

Fossum returns home to take on Baylor

► *The Aggie Baseball Team will play in Waco today and return to Olsen Field Saturday and Sunday.*

By CHRIS FERRELL
THE BATTALION

A year ago, Casey Fossum was the toast of Waco.

As an All-American pitcher at Midway High School, Fossum posted a 13-1 record while striking out 211 batters in 105 innings as Midway captured the zone title.

Tonight, the prodigal son returns to the scene of some of his greatest glories. However, he will be wearing Aggie maroon instead of his alma mater's green and gold.

Fossum will be on the mound as the eighth-ranked Texas A&M Baseball team (11-4) opens Big 12 play at Baylor (5-4).

"It's exciting," Fossum said. "It might pump me up a little bit getting to see all my friends out there. It'll get my adrenaline going a little bit pitching in front of my home town."

Despite the jump from high school to Division I, Fossum has continued to put up big numbers.

The freshman phenom leads all A&M starters with a 1.08 earned run average in four starts. He has also struck out a team-high 32

batters (including two 12 strikeout games).

"Right now, he hasn't given us any indication that he is intimidated because it's a conference game," Head Coach Mark Johnson said. "He hasn't backed off anything, and I don't anticipate that he will. Besides that, he's got our best numbers with an exception to won-loss (1-1).

"On Friday night's, usually you have your best pitchers going against each other. So his won-loss column is not going to be as good as if we had him in the third spot. How he's going to respond, we'll just have to wait and see, but thus far, he's responded well."

A&M also hopes Fossum's experience at Ferrell Field will pay off.

"I think it's (playing on the field before) going to help a little bit because I know the dimensions," Fossum said. "If the wind's blowing in, throw right at the hitters. I've pitched off the mound. I'm used to the mound, so if anything, it's going to help me."

Fossum and the rest of the Aggie pitching staff will have to be on top of their games to help a team that hasn't taken fielding practice in over a week due to inclement weather.

"What's happened to us has happened to them," Johnson said. "So we're on a level playing field. The actuality is last Monday, we had a doubleheader against Nevada-Reno, and we haven't been on the practice field since. It's a detriment to both Baylor and Texas A&M because of where we're at, the guys haven't been out on the field enough."

Another key for A&M will be the young team keeping its composure in its first conference game.

"The guys love conference games," Johnson said. "It's like playing poker for a nickel and then someone throws in 25 cents."

Johnson is trying to keep the game in perspective.

"Once we start playing Big 12, we've got 30 of them so we can't say that Friday night is the key game," he said. "There aren't any key games that are more important than the other until you get to a pennant race in the last two weeks, and then they become just paramount. The thing that everyone has to understand is that in the rankings, to win a championship, this game is just as important as the 30th. But we have to understand that when you play 30 games, you can't get too high for one game."

The Aggie pitchers feel they can match up with a Baylor team batting .302. Baylor has scored 95 runs on the season without a single senior in the starting lineup. Baylor will rely on its middle infield combination of second baseman Eric Nelson (.351) and Eric Boisjoly (.344) to provide much of the offensive spark.

"If we can hit the ball, all of us pitchers will keep us in the game," Fossum said. "We're going to keep the score low. Baylor's probably going to be a little better hitting (than Washington State), but we're just going to have to work harder at it. I think we can keep the score low."

The Aggies hope he is right and there will be no joy in Waco, when the mighty Casey's struck them out.



Ryan Rogers, THE BATTALION

Freshman pitcher **Casey Fossum** throws a pitch at a University of Texas-Pan American hitter.

Lady Aggies try to reverse their recent bad fortune this weekend

By NICKI SMITH
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M Softball Team is well-rested and ready to play after having a week off of game play due to inclement weather. With an overall record of 4-8, the Lady Aggies are prepared to face some of the best talent the nation has to offer in women's collegiate softball at the second annual National Fast Pitch Coach's Association Leadoff Tournament in Columbus, Ga. February 28-March 2.

The tournament will be held at the site of the 1996 Olympic Games softball venue and consists of a total of 18 teams, eleven nationally ranked.

Each team was placed in one of six pools. Depending on how each team fares in its pool it will advance to the gold, silver or bronze bracket.

In pool six, the Lady Aggies will face the 21st-ranked University of Notre Dame and 19th-ranked University of South Carolina.

Head Coach Jo Evans said the team is pumped for the tournament and is looking forward to facing some of the toughest Division I teams in the nation.

"Notre Dame and South Carolina are perennially great teams," Evans said. "Obviously, this tournament has some teams with awesome talent. We really want to do well because this is our opportunity to make our entire year."

Last year, the Lady Aggies won their pool after defeating the University of Illinois-Chicago and the University of Connecticut but then lost three straight games against the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, South Carolina and Notre Dame.

Senior left-fielder Heather Hayden said it will be exciting for the Lady Aggies to compete against teams outside the Big 12.

"This is going to be some of our toughest competition all year not from the Big 12," Hayden said. "We are excited to be able to play on the Olympic field and to



Rogge Hefflin, THE BATTALION

Catcher **Amy Schmaltz** watches shortstop **Jamie Smith** prepares to catch the ball and tag **Danielle LeMuch** at practice at the Lady Aggie Softball Complex.

find out where we stand with teams across the country."

As far as Notre Dame is concerned, the Fighting Irish have little playing time under their belt with a record of 1-3 after suffering losses to Arizona State University and the Universities of Indiana and Iowa. The Irish, who have a team average of .255 at the plate, are led by Katie Marten, who leads the team with a .500 batting average.

In the same pool, the Lady Gamecocks have a record of 5-2 and have beaten the 1996 NCAA runner-up University of Washington this season. They also have returning All-American pitcher Trinity Johnson, who has a .270 earned run average and is holding batters to a .084 average.

Evans said the Lady Aggies have their work cut out for them, but believes the tournament will be a positive experience.

"We know that if we play well against these teams we will take off," Evans said. "This is an important time for us because we have a couple of weeks before conference play to get the ball rolling for us. We need to come out of this feeling good about ourselves."

For the series, the Lady Aggies are 1-1 against Notre Dame; they have a 12-10 overall record against South Carolina.

Next week the Lady Aggies will host the University of Texas-Arlington March 5 and will play in the Super 8 Motel Aggie Invitational II at the Lady Aggie Softball Field on March 7-9.

Mother Nature wreaks havoc on softball team

The Texas A&M Softball Team wanted to prove a winning season remains within its reach, but Mother Nature decided other things were in store for the Lady Aggies this week.

Although the weather gave the go-ahead for last weekend's Aggie Mini Invitational at the Lady Aggie Softball Field, where the Lady Aggies went 2-4 and captured a third place title behind Colorado State University and Creighton University, the team has not seen game action since then due to rain.

Rain, Rain, Go Away...It's Tournament Time!

The Lady Aggies currently have an overall record of 4-8 and were hoping to add two more wins last Wednesday against Stephen F. Austin University, but inclement weather prevented that.

The delay means the team is well-rested and ready to compete in the NFCA Leadoff Classic Tournament this weekend in Columbus, Georgia. However this also means the Lady Aggies have fewer games and wins under their belts as they prepare to face some of the nation's best collegiate softball teams.

Included in the same pool as the Lady Aggies are ninth-ranked University of South Carolina and 21st-ranked University of Notre Dame, both of which beat the Lady Aggies last year.

Regardless of their ranking, Head Coach Jo Evans said it was an honor for the Lady Aggies to be among the 18 contenders in the tournament.

"These are some of the best overall teams in the country competing in this tournament," Evans said. "It would make our year to do well there."



Nicki Smith

Plays and Players of the Week

Despite the SFA doubleheader cancellation, the Lady Aggies were able to get in six games this week.

The Aggies belted three home runs in their 13-0 win over Sam Houston State University, two of them over the outfield fence.

Sophomore Kami Tucker hit the first home run of her career, her first grand slam and the team's second of the year.

Her hit provided the momentum the Aggies needed as senior Mya Truelove sent her first homer since her freshman year soaring over the right field fence, and senior Gina Perez used her speed to her advantage to get around the bases before the ball was thrown home.

Junior Amy Schmaltz deserves most improved player earning herself a .429 batting average for the tournament and a hit in every game. She recorded three doubles and two triples while improving her season batting average from .182 to .320.

On the mound, junior Trina Solesbee held opposing batters to a .212 batting average, while senior Lori Gioco is 3-3 with a 2.26 earned run average.

A busy week for the Lady Aggies...

In addition to playing at the 1996 Olympic Games softball park, the Lady Aggies will host the University of Texas-Arlington in a doubleheader March 5 at the Lady Aggie Softball Field.

The first game will start at 5:00 p.m. will the second immediately following.

Then, the Lady Aggies will host the Super 8 Motel Aggie Invitational II and will play Ohio State University, Northern Illinois University and Louisiana Tech University March 7-9.

Ags face Tech in season finale

By MATT MITCHELL
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M Men's Basketball Team travels to Lubbock this weekend to play the Texas Tech University Red Raiders in the regular season finale for both teams. In a scheduling quirk, the game will be played on Sunday, with tip-off at 1:00.

As he has many times this season, A&M Head Coach Tony Barone is drawing optimism from the Aggies' first meeting with Tech, a 80-65 Raiders win Feb. 12. The essentials of an A&M victory remain largely the same as they were then.

"The last time we played them, with five minutes to go it was a two-point game," Barone said. "We've got to do a job on Tech junior guard Cory Carr. We've got to do a job on (junior center Tony) Battie. Both of those kids are great players. We've got to step up to the table and do a good job against both of them."

Tech (17-8, 9-6) is looking to close the season with a flourish, having beaten Texas and Missouri in the two games prior. A win

over the Aggies would most likely give Tech a higher seeding in next week's Big 12 Conference Tournament.

A&M (9-16, 3-12) plays its second tough road game in as many contests, having dropped a 68-57 decision Tuesday to the University of Texas in Austin. Barone said the challenge of playing in Lubbock will be good preparation for the Aggies heading into the conference tournament.

"It's (Lubbock) a tough place to play — they've got great fan support there."

Tony Barone
A&M head coach

"It's (Lubbock) a tough place to play — they've got great fan support there," Barone said. "It's a good game prior to the (Big 12) Tournament for us because it'll prepare us for the enthusiasm of the tournament."

The Aggies' schedule doesn't slow down after its date with the Raiders. As soon as the game ends, coaches and players will begin preparing for their lone postseason tournament.

"The Tech game is on a weird day — it's a Sunday game," Barone said. "We'll come back right after the game Sunday and practice Monday and leave Tuesday night for the tournament."

Lady Ags run with 'Horns in finale

By JAMIE BURCH
THE BATTALION

Twenty-five down, one to go. After a long, treacherous season full of insurmountable adversities, the Texas A&M Women's Basketball Team (9-16, 3-12) closes out its season against the Runnin' Horns of the University of Texas (19-6, 11-4) tomorrow at noon in G. Rollie White Coliseum.

Head Coach Candi Harvey said the Lady Aggies realize the Texas rivalry is viewed as "the" game of the season by many A&M fans.

"At A&M, if you can finish the year with a win against Texas, it means the world to everybody," Harvey said. "But I also think that people would just like to see us be competitive, play hard, and put ourselves in a position to win. I certainly anticipate that will happen Saturday."

As if playing their rival school were not inspiration enough, the Lady Aggies will face a Texas team searching desperately



Harvey

for a victory to seal the Big 12 South Division Title. After losing to the University of Colorado, 60-56 at home on Wednesday night, the Lady Horns need a win over the Aggies to remain ahead of Texas Tech University (18-7, 10-5) in the rankings.

Adding to the intensity of the matchup will be the festivities bidding farewell to the Lady Aggie seniors. Harvey realizes the additional excitement could hamper the mental toughness of her young squad.

"I think the atmosphere's going to be fun and exciting," Harvey said. "I just hope our young kids will feed off of it rather than let it intimidate them. It sounds strange, but at times we play tighter at home than we do on the road."

"It's hard for them to stay focused. They worry about impressing everyone. Hopefully we'll just relax. When we do that we're a pretty decent basketball team."

In the first meeting of the home-and-home series, the Lady Horns destroyed A&M in Austin, 100-63. Leading a four man cast in double figures, Texas senior forward Amie Smith abused the Lady Aggies, posting a double-double with 22 points and 11 rebounds. 6-foot-1 junior center Angela Jackson scored 20 points

and four blocked shots. While vaunted senior forward Danielle Vignale added 15 points and four boards.

A&M trailed by only seven at the half, 51-44, but scored only 19 second-half points. Sophomore guard Kerrie Patterson said the Lady Aggies put themselves in a position at the half to win the game.

"In the first half we played well," Patterson said. "We played as a team, creating good shot selection. In the second half, we came out too relaxed. We didn't play to win. We must play two halves. Texas is beatable."

After witnessing Colorado's performance against Texas, freshman guard Amy Yates said A&M can beat Texas, but it has to ignore everything that has happened in the past.

"We need to play through our mistakes," Yates said. "We tend to hang our heads. In the Baylor game it cost us some easy baskets down the stretch. If we do that, then we can definitely pull out a win."

With a win over Texas, the Lady Aggies could look past a detrimental season to the sophomore edition of the Big 12.