

Corbelli, Lady Ags continue A&M's newest tradition

By ROSS HECOX
THE BATTALION

Traditions run rampant at Texas A&M. Take the A&M Volleyball Team for instance. The Lady Aggies finished the 1996 season playing in the NCAA Tournament again, continuing a four-year ritual that began when Laurie Corbelli was named Head Coach in 1993. A&M finished with a 25-8 record and a 15-5 conference showing, finishing in third place in the Big 12 Conference's inaugural season. The Lady Aggies' season ended after a hard-fought 19-17, 15-13, 15-12 loss to seventh-ranked Michigan State University in the second round

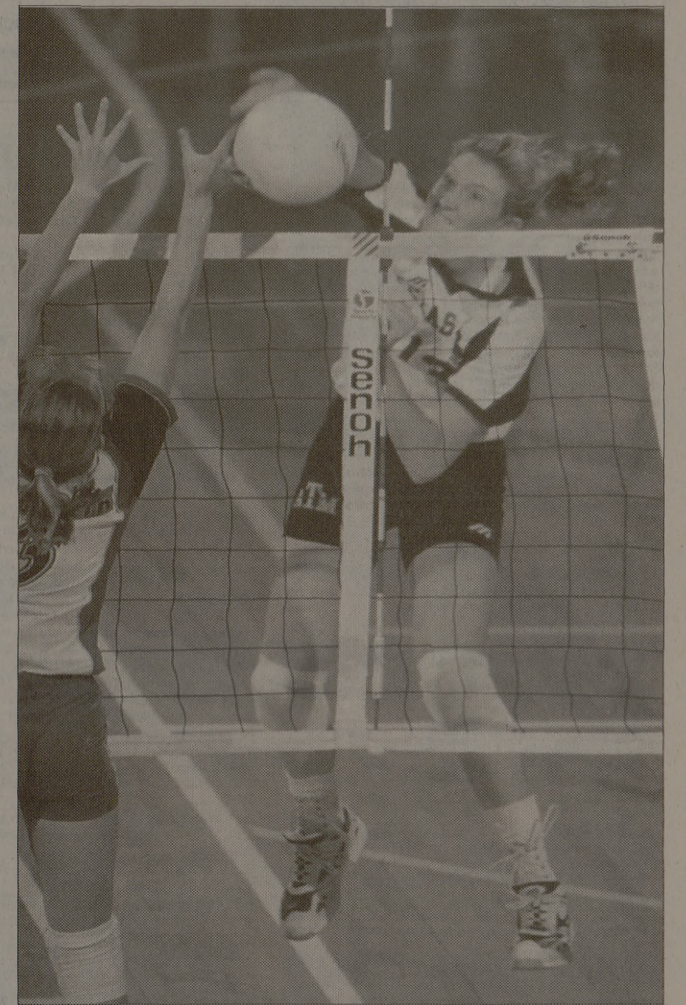
of the tournament. A&M was unable to copy last year's Sweet 16 appearance, but the Lady Aggies feel confident in their ability after playing well against the Trojans, who were a Top 5 team most of the season. "It was a great team effort," sophomore outside hitter Stacy Sykora said. "We played great defense. [Michigan State] would block our shots straight down, but then out of nowhere one of my teammates would somehow hit it back up. It was our best match this season." In the first-round of the tournament, the Lady Aggies defeated the University of Arkansas at Little

Rock 15-3, 15-8, 15-4 in G. Rollie White Coliseum. Throughout the season, G. Rollie White proved to be a safe haven for the team. A&M held a 14-1 home record, losing only to No. 5 Nebraska Nov. 30. Average home attendance increased by 51 percent this year. Junior outside hitter Kristie Smedsrud said the fans helped the team win. "[Opponents] knew they had a lot to deal with when they came here," Smedsrud said. "Our home court advantage was incredible. I think it will be even bigger next year, and I would like to thank everyone who came out and supported us this year." In G. Rollie White Sept. 25, the Lady Aggies upset the University of Texas — ranked fifth at the time — 16-14, 15-2, 15-12. A&M had not defeated the Longhorns in three games since 1977. "We came out strong and played strong the whole match," junior outside hitter Jennifer Wells said. "[The win] boosted our confidence and showed that we were a great team." The win over Texas was part of a 10-match winning streak that ended in Lincoln, Neb., at the hands of the

sixth-ranked and defending national champion Cornhuskers. The Lady Aggies posted a 9-1 record in the first half of conference play. Of their final 10 conference matches, the Lady Aggies had to play seven on the road. The team went 4-3 in those matches, losing its first-place tie with Nebraska. But junior middle blocker Cindy VanderWoude said A&M's third-place finish was enough to impress teams in the Big 12. "They know we are a good team," VanderWoude said. "We earned their respect, and no one is going to look past us (next year)." The season opened with the Lady Aggies lacking the all-time Southwest Conference career assists leader — Suzy Wentz. Whether junior setter Farah Mensik could replace the A&M legend was questionable. Mensik said her teammates and coaches did a good job of putting little pressure on her during the year. "The girls were awesome and supported me," Mensik said. "And the coaches never brought up Suzy's name. So there wasn't a ghost I had to fight."

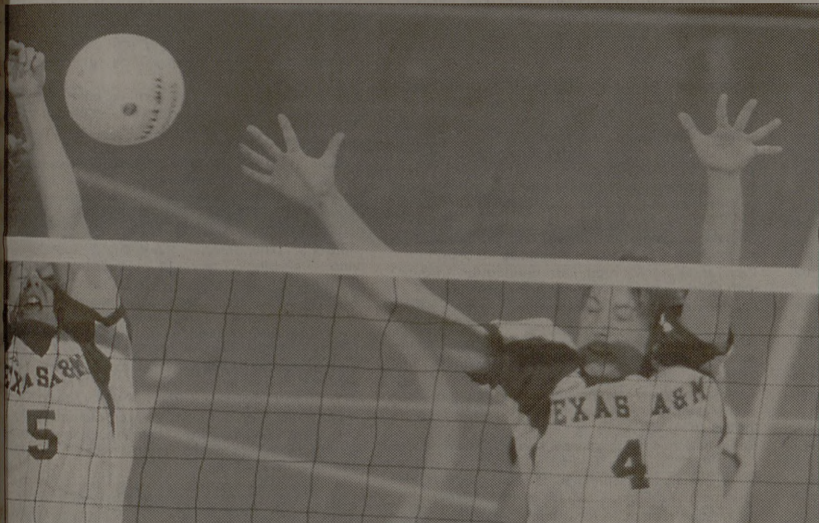
"It is hard for me to rank on a scale from one to 10 where my pride is for a team. Against Michigan State, with some of the plays they made, I came close to tears."

Laurie Corbelli
A&M head coach



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Junior outside hitter **Kristie Smedsrud** spikes a ball past a Iowa State blocker Oct. 12 at G. Rollie White Coliseum.



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Junior **Farah Mensik** (#5) and senior **Page White** (#4) go up for the block against Iowa State Oct. 12.

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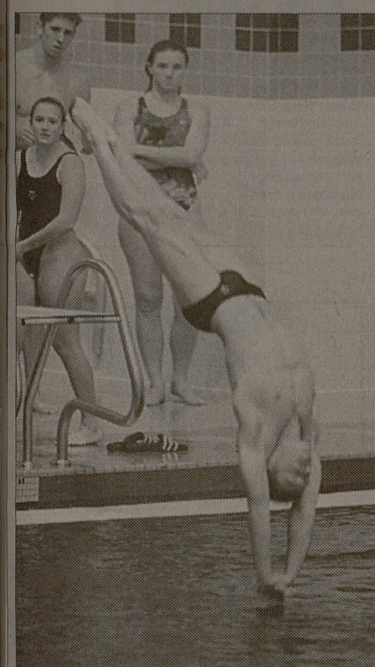
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Naftanel takes home first at Texas Invitational

STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

AUSTIN — Texas A&M sophomore diver Mark Naftanel blew away the competition and came away with the 10-meter platform title at the Texas Invitational Monday. Naftanel, who finished with 508.10 points, is the first Aggie diver ever to win the title. A&M Diving Coach Kevin Wright said that this was Naftanel's best performance. "On his first four dives, he posted 9.5 and 10 scores," Wright said. "That was the first time he's ever recorded a 10 in competition. He also tried two new dives, a back one and a half with three and a half twists. It was a very difficult dive and he scored 7.5s." "He showed great composure with the new dives, and his

technical execution was excellent. Mark beat all of his Big 12 and Zone D competitors; it was a very impressive showing on the tower." Naftanel was only 15 points back from first in the one-meter and placed fourth. The only three divers to place above him were from Nebraska, LSU and SMU. On the women's side, junior Jodi Janssen finished fourth in the one-meter and fifth in the three-meter. "This was the strongest performance she's had here at Texas A&M," Wright said. "She showed a lot of composure against some of the top divers around." The diving team will compete next at the Rainbow Invitational in Hawaii Jan. 2-3.



Ryan Rogers, THE BATTALION

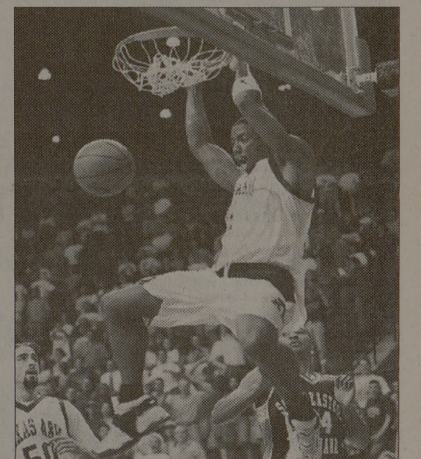
Sophomore **Mark Naftanel** practices at the Natatorium.

Runnin' Aggies host Georgia Southern

By MATT MITCHELL
THE BATTALION

After redeeming themselves for a lackluster performance against North Texas last Thursday with a resounding defeat of Southeastern Louisiana Saturday, the Texas A&M Men's Basketball Team hopes to continue its high-scoring ways against Georgia Southern University tonight at 7 at G. Rollie White Coliseum. The Aggies racked up 86 points against SLU, including 34 on the fast break, something A&M has been able to use to its advantage so far this season. "Coach (Tony Barone) has given us more freedom this year to pass the ball up the court," sophomore forward Shanne Jones said. "It's been a focus." Despite the Aggies' recent offensive explosion, Barone said there are still flaws in the A&M attack, though he adds that is not entirely unexpected. "Our offensive movement in the front court has not been as active as I wanted it to be," Barone said.

"We're holding onto the ball a little too much at times, and I'm not surprised at that. I think at this time of the year it's pretty normal that you're not functioning offensively as well as you should be." The Aggies (4-1) will try to work out some of the kinks and continue to improve against Georgia Southern (2-2) before taking 10 days off to concentrate on final exams. Barone said Southern will be a formidable opponent, however, and the Aggies must maintain their focus. "It's a good team; it's a team that's very talented athletically, and we think the physical nature of how they play is something that concerns us," Barone said. "(Southern Coach) Gregg Polinsky has a very physical defensive team. They've got an outstanding guard in Fernando Daniels, who's a big-time player. They've played zone and man (defense) and we're concerned about their physical nature." While Southern's style of play may reduce the number of fast-break opportunities the Aggies get, Jones said A&M's up-tempo style is here to stay, and the Aggies will ad-



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Sophomore forward **Shanne Jones** slams the ball home. just according to what Southern throws at them. "I don't think that will change our style of play," Jones said. "We'll still try to push it up the court. If we have to go inside more, then we'll focus on that."

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