

Swimming and Diving

Big 12 Championships

A&M hosts first Big 12 Championships

By COURTNEY LYONS  
THE BATTALION

After a season of heated anticipation, they are finally here. The Big 12 Swimming and Diving Championships have arrived and will take place this weekend at the Student Recreation Center, and the A&M Swimming and Diving Teams hope to send the competition home disappointed and empty-handed.

The Lady Aggies head into the meet ranked 24th in the nation, while the Aggies currently ranked 20th. Both teams are ready to move up the national charts by giving stellar performances this weekend.

Head Coach Don Wagner said the Lady Aggies have been working hard all season to prepare for this meet.

"We are excited and we are ready," Wagner said. "This is a time when the girls will reap the rewards for their efforts all year."

While Nebraska and Texas look to have the strongest women's teams, the Lady Aggies do not want to be counted out. Freshman Tracy

Evans and senior Jennifer Guillory are ranked in the top five in the Big 12 in the mile, and junior Jodi Janssen has already qualified for NCAA Zone competition.

"Strange things can happen in conference competition," Wagner said. "I've got girls who think we can win and I will never do anything to dilute those thoughts."

Wagner and his staff have been preparing the Lady Aggies for this one weekend all season by practicing hard and competing against some of the best teams in the country. The rigorous schedule has included competing against several nationally ranked teams, including former conference foe Southern Methodist University, currently ranked No. 2 in the nation. Wagner said the Championships are the challenge the team has been waiting for.

"We're going to run with the big dogs this weekend — we won't be left sitting on the porch," Wagner said.

The Aggies also are anxious for competition to begin. Head Coach Mel Nash said the Aggies' No. 1 goal

comprises three parts: each team member swimming as fast as he can, swimming as many lifetime bests as possible and qualifying as many people for the NCAA National Championships as possible.

Because the way one person swims does not directly affect the way the competition performs, Nash said he is cautious about setting the goal of placing highly as a team. Instead, he is more concerned with qualifying as many Aggies as possible for the NCAA meet.

"Last year, we had four guys qualify," Nash said. "Barring illness and injury, we can take more than that this year."

However, achieving these goals might not be as easy as it sounds.

Three Aggies were in the hospital this week. Freshmen Devin Howard, Tim Campbell and Kevin Kehlenbach were taken to the emergency room two days ago for severe food poisoning and are slowly recovering.

Despite the setback, the Aggies are heading into the competition with a positive outlook.

"Almost every race is going to be a

national-caliber competition," senior Robb Pantano said. "Each school has several nationally ranked swimmers."

Nash said the Big 12 features six strong teams and the competition will be deep.

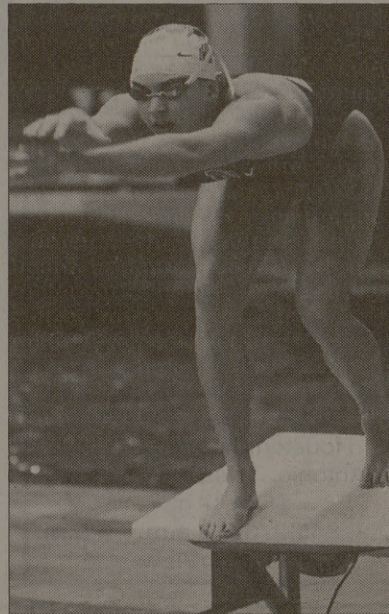
"Everyone has their strengths: Nebraska has good foreign athletes; Texas has a long history of winning programs," Nash said. "There is going to be some fast swimming in our pool this week."

Although the A&M team is laden with freshmen and sophomores, the upperclassmen are confident the team will do well. Texas is the favorite to win, but, the battle for second could go to anyone.

"This competition is the most exciting one this season," junior Patrick McDermott said. "Everything is up for grabs."

The Aggies have been preparing for this meet both in the pool and out. The conference championship meet is different than any other of the season, and junior Kyle Marden said the team has to be prepared.

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Amy Dunlap, THE BATTALION  
Nebraska's Beth Ravaica starts off the block on the first day of competition at the Big 12 Championships.

A&M enjoys comforts of 'Big Pool'



Courtney Lyons, THE BATTALION

It has been said any Aggie team has an unbelievable home advantage. But as the Big 12 Swimming and Diving Championships approach, some question this advantage. Considering the meager attendance of Aggie fans at last year's conference championships, the Aggie swimmers and divers will have to face the competition without the encouragement of a roaring Aggie crowd or the strains of the War Hymn. The Aggies said they would like to see a bigger crowd this weekend.

"We need the support, it does make a difference," senior Robb Pantano said. "I would love to see people make an effort."

However, the lack of fan enthusiasm will not stop the Aggies as they face their Big 12 foes. Competing in a pool the Aggies know inside and out will help them feel comfortable in their races, and sleeping in their own beds instead of in a hotel will add to their comfort level.

Where It's At ...

The 20th-ranked Aggies will be taking on returning national champion Texas as well as tough Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa State and Kansas teams. The fierce competition will feature many nationally ranked athletes from those teams, and many events will be a preview of the NCAA National Championships next month. Several Aggie swimmers and divers already have qualified for the national meet, including freshman Devin Howard.

"Devin and the rest of the freshmen are coming on strong right now," Men's Swimming Head Coach Mel Nash said. "They will be very tough."

The four-day competition, which ends Saturday night, will begin with preliminary events in the morning and wrap up with finals in those events at 6:30 p.m. A swimmer can compete in a total of seven events, but no more than three of those events can be individual events. This means the relay teams will consist of the best swimmers on the team.

Shaved Heads All Around

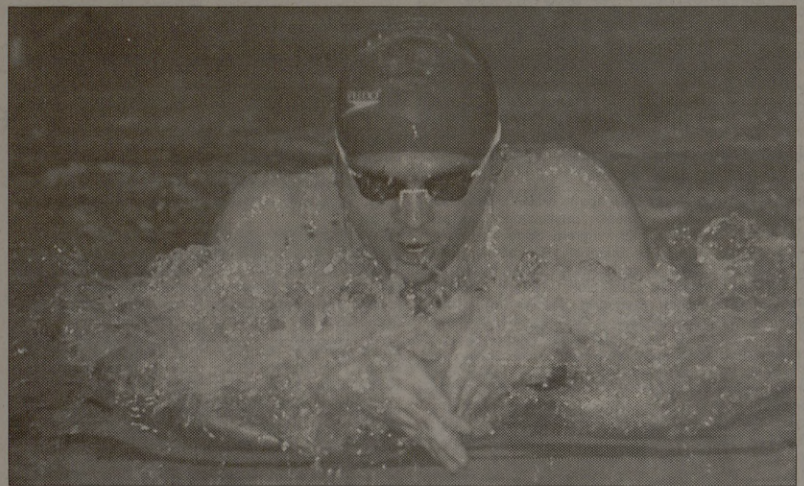
Part of each swimmer's preparation for the conference meet is deciding what to shave. All swimmers shave their legs and arms, but many of the men take it one step further and shave their heads. This has several benefits.

First, it can take tenths of seconds off a time by making the swimmer a touch faster. Theoretically, the swimmer will move faster through the water with no resistance from hair. Second, the swimmer does not have to wear an uncomfortable swim cap, and can still glide through the water quickly.

Third, a swimmer can look serious about his event, and intimidating if he goes to such lengths.

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"Lunch" Marden ready to eat up competition



Pat James, THE BATTALION  
Junior Kyle Marden practices at the Natatorium Tuesday afternoon.

By DENNIS RAMIREZ  
THE BATTALION

"Lunch" may not mean much more than a candy bar or some chips for some, but for the Texas A&M Men's Swimming Team, "Lunch" strikes a different kind of cord.

"Lunch" is the nickname of junior swimmer Kyle Marden, and junior Patrick McDermott said the nickname is well-deserved.

"He has got the most amazing appetite I have ever seen in my life," McDermott said. "He eats like a horse and he is always hungry."

Marden's hunger is not confined just to food. He also hungers for competition and the best interests of the team.

"Each year I have had certain individual goals, along with team goals, that I have wanted to accomplish," Marden said. "While I have been somewhat successful at fulfilling my goals, I would rather see the team do well because I am more happy when the whole team succeeds, not just me."

Now in his third year of competition for the Aggies, Marden credits his parents for pushing him into the water and propelling him to new depths. He was drug into a summer league in the seventh grade, but he soon developed a love for the sport.

"I remember my mom dragging me down to the neighborhood swim team at 9 a.m., and I hated it," Marden said. "I didn't like to go, but I soon started to like it and joined a club team. I kept on improving and

my freshman year in high school I first realized I loved to swim and would be able to at the college level and do more."

Marden's vision soon became reality as he found himself on the 33rd-ranked A&M team his freshman year. Since his rookie season, Marden has made two straight NCAA Championship appearances, finishing 13th. He now finds himself on the verge of making his third appearance.

"This year an individual goal is to make NAAs and finish in the top eight," Marden said. "This weekend is the first Big 12 meet and we are all really excited. I hope to make a strong showing, but more importantly, place high as a team and qualify as many for nationals as possible."

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Guillory goes the distance for A&M

By COURTNEY LYONS  
THE BATTALION

There are athletes who go great distances for their team, and some go even further for a fast time. Lady Aggie Jennifer Guillory takes this concept one step further — she goes the distance, in time and in the water. The senior from Lake Charles, La., swims distance events for the Texas A&M Women's Swim Team.

Guillory began swimming at the age of nine, and her talents led her to the distance events when she was 13. Guillory has had a hard time leaving the pool since then.

When Guillory was debating on which college to attend, she narrowed her choices to Louisiana State University and A&M. But LSU was not in the cards for her.

"I really wanted to leave the state (Louisiana)," Guillory said. "And the first time I came to A&M, when we were driving into town, I felt like I was coming home. It was a really weird feeling."

Fortunately for the Lady Aggies, Guillory has had a solid career at A&M over the last three years. Guillory ended last season with a second-place finish in the 1650-meter freestyle at the Southwest Conference Championships. She qualified for the NCAA National Championships last March for the first time with the time she recorded at the SWC meet.

"That race was the highlight of the meet for me," Head Coach Don Wagner said. "It was a great surprise. I was very pleased, and it made me very proud of her."

Guillory is quiet and unassuming, but over the last three seasons she has proven to be strong in competition and practice.

"Jennifer is a very focused individual," Wagner said. "She is extremely competitive."

Guillory usually does not get nervous during meets,



Pat James, THE BATTALION  
Senior Jennifer Guillory finished second in the 1650-meter freestyle at the SWC Championships last year.

but sometimes becomes excited and anxious. However, after competing for three years Guillory has become fairly relaxed during competitions.

Although Guillory has become more relaxed, teammate Danee Mastagni said Guillory is extremely determined. This year has brought some adjustments for Guillory. She said being one of two seniors on the team has taken some getting used to.

"I have a different perspective this year," Guillory said. "There is no one older, no one to look up to anymore. You're the oldest."

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Naftanel wins first title

By COURTNEY LYONS  
THE BATTALION

All it takes is a little muscle and a lot of concentration to win the Big 12 Diving Championship title. With World Championship qualifiers and Olympic medalists in the pool Wednesday evening, the Aggie divers managed to walk away with two conference medals on the first night of competition in the Big 12 Conference Championships.

Aggie sophomore diver Mark Naftanel became the first springboard conference champion in A&M history, winning the gold medal in the one-meter competition.

The competition between Naftanel and Nebraska's Danny Bergman was stiff during the entire finals, but Naftanel took the honors on his last dive.

"I was very nervous starting the finals," Naftanel said. "But that's

what I've been working on, to relax and concentrate on the dive and not where I am going to finish."

A&M Head Diving Coach Kevin Wright said this was a breakthrough meet for Naftanel. "He was able to respond when it came down to it on the last dive, a reverse twister, which he just learned this year," Wright said.

Tonight's finals will feature the women's three-meter springboard, Friday will be men's three-meter springboard, and Saturday will be men's and women's ten-meter tower competitions.

A&M freshman Danielle Guarnieri and junior Jodi Janssen both qualified for the one-meter finals. Janssen took the bronze medal, finishing less than four points ahead of the University of Texas' Sarah Vestal.

"Well, I took third place behind an Olympic champion and a world qualifier tonight," Janssen said. "I'm pretty happy with what I did. I did my best."

Texas' Vera Ilyina, a former Olympian, took first place. Texas also took the silver medal over Janssen, by less than seven points.

"There is so much talent here today," Janssen said. "It feels good to actually be competing."



Naftanel