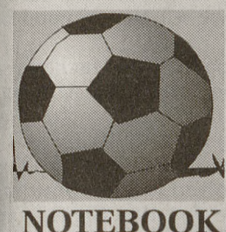


A&M gearing up for big test

Third-ranked Soccer Team set to battle top-ranked Tarheels



NOTEBOOK



STEPHEN BOUDREAU
Staff writer

With the Texas A&M Soccer Team riding high on a perfect 8-0 record, the pollsters are taking note of their success as well. Following last week's 1-0 victory over Nebraska, the Aggies have made A&M soccer history by attaining their highest ranking ever at number three.

Tarheel test

This Sunday the Aggies will face the top ranked North Carolina Tarheels in one of the biggest games of the year. North Carolina has won nine out of the last ten national championships and have defeated the Aggies both times they met.

This year the Aggies are armed with the talent and momentum that makes this the

best opportunity A&M has ever had to defeat the mighty Tarheels. The high profile showdown will be played Sunday afternoon in Houston at the Adidas Soccer Classic.

Full house

The 12th man is alive and well at the Aggie Soccer Complex. The complex has been filling up in numbers that the team has never seen before. This weekend close to 2,600 fans attended the Utah and Oregon games. An average of 1,211 fans are attending home matches, the best attendance ever for Aggie soccer.

Big 12 player of the week

Still riding high on being named The Battalion's player of the week, Melanie Wilson was distinguished even further by being named the first ever Big 12 player of the week. She received the honor for her impressive shut out performances against Iowa State and Nebraska.

The sophomore keeper has an amazing 25-4 career record, including 12 shut outs. Wilson has allowed only three goals in 630 minutes this season and holds a perfect 8-0 record.

Soccer America Team of the Week

Last week's victory over Nebraska

reaped yet another reward for the Aggies when Junior Sharon Pickering, was named to the Soccer America Women's Team of the Week. Pickering joined the 11-person team for her game winning goal against the then fourth-ranked Huskers.

One time is usually enough

In the 69 games in which A&M has scored more than once, the Aggies hold an astounding 65-3-1 record. The last defeat in which A&M fell short when scoring more than once was in the first round of last season's NCAA playoffs, losing 5-3 to San Diego.

Player of the week

Without a doubt, Bryn Blalack has earned her place among the nations best players. This weekend Blalack never let the team down. Against Utah, Blalack took control of the game and put three balls past the keeper. Sunday afternoon, against the mighty Ducks of Oregon, Blalack broke out for two more goals. Blalack tops the all-time A&M goal scorers list with 70.

For her incredible play, Bryn Blalack has received the ultimate honor any Texas A&M soccer player could dream of attaining and is being named this week's Battalion Player of the Week.



DAVE HOUSE/THE BATTALION

Sophomore Ashley Fendley heads a ball against the University of Nebraska. Fendley has helped the A&M defense limit its opponents to five goals this season.

HAMMER TIME

Fendley making impact for Aggies

BY MARGAUX HARRIS
Staff Writer

Tenacity, hard-working and competitive are words teammate and Coach G. Guerrieri use to describe Ashley Fendley, defender of the Texas A&M Soccer Team. If you ask Fendley what she thinks her talent are, she modestly gives her teammate most of the credit.

"Everyone at this level is good, so makes my job so much easier," she said.

Fendley began playing soccer at the age of five. Now she is a major asset to the Texas A&M Soccer team.

"Ashley is so competitive within herself that the hardest thing she has to endure was growth," Guerrieri said.

Last year, Fendley played behind two All-Conference seniors. Now she is a starter in her position and is only a sophomore. Guerrieri said that her success is attributed to hard work and an inner drive.

In high school, Fendley played for the state champion club team, the Klein Challenge.

PLEASE SEE FENDLEY ON PAGE 4

New Addition

Freshman Thrasher makes early jump look easy

BY STEPHEN BOUDREAU
Staff writer

Nikki Thrasher may seem like just another one of the nine May High School graduates on the Texas A&M Soccer Team Roster this fall, but she is not your traditional freshman.

Thrasher took summer courses this past summer and graduated from El Paso's Franklin High School a year early in order to play for A&M.

"I don't regret (leaving high school early) at all. I love it here," Thrasher said. "It was kind of scary though. I never came on an official visit to Texas A&M or anything, so I was coming in kind of blind."

The freshman midfielder had been corresponding with A&M coach G. Guerrieri through letters during her junior year at Franklin when the opportunity to join the Aggies became a reality.

"(Coach) G. knew I wasn't very happy with high school ... I just wasn't into it," Thrasher said. "An opportunity arose, so I took a whole bunch of courses over the summer and graduated."

Inexperience is not a problem, though. During her three years in high school Thrasher scored a combined 89 goals and tallied up the same number of assists. Despite those impressive statistics, she remains humble.

"High school is a totally different game. Just in order to put on the A&M jersey is an honor," she said. "It's been a dream for me since I was a little girl to play with a top 10 Division I team. For them to ask me to come a year early was just awesome. I can't think of anything more incredible."

Her teammates playfully nicknamed her, "youngster", but in reality do not treat her any differently than the other girls.

"We call her 'youngster' and give her a

hard time about not having a drivers license, but she gets around on her bike," senior midfielder Bryn Blalack said. "It's all in fun. She's a great contributor on and off the field."

Thrasher said, "The team is awesome. I don't think they really think of me as a 17 year-old. Sometimes it's hard to get into some of the places they go to, but that's OK. The girls are all great."

Already a solid member of the starting line up, Thrasher is turning heads around the nation. She has scored three goals and assisted in another through eight games. She, along with Blalack, was mentioned in the fall issue of Sports Illustrated Women's Sports as a strong midfielder for the Aggies.

"Nikki Thrasher, true to her name, thrashes up opposing defenses and gets the job done. (She) is always a key factor in the game," Guerrieri said. "All of our re-

turning stars do their part, but Nikki and all the freshman have stepped up and are doing a great job."

When Thrasher gets the ball, all her teammates anticipate that something is going to happen, Blalack said.

"Everybody on the team has confidence in her. Nikki has great tenacity and loads of talent. She adds a lot to this team," Blalack said.

The youngster has high hopes for her future with the A&M soccer program. Armed with loads of talent coupled with a positive attitude, her ultimate goal of a national championship may not be a dream for very long.

"We are in a position to build the program up to be number one. We show progress just in beating Nebraska," she said. "That is just one of the steps we are taking on our way to the top. This team is capable of so much."



DAVE HOUSE/THE BATTALION

Freshman Nikki Thrasher brings up the ball against Oregon.

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