

Defenders link A&M soccer roots to siblings

Edwards inspired to take up soccer after watching older sister
Elias hooked on Texas A&M after making visit to see Aggie sister

BY SARA DUESING
THE BATTALION

For many children growing up, trying to duplicate the success of an older brother or sister is a common goal. It was no different for Sandy Edwards, a defender on the Texas A&M Soccer Team.

While her natural athletic talent and relentless competitive nature motivated her forward, it was Edwards' older sister, Jennifer, who inspired her to compete in soccer.

"I had to do everything she did," Edwards said. "So I started to play competitively in the sixth grade."

Although she took up the sport later than most players that the sixth-ranked Aggies face in contention, Edwards makes up for her lack of playing experience with talent and dedication.

"Sandy's work ethic is second to none," Head Coach G. Guerrieri said. "Her main strength is her willingness to give 100 percent all of the time."

Standing 5 feet, 3 inches tall, Edwards is known for her speed, aggressiveness and persistence on the field. A&M senior forward Kristen Koop said Edwards' resoluteness is an inspiration to the whole team.

Edwards' biggest drawback? There is only one of her.

"Sandy is definitely the most hard-working player on the field," Koop said. "She is a great encouragement and is never down."

In her second year as team captain, Edwards said that she focuses on being a strong leader — especially to the freshmen.

"With eight seniors on the team, it is important to establish what we do now so that they can follow later," Edwards said. "I talk to the girls a lot and try to be a positive influence to my teammates."

When Edwards does find herself getting frustrated or down on herself — a characteristic she is trying to improve — there is one person she turns to for consolation.

"My mom really inspires me," Edwards said. "She knows just what to say to keep me going."

Edwards' impact on the team goes beyond the playing field and into everyday situations. The two-time recipient of the GTE Academic Achievement Award has been praised by teammates for being caring, supportive and for living up to her duties as team captain.

"As captain, Sandy is a great leader," Koop said. "If anyone needs to talk, she will always address the problem. She is someone to depend on both on and off the field."

Along with a few superstitions,

such as wearing the same socks and the same ponytail holder for each competition, Edwards does everything she can to reach her personal goal for the season.

"I want to make it to the (NCAA) Final Four, just like the rest of the team does," Edwards said. "We just have to play the best we can and not give less than what we have."

Edwards displayed her best last weekend at the Big 12 Conference Championships, where she was one of five Aggies named to the All-Tournament team.

BY JAMIE BURCH
THE BATTALION

Like many Texas A&M students on their first visit to Aggieland, Emily Elias liked what she saw. A sophomore defender on the A&M Soccer Team, Elias said a single trip to College Station to visit her sister was all it took for her to fall in love with the school.

When it was time to decide where to attend college, Elias said coming to A&M and having the opportunity to play

up after her trip to A&M.

"I already knew I wanted to come to A&M," Elias said. "So I didn't take any other official visits. I visited A&M and made up my mind before I looked at any other schools."

Elias exploded onto the scene last season as a freshman, securing a starting role at the sweeper position when teammate Tina Robinson was sidelined with an injury just five matches into the season.

Starting 18 contests, Elias was named A&M's Most Improved Player at the end of the year.

Guerrieri said he was not surprised by Elias' rapid improvement. "We recruited her to come in and be the leader of our defense as a freshman," Guerrieri said. "In the beginning stages of the season, she was not quite ready."

"But when she stepped into the sweeper role and Tina Robinson came back from injury, that was the difference in our success last year."

Elias has anchored the defense of the sixth-ranked Aggies this season, starting all 22 games and recording three assists. She has also helped the Aggies to a school-record 11 shutouts.

Guerrieri said Elias is still improving.

"I have the utmost confidence in her," Guerrieri said. "She was the premiere defender coming out of Texas last year. She proved that in her freshman year. I hope she's in our lineup for the long term. I feel that she has only scratched the surface of her potential."

Elias said it was difficult to come in and be expected to play as a freshman.

"It was nerve-racking," Elias said. "It was tough coming in, especially with the caliber of athletes on the team. It was hard to win a position, but it was for the best. It has made me a better player."

Elias said the Aggies' success this season has made the sport even more enjoyable.

"It's been great," Elias said. "It's been the best year since I've been on the squad. I'm proud to play with this team."

Elias' positive, upbeat nature has garnished her recognition from her teammates. Senior defender Tina Robinson said Elias supplies the team with a positive outlook.

"Emily is one of those people who never says a mean word," Robinson said. "She always has a smile on her face and she is always happy and optimistic. You can always look to her for a smile."

Elias uses that same positive attitude to keep from burning out.

"It's a game," Elias said. "That's the one thing I always tell myself. I go out there to have fun and to play with the team. I simply love soccer."



Photo Illustration by Stew Milne

"Sandy has a great ability to take people on," Guerrieri said. "She is one of our most complete players."

"She doesn't really have any weaknesses, except that she is a senior and this is her last year to play for us."

Although the opportunities for women to compete in soccer dwindle beyond the collegiate level, Edwards said she could never stop playing.

"I will always play for fun [after college]," Edwards said. "I could never give it up."

Sandy Edwards (left), a senior industrial distribution major from Plano, and **Emily Elias**, a sophomore architecture major also from Plano, anchor an A&M defense that has recorded a school-record 11 shutouts this season. Both players earned the GTE Academic Achievement Award for 1995-96.

Ags earn NCAA home matches

BY NICKI SMITH
THE BATTALION

At approximately 5 p.m. Central Standard Time Monday evening, collegiate women's soccer teams across the country gathered around television sets to learn their post-season fates from the College Soccer Weekly 1996 Women's Selection Show.

Thirty-two teams were awarded bids to the NCAA Division I Women's Soccer Championship, with the seventh-ranked Texas A&M Soccer Team being named a first-round host team. The seventh-seeded Aggies (20-3) will play host to unranked University of San Diego Sunday at 1 p.m. at the Aggie Soccer Complex.

Head Coach G. Guerrieri said regardless of who the Aggies played, he was excited that the team was nominated to be in the tournament.

"I was worried that our loss to Nebraska would take away from our seeding in this tournament," Guerrieri said. "Having the opportunity to play for the national championships was definitely what we hoped for."

San Diego owns an overall record of 13-5-1, including a victory over sixth-ranked Santa Clara University during the regular season.

Guerrieri said the Aggies' home-field advantage could play a deciding factor in their first-round match.

"We wanted to earn a high seeding so that our first-round game would be at home," Guerrieri said. "Playing at home with our fans and a big crowd, we are more likely to have our best performance, which will hopefully put us in the top 16."

A&M and San Diego were placed in the fourth bracket, along with George Washington, Northwestern, Indiana, No. 9 Maryland, No. 10 Wisconsin and top-seeded, defending national champion Notre Dame.

Despite being grouped with Notre Dame, Guerrieri said the Aggies are not concerned.

"Over the years, we have learned not to expect a lot out of these things," Guerrieri said. "With being in the same bracket as Notre Dame, we just have to look at it as a challenge to look forward to. Somewhere along the line, someone has to beat the former national champions."

Senior forward Kristen Koop said the Aggies will take the tournament one game at a time.

"We were expected to be seeded in the top eight, which is a good situation for us to do well in," Koop said. "Now we just have to start over and go out and play our hardest, because the rest of the season is behind us."

If the Aggies win their first-round game against San Diego, they will play another home game Nov. 22 against the winner of the George Washington-Maryland match.

First-round play commences this weekend, with the second round slated for Nov. 22-24 and the quarterfinals scheduled for Nov. 29-30. Semifinal action will take place in Santa Clara, Calif., on Friday, Dec. 6, with the final slated for Sunday, Dec. 8.

"Playing at home with our fans and a big crowd, we are more likely to have our best performance."

G. Guerrieri
Soccer Head Coach

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