend.

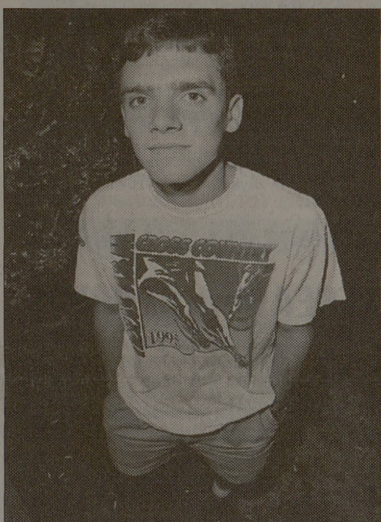
"I've had a much better season than last year due to the fact that I'm in better shape because of all the hard work in the summer," Erath said. "With the two big meets left, I hope I run my best at those meets. As a team, we are excited about competing because we have a chance to run against some premier teams and individuals."

A&M Head Coach Greg Hinze said Erath has done a great job and looks forward to bigger and better things from him in the future.

"He has made great strides this year, he worked hard all summer and has been very consistent this year," Hinze said. "This year, because we have a young team, he's been able to come in and get experience. He leads by example and people notice his work ethic."

"Improvement is a big motivator behind my love for running."

Stephen Erath
cross country runner



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION
Stephen Erath finished fourth at the Rice Invitational Sept. 21.

Consistency coupled with dedication has been what has helped Erath with his running and academics.

"Academics has always been my first priority, I studied hard in high school and I'm still studying hard now," Erath said. "A lot of people think that if you excel in athletics you can't get good grades, but it can be done."

For now, Erath is going to concentrate on the conference championships this weekend and the following regionals. But his long term goals include an NCAA cross country championship.

"My greatest goal is for the team to make it to the NCAA National Championship," Erath said. "This is a team as well as individual goal because it's going to take each individual to get there, and we have an opportunity to get there soon."

"A lot of these schools we've never seen before," Erath said. "Next year, we'll be able to compete even better against them. But for now, I think we're focusing on beating the SWC teams we've faced in the past."

Of all the Big 12 teams, five are ranked in the top 25, emphasizing the challenge facing the Aggies. The men's team, however, is coming off a first-place finish at the UTA 5-Way Meet two weeks ago, while the women had a strong third-place finish, providing both teams with momentum going into the competition.

But since freshman Caroline Kohler will not compete because of an injury, Hinze said the women's team may have a greater challenge than the men's.

Since the team is young and inexperienced and will face new competition, freshman Debbie Villarreal, who placed 13th in the two-mile race at the UTA Meet, said she is focusing on a strong performance to see how she stacks up individually in the Big 12.

"I think this meet will motivate me for next year," Villarreal said. "It will make us a stronger team, and hopefully we'll get ranked higher."

However, the main focus will not be where individuals finish, Erath said, but how the team does overall.

"We all want to just go out and run the best we can and help the team to place well," Erath said.

Villarreal said even if the Aggies do not come out with the first-place title, they will have faced their new rivals for the first time and will have gained experience.

"This meet is very important," Villarreal said. "But if anything, it will help us to do better next time."

Boredom makes Ondras hit the pavement

By SARA DUESING
THE BATTALION

The morning sky is still dark and all seems quiet. But if you listen closely, you can hear it. It is the sound of feet on pavement — of rubber soles hitting concrete. One step after another, a steady rhythm is produced.

At a time when most people are still in deep slumber, Milli Ondras is up and running — literally.

A junior on the Texas A&M Women's Cross Country Team, Ondras has committed herself to running. Motivated by her boyfriend (senior James Menze of the men's squad), Ondras said she depends on him to get her going, even on the worst days.

"He's such a good coach," Ondras said. "He inspires me and keeps me going."

It was a lazy afternoon during her sophomore year in high school when utter boredom drove Ondras to do something that would change her life forever — she got up and ran.

"I was really bored that day," Ondras said. "It [running] was something to do."

Since then, running has become much more to Ondras than just doing something to pass the time. Now, running every day, Ondras said she enjoys everything it has to offer.

"I have made lots of friends [competing]," Ondras said. "But mostly, I like the pain."

And painful it is. With workouts Ondras describes as "killer," running competitively requires dedication, determination and talent.

"Milli is the most dedicated person I know," Menze said. "She's just obsessed with running and would do it even if there wasn't a team to run for."

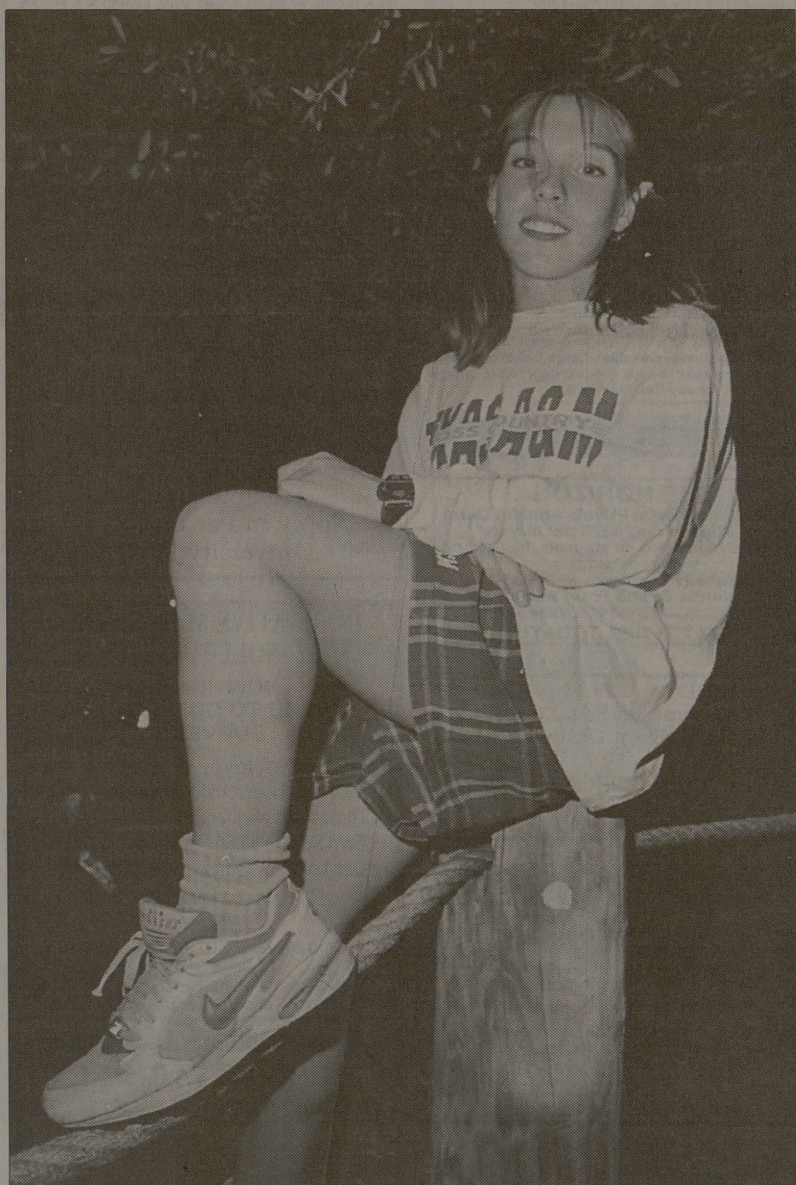
A&M Head Coach Greg Hinze said Ondras is extremely disciplined, and she is perhaps the most consistent runner on the team.

"I never have to worry about her," Hinze said. "I know that in each race she knows what she has to do."

Constantly striving to improve, Ondras has worked her way up from a mediocre high school record in San Antonio to a strong collegiate career. In the UTA 5-Way Meet two weeks ago, Ondras finished in 10th place with an impressive time of 11:44 in the two-mile race. She considers last year's SWC Championships Meet, where she placed 27th, a big breakthrough for her.

"I'd been getting discouraged because no matter how hard I tried, everyone else was better," Ondras said. "But I realized then my work was paying off and I was really getting somewhere."

With an outgoing personality, Ondras has made quite an impact on her teammates.



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION
Junior Milli Ondras finished 10th at the UTA 5-Way Meet two weeks ago.

Hinze said Ondras keeps her teammates loose.

"I would say Milli is very gregarious," Hinze said. "She has a loud personality and is always making someone laugh. It's a great stress reliever."

However, Ondras can be serious as well. Realizing the importance of concentration and a positive attitude, Ondras said she tries to imagine each race before competing, although she is careful not to get too tense.

"It's not good to be too nervous or you won't do as well," Ondras said. "But it's not going to be the end of the world if you don't finish at the top."

Ondras may not have much mental anxiety, but she does have superstitions.

"Everything has to be just right, just the same," Ondras said. "The same socks, the same ponytail holder, everything."

As an upperclassman on a young team, Ondras is looked up to by the younger runners, Menze said.

"She has got a real positive attitude," Menze said. "It not only helps her, but rubs off on the whole team. They can see her and follow her example."

Training every morning and always being prepared help Ondras' contribution to the team's success.

"She approaches every workout and every competition with such consistency," Hinze said. "She really knows where she belongs and what her limits are. I think that is key for any athlete to know their strengths."

Hooked on the effects of running, Ondras said that she plans to run her whole life and to compete as often as possible.

"I want to be a good road racer and do marathons," Ondras said. "Plus, the older you get, the less competition there will be. By the time I'm 60, I should win them all."

Possessing a true love for and dedication to running, Ondras never gives anything less than everything she has — just listen for the early-morning footsteps.