

Aggies' road to postseason begins today

With a solid core of returning players and a strong group of freshmen, the Texas A&M Softball Team is in the Big 12 hunt



JAKE SCHRICKLING/THE BATTALION
Trina Solesbee and the Aggie Softball Team play at Southwest today.

By **ROBERT HOLLIER**
Staff writer

The Texas A&M Softball Team will take the field for the first time in the 1998 season when it travels to San Marcos to play a doubleheader against Southwest Texas State today at 5 p.m.

The Aggies return eight players, including five starters, from last year's team that went 37-29 overall and finished fifth in the Big 12 with a 7-9 conference record.

Led by second-year Coach Jo Evans, the Aggies are looking forward to a season that could see them competing in postseason play. "I'm really excited about getting started this season," Evans said. "The girls worked hard during the off-season to get into shape, and there was improvement in every player. We are stronger and faster than ever."

Topping the list of returners is second-team All-Big 12 shortstop, sophomore Jamie Smith, who led the team with a .338 batting average and drove in 27 runs. Senior pitcher and designated player Trina Solesbee, who led the Aggies with eight home runs and 31 runs batted in last year, is also returning.

Other returning starters include senior catchers Amy Schmaltz and Mary McGuire, senior outfielder Tanya Klecker and sophomores Angie Long, Danielle Lemuth and Susanna Reed.

The rest of the team, however, is composed entirely of newcomers, including an all-freshman pitching staff headed by Ashley Lewis, the team's opening day starter.

Lewis, a two-time All-American, state MVP and the 1997 Louisiana Female Athlete of the Year, said that inexperience is the team's main problem, but playing in tournaments against some of the top teams in

the country should give them the experience they need. "We have the talent. It's our biggest asset," Lewis said. "We just need the experience of playing at the college level."

Co-captain McGuire agreed, saying this may be the best team they have had in a long time.

"This is the best team we've had in the four years I've been here," McGuire said. "We have some excellent athletes with strong work ethics. Their talent will make up for their mistakes and inexperience."

Evans said the key for the freshmen is gaining confidence which hopefully will come with experience.

"We have plenty of talent," Evans said. "All we need is some game experience. We have plenty of depth and tremendous team speed, we just need the experience."

Despite this, Evans said she believes the freshmen can and should contribute immediately.

"All of our new players have had success playing against some of the best teams in the country," she said. "They know what it takes to play at a higher level."

Evans also said the Aggies will face some tough teams in tournaments. This should give the new players a good test against some quality competition and prepare them for Big 12 play.

With tremendous young talent combined with senior leadership and experience, A&M could be competing for the Big 12 title.

"This team is very young," Evans said. "We have the nucleus and the foundation for a successful future and our team knows and understands that."

After Tuesday's doubleheader, A&M will play in the UTA Pepsi-Cola Classic in Grand Prairie Feb. 13-15, followed by their home opener, Feb. 20-22, in the Aggie Invitational Tournament.

Tennis teams off to dominating start



The Texas A&M Men's and Women's Tennis Teams are off to strong starts this spring both winning their first two matches. The women resume play against Houston on Wednesday and the men are in action Friday at LSU.

Long Guns

With five freshmen currently seeing playing time, the men's team is one of the nation's youngest. Dumitru Caradima, Rafael de Mesa, Cody Ibbell, Brian Lubin and Shuon Madden lead a freshman class that was ranked by College Tennis Weekly as the best in the nation.

Under Construction

As anyone who has ventured onto West Campus lately has probably noticed, the new tennis center is coming along nicely. Slated for opening this summer, it is being billed as one of the premier tennis facilities in the nation.

PLEASE SEE LAZARUS ON PAGE 9

Season opener against Southwest Texas

KATIE MISH
Staff writer

Today marks the start of the season for the Texas A&M Softball Team as it travels to San Marcos to play Southwest Texas in a doubleheader at 5 p.m.

The Aggies hope this game will bring more confidence to their starting freshmen, especially the pitchers who are playing for the first time on the collegiate level.

Marianne McGuire, co-captain and catcher, said the bulk of the pitching staff is still raw. With only one sophomore and one senior, the remaining freshmen players need some experience at the collegiate level before conference starts, she said.

Despite the young age of the team, McGuire said she still has big goals in mind for this season including a trip to the postseason.

"I don't think I could honestly ever say this before, but I think this team has the potential to go postseason and potentially to a World Series if we work hard and stay focused," she said. "It's kind of a rebuilding year because we have so many young girls, but they are all really talented, so I don't think anything is out of reach."

Ashley Lewis, a freshman and the starting pitcher for the Southwest Texas game, said she is ready to start playing.

"I'm excited to start as a freshman and this is my first season. I just want to get it over with and see how it's going to be," Lewis said.

McGuire said she has a great deal of confidence in Lewis' ability and that she would be unbeatable if she could get in a zone. Lewis said she is positive she can get to that point if she works on her focus.

"The game will be at a different level, but if

I can focus, we can kill 'em," Lewis said.

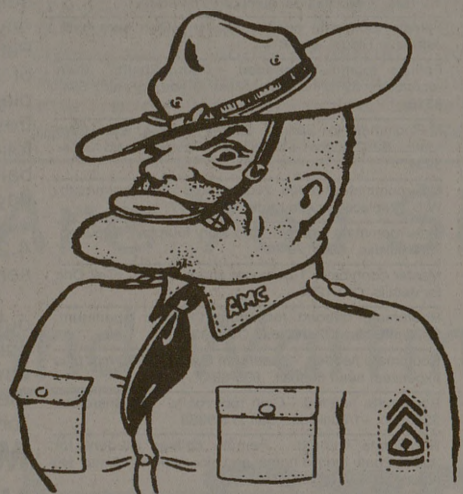
Coach Jo Evans said Tuesday's game will be a good way to analyze where the team needs work.

"We're excited to play, we've been practicing for a long time, so this is a good chance for us to gauge where we are, what our strengths and weaknesses are," Evans said.

Evans said the advantage of a young team is the energy and eagerness they bring to a game. She said the downside is their lack of experience at this level, but they will be fine after they get used to it. She is looking to her pitchers to come through today.

"We need our pitching staff to step up and take control of the game," Evans said. "We had a long talk the other day about how it starts with that pitching circle, and if our pitchers will get out there and hit their spots I think we'll do really well."

WANTED Aggie Leaders



❖ The Memorial Student Center ❖

Who: Motivated Aggies

What: Leadership Positions Including:

MSC Committee Chairs

Application due: February 16, 1998

MSC Council Vice Presidents & Directors

Applications due: February 9, 1998

For a complete listing of vacant positions, come to the MSC Student Programs Office.

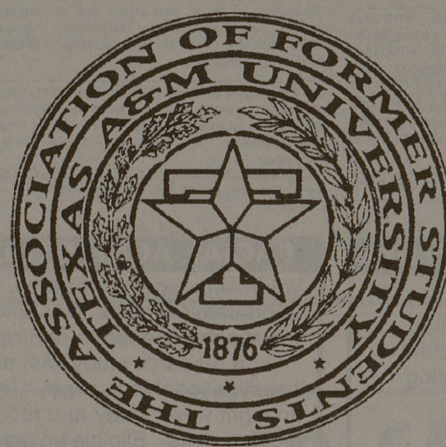
Where: Applications are available in the MSC Student Programs Office

MSC Room 216 ph: 845-1515 web: <http://wwwmsc.tamu.edu/>

When: Immediately...Interview slots are filling fast!

Why: To gain hands-on experience and learn more about your major

Persons with disabilities please call 845-1515 to inform us of your special needs. We request notification three (3) working days prior to the event to enable us to assist you to the best of our abilities.



Class of '98

YOUR CLASS AGENTS WILL BE ELECTED
APRIL 1 & 2
IN THE
1998 SPRING STUDENT BODY ELECTIONS

POTENTIAL CANDIDATES:

- A team of 3, enthusiastic, motivated leaders to serve the Class of '98 until 2003.
- Will act as liasons between the Class of '98, The Association of Former Students, and Texas A&M University.

REQUIREMENTS:

- At least 2 of the 3 candidates, for each team, must attend a mandatory information meeting on Tuesday, February 17, 1998 at 6:00 p.m. at the Clayton Williams, Jr. Alumni Center.

One member from each team must contact
Shannon Crockett '93 at 845-7514 before 5:00 p.m. on February 16.