

# THE BUSINESS OF WINNING

Coach Melvin Watkins left all he had known in North Carolina for the challenge of building a basketball tradition at Texas A&M.

JEFF WEBB  
Sports editor

The most noticeable feature about the office of new Texas A&M Basketball Coach Melvin Watkins is nothing at all. The walls stand bare, and aside from random stacks of papers that sit around the room, the surroundings are pretty boring.

Watkins is not familiar with the conventions of moving into a new office because until one month ago, he had spent a quarter-century at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte.

Looking past the six-inch-high stacks of phone messages that await his reply, Watkins sits back in his chair, arms folded, and dreams about how long it will take for the Aggies, his Aggies, to win the National Championship.

"I've looked at some film, and I know they (Aggies) had some injuries last year, but we won't spend time on last year," he said. "We need to look forward and bring some fresher air in here."

"We want to have a winning basketball team, but more importantly, we want to win at life. I want to win the National Championship. Is that realistic? I don't know, but I ask my players to think big."

A winning attitude is something Watkins earned a reputation for as a player and a coach at UNCC. As a starting guard, Watkins led the 49ers to a 28-5 record in 1977 on their way to a Final Four berth where they would

be knocked off by eventual champion Marquette. As a coach, Watkins began his stint in Charlotte in 1996 by losing three of his first five games. The team rebounded to win 10 of their next 11 games and made the NCAA Tournament for the first time since Watkins was a player. Leaving the only place he had

**"Melvin's voice started breaking. Tears started running down my face."**

Judy Rose  
UNCC Athletic Director

ever lived was difficult, but was a decision he felt was right at the time.

"Some of it was talking to Wally (Groff, athletic director), and after talking to him, I started doing a little recruiting of myself," he said. "After I investigated it and found out more about it, it looked like a heck of an opportunity."

Current UNCC basketball coach Bobby Lutz served as an assistant under Watkins during his brief two-year tenure. Lutz and Watkins also worked together as assistants under former coach Jeff Mullins. Many people in Charlotte were taken aback by

Watkins' departure.

"I was surprised, but not shocked," Lutz said. "When you've been in the business as long as I have, you should never be shocked at what happens. What he was able to do in such a short time at UNCC is incredible."

Watkins also is the first African-American basketball coach in A&M history. Despite the fact that many try to make light of the situation, Watkins refuses to see it as a racial matter.

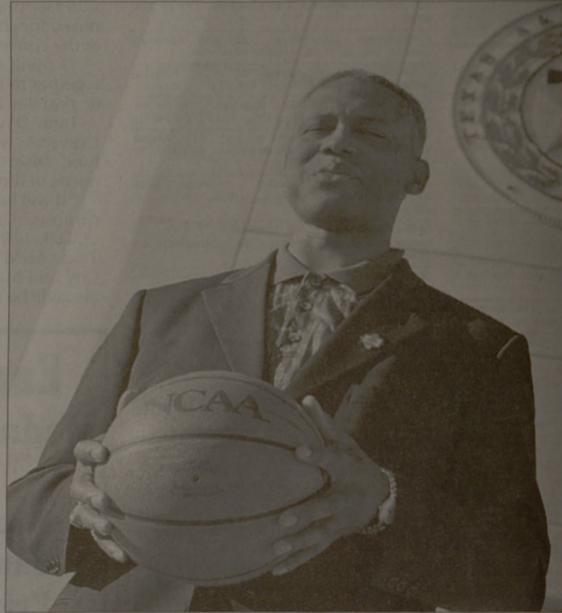
"What is the color of a basketball? Orange," he said.

Lutz said that Watkins' character overshadows any racial questions proposed to the coach.

"I consider him one of the best professionals in the business and the best person," Lutz said. "It's rare to find such a class-person who is also a great coach and an open-minded individual. He is proud of his race, and he's also the man who is best for the job."

Watkins has a reputation for developing close, family-like relationships with his players. When reserve UNCC guard Charles Hayward was diagnosed with leukemia during last season, Watkins called for the season to be dedicated to him and stood by him as if he was a family member. UNCC Athletic Director Judy Rose found out about the incident from Watkins and said he was profoundly affected by the incident.

PLEASE SEE WATKINS ON PAGE 8.



New Texas A&M Coach Melvin Watkins makes sure players will adhere to the code that makes them winners on the court and in the game of life.

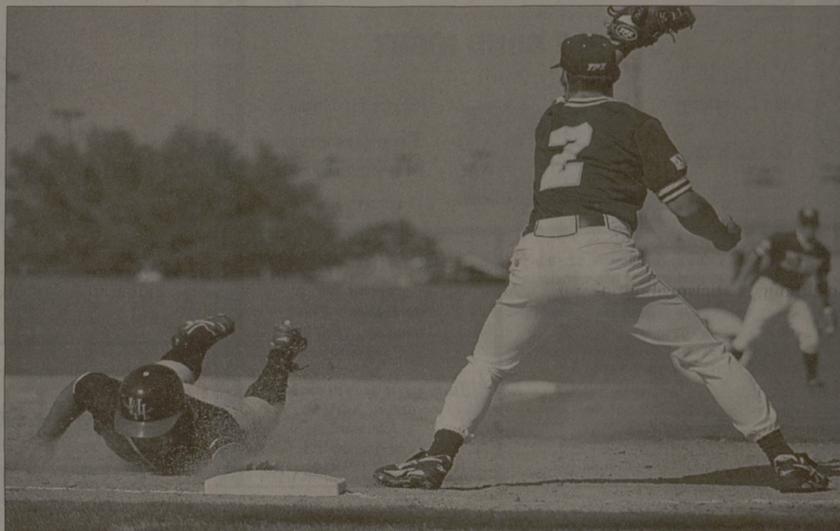
## Texas A&M travels to Waco to cage Bears

By TRAVIS HARSCH  
Staff writer

The Texas A&M Baseball Team will be playing for first place in the Big 12 this weekend as they travel to Lawrence, Kan., to take on the Kansas Jayhawks. The current first place team, Baylor, won two games against Kansas State in midweek action, so a sweep by A&M would put the Aggies into the conference lead.

Coach Mark Johnson said the Aggies will not be concerned with that when they take the field this weekend.

"We're not going in there with the idea to sweep; we're going in to play the best games that



Texas A&M's Craig Kuzmic tackles the challenge of beating Baylor for the Big 12 title this weekend.

**Baseball Update**

**Record:** 34-15, 16-8 Big 12  
**Next Game:** at Kansas  
**Time:** 7 p.m.  
**Scheduled Starters:**  
Ryan Rupe (7-4, 3.30 ERA) vs.  
Les Walfrond (3-4, 8.00)

we can," Johnson said. "If we sweep, if we win two out of three, we'll take that and go from there."

Johnson said the Jayhawks have had some difficulties this season.

"They were hitting .311 going into their series with Texas, their fielding hasn't been very good, they've struggled defensively and they've struggled a little bit on the mound," Johnson said. "They're a pretty good offensive team. That seems to be their strong suit and they've got a couple of pitchers with good ERAs."

Johnson also said warmer temperatures in the north will help Kansas.

"I think northern teams start picking it up a little more towards the end of the season. They start getting warmer weather and get more practice time, so we really anticipate a tough series," Johnson said.

That would be a turnaround from last year's games in College Station when A&M swept the Jayhawks. Ryan Rupe got a 10-5 win in the first game of the series, the last game he pitched before a blood clot was discovered near his clavicle. The Aggies came back from an 8-0 deficit to win the second game, 10-9, and shut out Kansas in

game three, 8-0 to take the series. The sweep increased A&M's all-time lead in the series to 16-5.

Kansas will be trying to rebound from a sweep by Texas in a midweek series which saw the Jayhawks lose two extra-inning games. A&M is coming off an extra-inning loss of its own, a 10-inning affair which the Aggies dropped to Houston, 9-7. That game followed a weekend in which A&M took two of three from the Longhorns to go to the 12th spot in both the Baseball America and the Collegiate Baseball polls.

## Big 12 schedule ends this weekend for Aggies

By ROBERT HOLLIER  
Staff writer

The Texas A&M Softball Team (32-22-1, 6-8) will conclude its conference schedule this weekend when they host No. 19 Texas Tech on Saturday and Baylor on Sunday. Both series are doubleheaders and will start at noon at the Aggie Softball Field.

The Aggies are currently in sixth place in the Big 12 and need to make a strong showing this weekend to possibly move up in the standings for a better seeding at the conference tournament.

"Last weekend, we got great pitching and tremendous defensive play," Coach Jo Evans said. "We put it all together last weekend and I was really pleased with our team's play."

"If we want to win this weekend, we have to carry the intensity over from last weekend."

Last weekend, the Aggies split two doubleheaders from No. 5 Oklahoma and No. 10 Oklahoma State behind some timely hitting, solid defense and tremendous pitching.

"Our outfielders were aggressive. Our overall defense didn't make any costly mistakes and our pitching was excellent," Evans said.

Freshman Amy Vining, who pitched two games last weekend, agreed, adding the Aggies' defense saved the day on many occasions.

"Our defense was amazing," Vining said. "Our outfield didn't let a

ball get passed them this weekend. We've been aggressive and learning every game."

Vining also expressed confidence that this weekend will be a turning point and where they will stand in the Big 12 tournament.

"This weekend is very important leading up to the conference tournament," she said. "I feel like we should be able to sweep Baylor, and Tech could hold some problems for us. They've got a couple of guys who can really hit the ball."

"Baylor has some good hitters who can hit the ball. Amy Vining is a good pitcher for us. She has a good rising fastball and a good knuckler."

Evans said if the team could play with the same intensity shown in Oklahoma, the Aggies have no doubts about this weekend.

"We feel like we can win a couple of these games," Evans said. "We have to keep the intensity and confidence is strong right now. We need to stay aggressive on the plate and in the field."

After the Aggies conclude their conference play, they will travel to Oklahoma City May 1-3 to play in the Big 12 Tournament.

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