

Aggies off to Big 12 Championships

Texas A&M Track and Field Team gears up for conference competition in Ames, Iowa



RYAN ROGERS/THE BATTALION
Long jumper Bashir Ramzy competes in the long jump at the Houston Invitational.

By MICHAEL FERGUSON
Staff writer

The Texas A&M Track and Field Team will wrap up the indoor season this weekend when it travels to Ames, Iowa, to compete in the Big 12 Indoor Conference Championships. This promises to be an extremely competitive meet with the northern Big 12 schools traditionally dominating the events. However, the Aggies are concluding their best indoor season in recent years and should rise up to meet the challenge.

After last year's disappointing performance in the conference championships, Texas A&M is out to prove that last year was nothing more than just a fluke. Coach Ted Nelson said last season was an inaccurate reflection of the team's ability.

"We were a better team than we showed. Things just didn't go right for us," Nelson said. "If you go back and look at the events, if they were qualifying eight for the finals, we'd be ninth. It just wasn't our day."

The Aggies have put that performance behind them and are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to redeem themselves. The experienced gained last year did help the team and coaches make adjustments this season in preparation for the season finale.

"We're going to approach it a little bit different this year. We went

into it a little apprehensive last year," Nelson said. "I think our athletes are going to react good to it."

This newfound approach coupled with the knowledge gained in

"I feel like our luck may change a little bit (this year)..."

Ted Nelson
Track and Field Coach

the first Big 12 Indoor Championships should lead to much more success for Texas A&M this weekend. Nelson said he has a positive attitude going into the meet.

"I feel like maybe our luck will change a little bit (this year), and we have the quality of athletes that can do that," Nelson said.

The Aggies will begin their quest for redemption today at 9 a.m. The preliminaries and semifinals will take place today, with the finals following on Saturday.

Following the Big 12 Indoor Conference Championships, the indoor season will be completed (with the exception of the NCAA Championships), and the outdoor season will get underway March 7 at the Alamo Early Bird in San Antonio.

Softball team on the road at NFCA Classic

By ROBERT HOLLIER
Staff writer

The No. 22 Texas A&M Softball Team (11-3), coming off a second-place finish in the Aggie Invitational, will face its toughest competition of the season as it travels to Columbus, Ga., to participate in the NFCA Classic Tournament this weekend.

The Aggies will play No. 3 Michigan at 3 p.m. on Friday followed by No. 7 Arizona State at 5 p.m. On Saturday, they will play Nicholls State at 9 a.m. and Canisius at 11 a.m. followed by bracket play on Sunday. Other Big 12 teams participating will be No. 6 Oklahoma, No. 9 Oklahoma State, No. 12 Missouri, No. 16 Kansas, Texas and Nebraska.

"This is the best and toughest tournament in the country," Coach Jo Evans said. "This tournament will give us a good idea on how far we've come and where we need the most improvement."

Senior catcher and co-captain Mary McGuire agreed, saying this tournament will provide the team with some tremendous competition against some of the country's top-ranked teams.

At this point in the season, much of the team's success can be attributed to consistent and dominating pitching performances.

The starters, which include senior Trina Solesbee, sophomore Danielle Lemuth and freshmen Ashley Lewis

and Amy Vining, have gone 10-1 (including eight complete games and two shutouts) with a 1.34 ERA and have allowed only a .178 batting average against them. Freshman closer Kristina Gandara has also come in to nail down two saves.

"Right now they (the pitchers) are our team's biggest strength," McGuire said. "When they get into really tough situations, they always seem to get the job done. The more comfortable they get, the more they excel."

Evans said the team still needs to get more consistent and productive hitting.

"We need to be more aggressive at the plate," Evans said. "We need to get more consistent RBI production from our lineup to be more effective. Lack of hitting probably costs us first place in the tournament."

McGuire said the team just has not clicked in all phases of the game yet.

"When the season began, we were hitting the ball so well, but we weren't making the plays in the field," McGuire said. "In the last tournament, we fielded the ball well, but we couldn't hit consistently. We just need to put it together."

Evans said the Aggies have played as well as she had hoped, but they know they can play better and continue to improve.

After this tournament, the Aggies will return home to play a doubleheader against the University of Texas-Arlington on March 4.

Baseball team faces tough Big 12 opener

By TRAVIS HARSCH
Staff writer

The Aggie baseball team will try to make up for a mid-season loss Friday as they open up Big 12 play against Texas Tech, one of the preseason favorites to win the conference.

Coach Mark Johnson said the Red Raiders are a team that can do a lot of things well.

"We're facing one of the teams that is favored to win the championship, and you hate to open up your Big 12 season like that, but I'm glad we're at home," Johnson said. "They're going to bring outstanding pitching, and they can run the bases well and they're going to hit. Texas Tech has always been a hitting ballclub, they've got a great staff, we've got our hands full, we're going to have to play well."

Senior Ryan Rupe, sophomore Casey Fossom and junior Matt Ward will start in the three game series for A&M, Johnson said, as the Aggie offense will try to cope with an injury to one of its key components, junior Jason Tyner.

Although the Aggies did lose 10-7 to Sam Houston State Tuesday, Johnson said he did not think that would have much of an effect on the Tech game, because all of the conference teams are just getting started.

"We always start with a chance to win and we want to put our best game out there," Johnson said. "Nobody at this time is on full cylinders there's not going to be a Big 12 team on full cylinders in the latter part of February."

The Aggies are ranked fifteenth in the latest Collegiate Baseball poll. Johnson said although it was nice to be noticed, the rankings really do not have all that much importance.

"It's fun to have recognition, but nobody knows who the fifteenth team in the nation is," Johnson said.

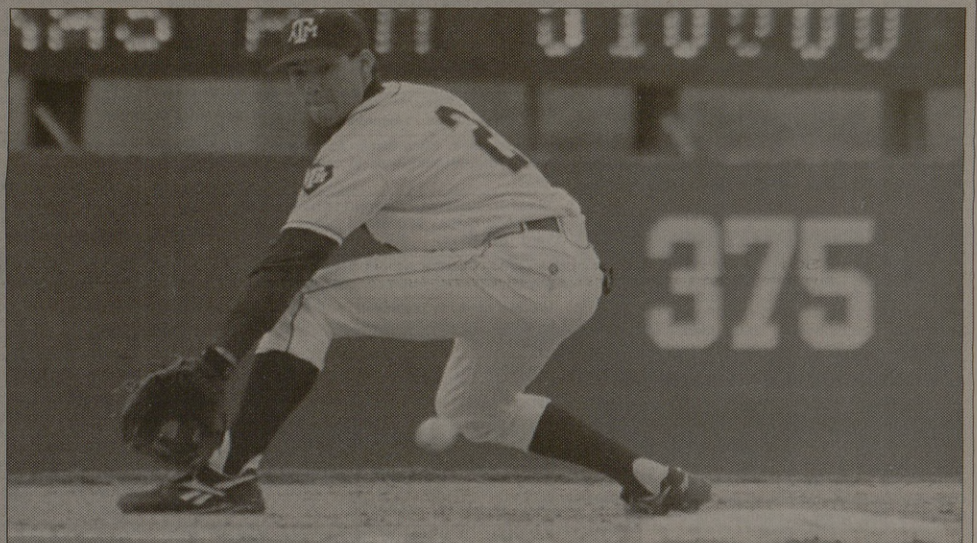
The first game of the series will start at 3 p.m. on Friday with Saturday's game at 3 p.m. also and Sunday's beginning at 2 p.m.



Johnson

"He rested over the weekend and Monday felt like he would go full speed," Johnson said. "Then he got an infield hit that he had to leg out, and it tightened up, and so we took him out. It's a day by day deal, I'm not as optimistic right now as I was Monday, he's got a pretty good strain."

"He's going to have to tell us how it feels, it's more important now that he plays at 95 percent than not playing at all, he's so critical to offense that we need to have him in there."



BRANDON BOLLOM/THE BATTALION
Junior third baseman Craig Kuzmic backhands a ground ball in a game against Mississippi.

Women's tennis team at home with matches against BYU and KSU

By AL LAZARUS
Staff writer

The No. 38 Texas A&M Women's Tennis Team will face No. 14 Brigham Young University at 1:30 p.m. today at the Omar Smith Tennis Center, and remain at home Saturday afternoon to take on Kansas State University at 1:30 p.m. The Aggies (7-1, 0-1) are coming off a

disappointing loss at No. 36 Baylor on Wednesday, 5-4. After winning four of six singles matches, A&M needed only one doubles victory to secure the match, but could not manage it.

In BYU, the Aggies face a perennial power that is fresh off an upset of the No. 2 team in the nation, Pepperdine University.

"BYU is an excellent team," Coach Bobby Kleinecke said. "They are a top-



San Miguel

15 team, and they're just getting back from the national indoors, so they probably have more experience than we have at this point of the season."

The Aggies are coming off a tough road stretch during

which they played regional powers LSU, Rice and Baylor.

"It's going to be good to get back home again," Kleinecke said. "We've been on the road for quite a while, and it should be good to play some home matches."

At the beginning of this season, among the Aggies' goals were to finish first in the Big 12. After losing to Baylor, they will likely have to win their remaining conference matches to accomplish this goal,

starting with KSU on Saturday.

A&M was victorious, 6-3, at KSU last year. Junior Monica San Miguel said although the Aggies defeated KSU in Kansas last year, she does not expect an easy go of it this time around.

"They were a pretty strong team last year, and they are supposed to be even stronger now," she said. "We are just glad to get a chance to play them at home."

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