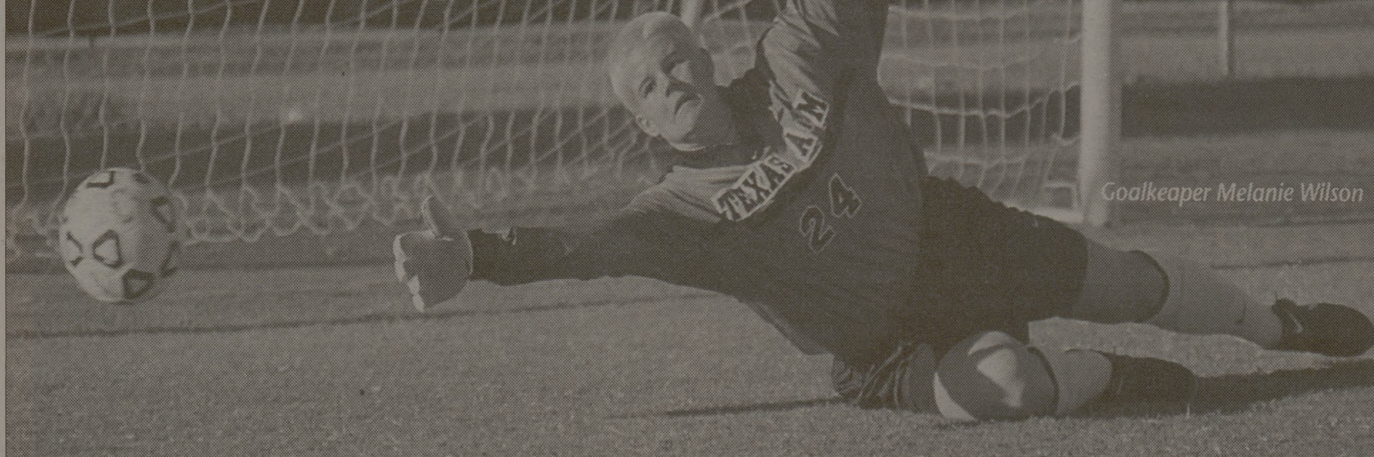


# The Road to the NCAAs



Goalkeeper Melanie Wilson

## Soccer fighting for campus recognition

It is the world's oldest game and perhaps its most popular. Millions of people around the world crowd around television sets and into stadiums to witness a game called football, or as it is referred to in the United States, soccer.

For many, soccer is in the blood and hearts stop on Sunday afternoons when their team takes the field.

But in this country and on this campus, soccer is often looked upon as a "secondary sport," which does not often provide the offensive scoring that people seem to demand.

Here in Aggieland, American Football, yes, the kind played on "sacred" Kyle field, flows through the veins of every "true Aggie." The sport gets so much attention that it is often easy to overlook the hard work the Texas A&M Soccer Team puts in each day.

This hard work paid off last weekend when the sixth-ranked Aggies recorded their 42nd-career shutout. The victory gave A&M its first Big 12 title with a 5-0 victory over Colorado.

"I can walk around campus and people will come up to me and say, 'Oh I've been to every single game,' and you know they are really great fans," senior midfielder Sonia Ibanez said. "But there are the other people who don't even know we exist."

Junior defender Emily Elias said, "It's a big deal. We were ranked third in the nation, the highest-ranked team at A&M. I think that's something that people at this school should be proud of."

The road has been a long and rough one for the Aggies. In 1977, soccer was initiated at A&M in the form of an intercollegiate club team. After many years of success in club and varsity II status, the team was elevated to full varsity status in November 1992.

Five years later, the program is thriving.

Things have never looked so good for the Aggies.

"It's gotten better over the years. Attendance improves with every passing season, now the stadium has lights, things keep coming one by one," Ibanez said. "It seems like every season we're stepping up higher. But we've really had to do a lot of work to get any kind of recognition."

With the Big 12 championship on their résumé, hopefully that success will transform into larger crowds, more publicity and most importantly, more respect.

Despite many advances the Aggies and their loyal fans have made, an attitude of apathy still exists among many of the 43,000 students at Texas A&M.

Many will look at this title and with a short smile and turn of the head and say, "Oh it's just soccer."

"As much hard work and dedication that every member of this team puts in, it's not 'just soccer,'" Elias said. "It's a full-time job for everyone out here and it is degrading in a way to think that we work our butts off every day to represent the school and some people think a soccer championship has little value."

Is a soccer championship secondary to, say, a football championship? Perhaps football draws bigger crowds and more national attention, but the soccer teams put in the same effort in representing this university as the football team does.

The soccer team puts so much time and energy into representing the student body of this school, more students could and should take pride in representing them in the stands.

"People talk about us more than ever now, but some people only talk about it and don't come out to the games," sophomore goalkeeper Melanie Wilson said. "It's good to come out to games. Some people think it's boring, but have never really given it a



Midfielder Diana Rowe

chance. They really need to experience it. We are a fun team to watch."

Still, 1997 marked the highest attendance the Aggies have ever drawn. With an average of over 1,200 fans, the Aggies had the top attendance in the Central Region and sixth highest in the nation.

In September, the Aggies drew close to 1,400 when Big 12 rival Nebraska rolled into College Station.

Despite seemingly impressive numbers, a school this size with a soccer team that has had the success of the Aggies, should not be out drawn by universities like Fresno State and Portland that do not have half the enrollment of A&M or the same amount of supposed school pride.

The past five years the Aggies and their fans have seen the program develop into a national powerhouse. The soccer team has only one tradition and that is winning. Beat-

ing Colorado every year is nothing unexpected, the Longhorns have never outsourced the Aggies and their Big 12 trophy case is no longer empty.

In spite of the fact that many people were disappointed that the Reveille grave sites were moved away from Kyle Field, perhaps now she will be able to look a little to the west and catch a glimpse of the Aggie Soccer Complex.

# Aggies try to score national title

## Team heads to San Antonio as Big 12 No.1 seed

It is said that anything done more than once at Texas A&M is a tradition. If that is the case, then winning seasons and being ranked in the top ten have become mainstays for the Texas A&M soccer team.

The 1997 regular season was no different for the Aggies. A&M finished 16-2-0 and ranked 4th in the nation. With the Big 12 Tournament and NCAA National Championship Tournament approaching, the Aggies are poised to capture their first national championship.

The question is not so much if the Aggies can bring home a national title, but what it will take to do so.

"We need to have determination if we are going to win the national championship. As a team, we work well when we work as one unit and play as a team. In soccer you play well as a team, or you play bad as a team," Emily Elias said. "If we want it, it's ours. With 23 excellent athletes on this team, it can be ours just like that. But everyone needs to want it."

With each passing season, the Aggies improve their record and national standing. Since the inception of

scholarship NCAA Division I soccer at A&M, the Aggies have compiled an amazing 82-17-3 overall record and have only lost three Big 12 conference games.

The Aggies will be the number one seed in the Big 12 Conference tournament which begins today. The tournament will be played at Blossom Stadium in the Blossom Athletic Complex in San Antonio.

As the number one seed, A&M has a first round bye. In the second round, the Aggies will face the winner of the Texas/Colorado game on Friday at 7:30. The winner moves on to the championship game on Sunday at 1 p.m. to play either Nebraska or the winner of the Iowa State/Baylor game.

"The talent is overflowing on this team. It is just a matter of putting it all together for the duration of the post season. I think right now we are in a great setting. We've got the Big 12 tournament and then we hit it with the playoffs right then," Sonia Ibanez said.

"This is the perfect time for us. We've got momentum, the intensity

level is at a high and we just need to go with it."

A&M entered the tournament as the number two seed last year and reached the championship game. Despite a valiant effort, the team fell to Nebraska in a heartbreaking 1-0 overtime game in Kansas City.

"We need to play with a lot of confidence. We need to stay focused on the task at hand," senior Diana Rowe said. "Like any team, sometimes we can get in a lull when the whole team isn't focused at the same time. But I think we are passed all that and it's all coming together."

Pairings for the NCAA tournament come out on November 11th. The final four and National Championship game will be played on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro from December 5-7.

"This team has more talent than any other in A&M soccer history," senior Bryn Blalack said.

"If we play together and keep our heads straight we can bring home a national championship."

**"We've got momentum, the intensity level is high and we just need to go with it."**

**SONIA IBANEZ  
SENIOR MIDFIELDER**

## 16-2: The year in review

The Texas A&M Soccer Team has completed yet another interesting and successful regular season.

Their record of 16-2, 8-1 was good enough to finish ranked fourth in the nation and seeded first in the Big 12 tournament.

### Boogie Nights.

The season began like no other before it, when the Aggies kicked off the season with the first ever night game at the Aggie Soccer Complex. The lights were installed in an effort to not only provide a more comfortable soccer environment, but to draw larger crowds. These expectations soon became realities.

The season opener against Oklahoma drew a then record crowd of 1,350 people.

The record would eventually be broken when the Aggies defeated Nebraska before a crowd of 1,368.

"The fans are great," senior Diana Rowe said. "I mean, when they get loud, they get really loud."

Attendance continued to rise throughout the season and the season concluded with a record breaking 1,205 average per home game.

### In the beginning.

The Aggies dominated in their first nine games, outscoring opponents 27-5. Two of

those victories came against ranked opponents Stanford and Nebraska.

Only two of the games, though, were on the road. The Aggies used the home-field advantage to improve on their pre-season ranking of eight to an all-time high number three in the nation.

During the nine game span, the Aggies captured five conference victories.

### On the road again.

A&M began its four week, seven game road trip with the Adidas Soccer Classic Tournament in Houston. A game which pitted them against the number one team in the nation, North Carolina, gave the team hopes of becoming the top ranked squad in the nation.

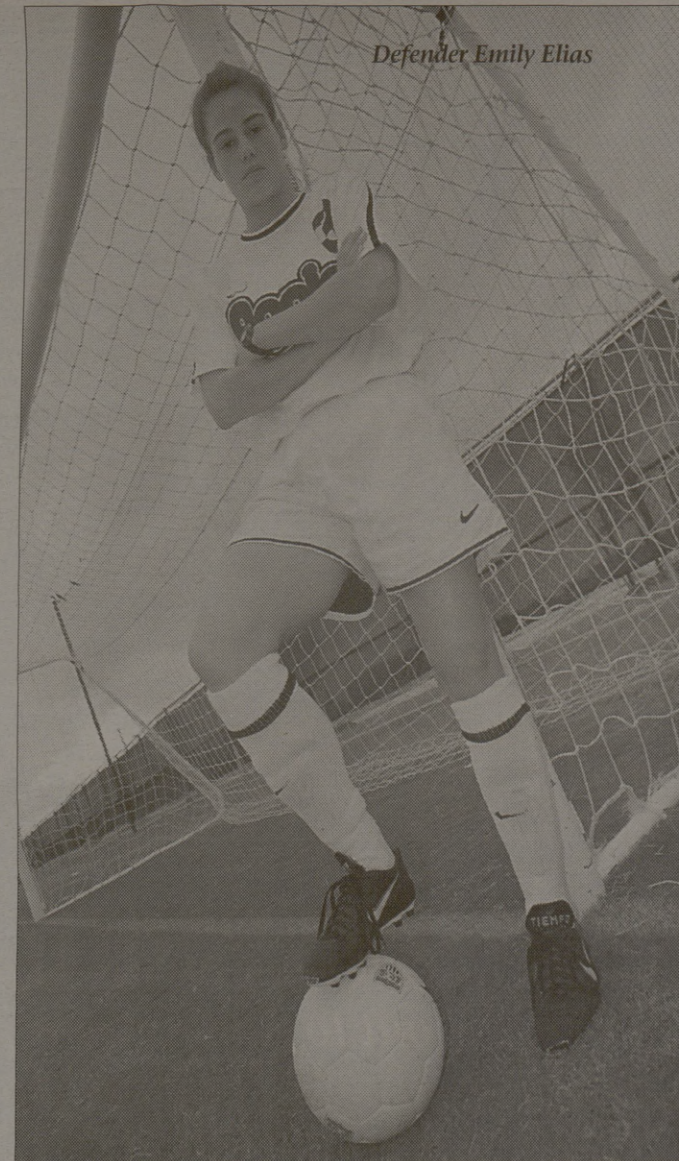
The then third ranked Aggies never lost sight of their goal of winning the Big 12 Championship and focussed on the first game of the tournament against Oklahoma State. The team cruised against the Cowboys and prepared for the game against national powerhouse North Carolina.

Before a record neutral crowd of 5,400, the Aggies valiantly battled the Tarheels, but came up on the short end of a 2-1 game.

Still, the Aggies kept up with their highly touted opponent and the day could just as easily belonged to them.

The North Carolina game proved more costly to the Aggies, though. In the second half of the game, sophomore defender Ashley Fendley suffered a season-ending injury to her ACL. Elizabeth Pavlas, a freshman, was called upon to replace the injured Fendley.

PLEASE SEE SEASON ON PAGE 4.



Defender Emily Elias



Midfielder Sonia Ibanez