

Aggies put No. 14 ranking on the line vs. KSU

By TRAVIS HARSCH
Staff writer

As their Big 12 season approaches the halfway point, the Texas A&M Baseball Team will take on the Kansas State Wildcats in an important conference series for both teams this weekend at Olsen Field.

The Aggies will be looking to continue their recent hot streak, one which has seen them take two of three from Oklahoma last weekend and sweep a doubleheader against the Houston Cougars on Tuesday.

Ryan Rupe, who will start the first game for the Aggies, will be trying to improve on his impressive season record of 6-1 and his solid ERA of 2.10. Rupe said he will continue to work with what has brought him success.

"I need to do what I've been doing, work the ball in and out, let my defense carry most of the outs and get all three pitches over the plate," Rupe said.

The way the season has gone so far for Kansas State, El Niño should receive some sort of special award at the postseason banquet. The Wildcats have only played seven conference games because of weather can-

cellations, compiling a 3-4 record, with two of those wins over Texas last weekend at home. Coach Mark Johnson said the Wildcats will be coming in on a high after beating the Longhorns, despite battling some defensive troubles.

"They're hitting around .290, their fielding has been a little bit below average, they're making some errors, but they're doing some things well on the mound," Johnson said. "They're a team that hasn't played much, they've had some tough luck, they haven't gotten all their games in, but they beat Texas two out of three last week, so they've got to feel good about that."

Rupe, Casey Fossum and Matt Ward will take the mound for the Aggies in the series and Johnson said their performances have been a big part of the Aggies' 23-10 record.

"One of the main reasons we've had success on the weekends is that we've pitched well, and we're going to have to get that to continue, Rupe and Fossum and Ward are going to have to do well, and there's no reason to think that they won't," Johnson said. "I'm encouraged that our pitching is giving us a chance to win."

After losing the first game of the three-

game set last year, A&M pulled off two late-inning comebacks to win the next two games and the series. The wins gave the Aggies a 6-2 lead in the all-time series, which first started in 1985.

This series will mark the midpoint of conference play and Johnson said he believed there were opportunities to get better as he evaluated his team.

"My feeling was that we could hit better, there's room for improvement, we really haven't had hot bats," Johnson said. "I think we can improve offensively and I know we can improve defensively, we've been able to steal bases. It's the little parts of the game you've got to be sure you're doing right."

Rupe said the first half has left the Aggies right where they want to be.

"I think we've put ourselves in good position, we've obviously put ourselves in position to win the Big 12, and let everybody know that we are a team to beat, we still have some ball to play, but I think we're going to do well," Rupe said.

The Friday and Saturday games will begin at 7 p.m., with the Sunday matinee scheduled to start at 1 p.m.

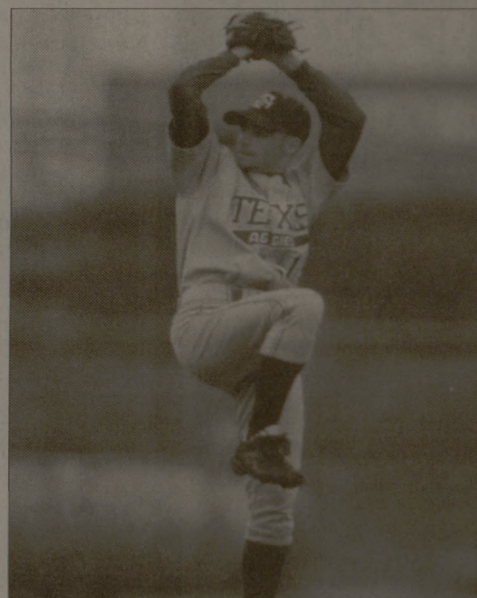


PHOTO COURTESY SPORTS INFORMATION
Sophomore **Casey Fossum** will be going for his second consecutive victory Saturday.

Track and takes late S Break in Fl

By MICHAEL FER
Staff writer

After hosting the College Competition and Relays, the Texas A&M Track and Field team will return to action this weekend in Florida for the Florida Relays. The east coast schools include Florida State and the University of Florida. The Aggies will be competing in the meet along with the University of Texas.

Coach Abe Brown spoke about the advantages of traveling to Florida to compete in the relays.

"It gives us some flexibility. It gives us some new faces to see," Brown said. "We really don't have to go very far to get all of the competition. It just gives us an edge represented in other parts of the country."

After the grueling winter out competition of the season, Coach Brown mentioned the athletes will be held at high altitude events in order to prepare for the upcoming outdoor season.

"(Adrien) Sawyer will triple jump this week, but the 4x100-meter shuttle relay will be the main event," Brown said.

"(Detrich) Clark won the 100. She won't be in the jumps. Larry Wade is still a tough indoor so he's going to be a challenge for us."

With the outdoor season starting its third full week of competition, Brown said the athletes should benefit many of the athletes more than ten weeks of indoor training. Brown alluded to the tire and the precautions taken when looking at the big picture.

"We still have a long season," Brown said. "If you're not careful, you're going to overload some people and have a chance of losing those people."

After the Aggies return, they will travel to Austin for the Texas Relays. These relays boasted some of the top talent in the world, including athletes such as Johnson and Carl Lewis.

The Texas Relays will take place in Austin, Texas, on March 24-25.

Softball team opens Big 12 play

By ROBERT HOLLIER
Staff writer

Coming off a doubleheader sweep against Sam Houston State Wednesday, the Texas A&M Softball Team (22-14-1) will begin conference play this weekend on the road against Iowa State on Saturday and No. 12 Nebraska on Sunday. Both series will be doubleheaders and will start at noon.

"If we could go 3-1 this weekend, that would be a great start for us," Coach Jo Evans said. "A split with Nebraska on the road would be great and I believe we could sweep Iowa State at their place."

After competing in five tournaments, the Aggies should have the much-needed experience their young team needed and they feel they are ready.

"We're as ready as we'll ever be," senior catcher and co-captain Marianne McGuire said. "Our pitching is stacked. They should carry us like they have all season."

"Right now, we're not making the routine plays and that worries us the most," McGuire added. "Sometimes our intensity is also lacking and we're

not always as focused as we should be in the field."

So far this season, the Aggies have committed 63 errors including 13 at the Sacramento tournament.

Evans said poor field play has been the team's Achilles' heel and she would like to see more consistency from the team defensively.

"Inconsistency in the field is our biggest problem and our goal is to get that consistency back," she said. "It's costly in any game when you make errors."

We played well in the beginning in California, then the wheels fell off. We won two in a row against some tough teams, but then we lost our focus and lost three straight."

The Aggies will have to maintain that consistency and focus when they travel to Lincoln for the doubleheader against Nebraska.

"They're a very solid team offensively and defensively," Evans said. "They hit the ball very well and they have some marquee All-American players."

Iowa State is definitely a team that could beat us. They are a scrappy, well-coached team, but I believe we can beat them this weekend."

McGuire said the Nebraska offense is its biggest strength and will be the main concern for the Aggies.

"Their lineup really worries me the most," McGuire said. "Everybody on their team swings with no fear, but our pitchers should be able to handle it."



McGuire

Men's tennis team faces pair of conference foes this afternoon

By AL LAZARUS
Staff writer

The No. 19 Texas A&M Men's Tennis Team faces a Big 12 doubleheader today at the Omar Smith Tennis Center against the Missouri Tigers and No. 55 Oklahoma Sooners. A&M will begin with Missouri at noon and will then take on the Sooners at 6 p.m.

The Aggies (7-2, 2-1) are coming off a 4-3 victory last Saturday against a tough Oklahoma State team that features the No. 1 singles player, as well as the No. 1 doubles team, in the nation.

A&M defeated the Tigers twice last year, once during the regular season in Missouri, and again in the Big 12 Championships in Austin.

Missouri will cancel its men's tennis program after this season, but A&M Coach Tim Cass said he expects a tough match from Missouri despite its lame-tiger status.

"It's disappointing that this will be our last time to play (Missouri), but we are certainly not going to take the match lightly," Cass said.

The Aggies traveled to Oklahoma last year, and lost, 4-3, to the Sooners.

"We have a lot of respect for Oklahoma, they have had a good first part of the season," Cass said. "In order for us to hang in the Big 12 race, we have to win out, because no one is going to win the Big 12 with two conference losses."

Junior Brent Horan, who is the Aggies' team co-captain, said he expects a tough match from the Sooners.

"They are a solid team and have played well against some good teams this season, so we know they will give us quite a challenge," Horan said.

Horan, who is 7-1 in dual match singles play this season, admits that revenge will certainly be on the Aggies' minds against Oklahoma.

"You always want to beat the teams that beat you," he said, "so we will be ready to play."

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