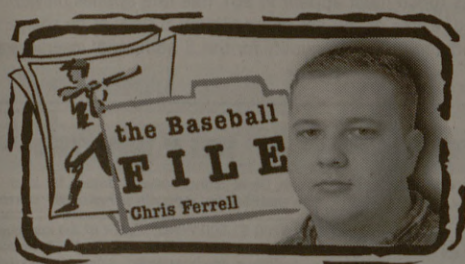


## Baseball team off to hot start



The 15th-ranked Texas A&M Baseball Team is flying high at 11-2 but will get one of their toughest tests of the season this weekend as the Texas Tech Red Raiders come to Olsen Field for a three-game set. The Aggies are off to one of their best starts in recent years but A&M, which has been relatively untested this season will have to be at the top of its game if the team is to remain hot.

### Here's The Pitch

With an exception to a 17-3 loss to Ole Miss last Friday, the Texas A&M pitching staff has been very impressive in the early part of the season. What has made the early success even more impressive is the fact that there were so many questions surrounding the staff coming in. Four pitchers from last year's team left to sign professional contracts and there were a multitude of off-season surgeries among the returning players.

The biggest off-season surgery centered around senior pitcher Ryan Rupe. Rupe was an all-Big 12 performer a season ago after posting an 8-2 record with a career-high 63 strikeouts. However, he missed the end of the season and regionals due to blood clots. Rupe had a rib removed to allow for better circulation into his pitching arm. He answered a lot of questions on opening day, getting the win in a combined no-hitter against UT-Pan American. Coincidentally, one of the other pitchers who threw in that game was junior Shane King who missed all of last season after undergoing "Tommy John" surgery on his pitching arm.

The emergence of junior pitcher Matt Ward as a solid number-three starter has also been big for the Aggies. Ward, a transfer from Rancho Santiago Junior College in California, has been impressive in each of his starts. None, however, were bigger than Sunday's 3-2 win over Ole Miss in extra innings. Ward went nine innings, striking out seven Rebel batters to keep the Aggies in the game.

### Orange You Glad You Came to Aggieland

The Aggies may have finally found the closer they have been searching for in the form of senior Eric French. While French is new to A&M this year, he is by no means new to the Big 12. Last season, French was the closer for the University of Texas where he led the nation in strikeouts per nine innings and led the Longhorns in saves with 10. A&M had only seven as a team and four of those came from sophomore pitcher Casey Fossum, whom the Aggies would much rather see in a starting role. French has compiled a 1-0 record with two saves through 13 games.

### Home is Where the Games Are

The Aggies are in the middle of a stretch which will see the team play 15 of 16 games at Olsen Field. A&M will not go on the road again until Mar. 13 when they travel to Stillwater, Okla. to face perennial power Oklahoma State. So far the Aggies are 4-1 at home. Over the past decade A&M has won about 80 percent of their home games, a number that could prove big for A&M with Tech coming to town this weekend.

—Chris Ferrell is a sophomore journalism major

## Women's team home to face Kansas St.

By PHILIP W. PETER  
Staff writer

The Texas A&M Women's Basketball Team (7-17, 3-11) faces Kansas State (10-14, 4-10) Wednesday at 7 p.m. in the final women's home game played in G. Rollie White Coliseum.

After beating the University of Texas last week, A&M traveled to Texas Tech and despite losing 77-65, they seem to be gaining momentum with contributions from everyone. Sophomore Kera Alexander said that is why they are starting to play better. "Everyone on our team has to do something each game," Alexander said. "If it's not scoring, then we try to rebound or try to play defense and I think that is how everyone has to be. When we start playing like that is when we start playing well and getting wins."

Sophomore forward Prissy Sharpe, whose playing time has been limited due to injury, said after a good showing in the last couple of home games, they

are ending the season on a positive note. "It shows the team's positive attributes when you have players who can step up when someone gets hurt," Sharpe said. "When you know that someone can pick up the slack, it's a good feeling."

With only two games left before the Big 12 Conference Tournament in Kansas City, Mo., Texas A&M Coach Candi Harvey is happy with the team's play. "They're starting to click," Harvey said. "They're starting to play well as a team and it couldn't be happening at a better time. Hopefully we'll be able to sustain that through tonight, Saturday and on to Kansas City."

Kansas State, which has lost seven of its last eight games, is coming off of a 78-47 loss to Oklahoma State. Sophomore Angie Finkes led Kansas State with a team-high 17 points and nine rebounds. Harvey said that Finkes is yet another in a long line of great post players in the Big 12, but is confident about defending against her. "We have made some adjustments as

a coaching staff and as a team, with the way we defend the interior in the last few games," Harvey said. "We've been pretty successful with it. We'll come out and do the same thing and hopefully we'll be able to keep some of their other players in check too."

For A&M center Kim Linder, the game will be extra special. Linder is the only senior on the A&M team, and said she is sad that her time at A&M is over.

"I can't believe it has gone by this fast," Linder said. "It has been four years and it seems like yesterday I was playing my first game here."

However, Linder is not upset that she will not get to play in the new Reed Arena.

"I thought I was going to get to play at least my senior year there," Linder said. "But it's kind of nice to go out here and be the last senior to play here."

"I just want to end the season on a good note," Linder said, "not just feeling good about how I'm playing, but about how the team as a whole is playing."



RYAN ROGERS/THE BATTALION  
Kera Alexander and the Aggies will play their final home game against KSU.

## Hard work keeps Alexander ahead of the game

By COLBY MARTIN  
Staff writer



BRANDON BOLLOM/THE BATTALION  
Sophomore Kera Alexander takes a shot against Baylor.

No matter who you talk to about sophomore forward Kera Alexander, one comment is always made about her — she is a hard worker. Teammates, coaches and fans alike are all adamant about the work ethic exhibited by the Texas A&M Women's Basketball Team's "spark plug."

"Kera is a blue-collar kid," Coach Candi Harvey said. "I can't remember one practice or game that she is not going all out."

Junior guard Kerri Patterson said she is also impressed with the sophomore's work ethic.

"Plain and simple, Kera works hard every day," Patterson said.

Harvey said Alexander's unique combination of desire and talent makes her an asset to the team.

"She gives her all whether she is coming off the bench or starting," Harvey said. "When you put talent on top of that, you have a special player."

Alexander has had to adjust to a starting role this year, but said she has not let it affect her.

"The only difference for me when I am starting is

the fact that I have to be ready to go from the start," Alexander said. "When I was coming off the bench I could sit and watch the flow of the game, but as a starter you are the one setting the tempo."

Alexander has been hot of late, but says her success is not as important as the team's.

"As a team we have really started to put it together the last two games against Texas and Tech," Alexander said. "We beat Texas pretty well, and we played Tech extremely tough at their place."

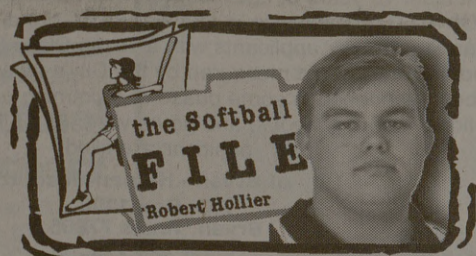
Harvey describes Alexander as a player who puts the team first, not her personal goals.

"Kera is one player that will scrap and hustle in every situation," Harvey said. "She is a player that is not worried about just scoring."

Alexander attended Whitesboro High School where she excelled in everything she did. She was valedictorian as well as a National Merit Scholar. Along with basketball, she also lettered in volleyball, cross country, track and field and tennis. She was the district's basketball MVP her junior season, but a knee injury her senior year kept her from repeating.

PLEASE SEE ALEXANDER ON PAGE 10.

## Young guns step up for Texas A&M Softball Team



The Texas A&M Softball Team (11-3) continued to rack up the wins last weekend, posting victories over UTSA 4-0, New Mexico State 3-2 and Penn State 3-2 and 7-0 in the Aggie Invitational.

### Offensive Firepower

The Aggies have put on a hitting clinic so far this season. They have out-hit their opponents by 53 points and have outscored their opponents 49 to 29. Freshman second baseman Rachel Lewis currently

leads the team with a .333 batting average and a .333 slugging and on-base percentage. Freshman outfielder Tiffany Esters is second on the team with a .324 batting average and on base percentage and leads the team with a .382 slugging percentage. The two have combined for 17 hits, 10 runs, five RBI and nine stolen bases so far.

### The Keys To Success

When this season began, the main question for the Aggies was how their pitching staff, which is composed of one sophomore and three freshmen, would handle the pressures of collegiate competition. So far, those questions have been answered.

Freshman pitcher Ashley Lewis has been the most dominating, starting the season 5-0 with a 0.33 ERA and 39 strikeouts in 42.1 innings. In all five of her wins Lewis has gone the distance, including two shutouts. Also, opponents are only hitting .128 against her.

Freshman pitcher Amy Vining is second on the

team with a 3-0 record and a 2.02 ERA. Freshman closer Kristina Gandara leads the team with two saves to go along with a 1-2 record and a 3.07 ERA.

In all, the pitching staff has a 1.34 ERA, eight complete games, 65 strikeouts and opponents are only batting .178 against them.

### For The Record

During the Aggie Invitational Tournament last weekend, freshman outfielder Amy Lawler hit her first collegiate home run against Penn State in a 3-2 victory. Also, senior outfielder Tanya Klecker has five stolen bases this season and is only 10 away from tying the all-time career record of 45 held by Judy Trussell (1984-87).

Next weekend, the Aggies will continue their tournament play when they to Columbus, Ga., to participate in the NFCA Tournament.

—Robert Hollier is a junior journalism major

## Aaron Jack fills difficult role for men's team

By COLBY MARTIN  
Staff writer

Sometimes your life does not follow the path you expect it to. Different factors that arise can change the course of plans you have set out. No one knows this fact better than Aaron Jack, a sophomore forward on the Texas A&M Men's Basketball Team.

Jack was born and raised in Tulsa, Okla., but transferred to a prep school in Connecticut before his senior year of high school.

"I was a 6-foot-7-inch, 195-pound kid who needed to go to a school like Loomis Chaffee (the prep school) in order to play Division I basketball," Jack said.

The decision definitely paid off for Jack as he signed to play at Penn State. After being recruited mainly by eastern schools, Jack said attending Penn State was an easy choice for him.

"Penn State was a great school, and I still

have a lot of friends that go there," Jack said.

Jack ended up wanting to leave Happy Valley, but not because of any reasons such as homesickness or disagreements with the coach. After Penn State doctors would not clear him to play because of three concussions he had suffered between December 1995 and October of 1996, Jack decided to take his talents elsewhere.

Jack was cleared by three separate doctors after making his decision to leave, so he decided to follow former Penn State Assistant Coach Frank Haith to College Station. "Coach Haith knew my game and knew what I could do as a player," Jack said.

So after all of the road blocks and setbacks, Jack was an Aggie. Even though it has been tough, he said he does not regret his decision.

"I love it here, the team is extremely close and we all would go to battle for each other," Jack said.

The 1998 season has offered one hard-

ship after another for Jack and the rest of the Aggies. After the loss of All-Big 12 forward Calvin Davis, Jack was forced into a more critical role for the team. He was thrown into the fire immediately and has performed better than anyone could have expected.

"I just tried to stay within myself, and do what I could to help us win," Jack said. "Coach Barone stressed that with the loss of Calvin, somebody new was going to have to step up, and I just tried to do that."

However, Coach Tony Barone said Jack's ability to step in and fill a starting role for the Aggies was no surprise to him.

"Aaron is absolutely, totally fundamentally sound," Barone said. "He's a guy who can pass, dribble and shoot."

Unfortunately circumstances led to Jack's insertion in to the Aggies' starting lineup, but he has made the most of the opportunity and shown he deserves the spot. Before the season, Barone said that if Jack was

not included in the Aggies' starting five, that they will have an outstanding team because Jack is an outstanding player.

Jack's maturity and natural leadership abilities have been impressive this season for the Aggies. Jack said he has tried to provide some leadership on the court in the wake of the all of the Aggies' injuries.

"I try to be a calm influence on the court, especially with the loss of a talent like Calvin," Jack said.

Although the Aggies have endured a disappointing season, Jack said the Aggies have the talent when healthy to be a competitive team in the Big 12. Jack knows what it takes to make it to the NCAA Tournament because he went to one while at Penn State.

"We feel like we can win every one of our upcoming games," Jack said. "We are not overmatched by any means. Once we get that first taste of winning a conference game, I think things will get easier."



RYAN ROGERS/THE BATTALION  
Making the most of his opportunities, Aaron Jack has been a force in the Aggie lineup.

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### The Department of Mathematics

will sponsor a lecture on  
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one of the pioneers of catastrophe theory  
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