

HOCKEYTOWN, TEXAS

Texas A&M Inline Hockey Team advanced to Las Vegas where its gamble almost paid off

BY TOM KENNEDY
Staff Writer

When it comes to winning in sports, there is a widespread belief that a team needs a player with a do-what-it-takes attitude and high motivation to succeed.

It seems the Texas A&M Inline Hockey Team has about a dozen of them, so it is no surprise the team is becoming recognized as a national power.

The squad advanced to the National Tournament in Las Vegas, held June 18-22, by beating the University of Texas in the final of the Southwest Collegiate Hockey League Tournament.

The round-robin RHIA Collegiate National Tournament consisted of six collegiate teams and two pro-compilation squads made of professional inline hockey players.

The Aggies notched wins over UNLV and one pro-compilation team by scores of 5-4 and 7-5, respectively, but losses to Cal-Poly and the University of Washington (St. Louis) ended the Aggies' season and handed them a fifth-place finish in the final national standings.

Outstanding play by sophomore forward Dane Madison, the Aggies' point leader during the tournament, and junior defenseman and assists leader Stephen Malek helped key the offensive attack.

Senior forward and coach James Stenson, the regular-season point leader, provided guidance throughout the season. Sophomore goalie Luke Wade was credited with a major part of the squad's success throughout the tournament, containing the other teams' offenses and keeping the Aggies within reach in every game.

"He totally dominated the shots," Chad Cran-

ford, a senior forward, said. "The score doesn't really reflect it, but the average score is about 12-8."

The Aggies are no strangers to success. In fact, they are starting to get used to it. This year marked the third straight year they have appeared at nationals. They said they can partially attribute it to being a cohesive unit.

"We'd skate 20 minutes of drills, then probably 30 minutes of shooting and breakout drills and then we do more skating at the end of the scrimmage."

— Kris Cravens
Inline Hockey Team senior defenseman

"It's been a great experience, a great bunch of guys," Cranford said. "There are twelve of us, and they've become some of my best friends here at school."

The team also owes a major portion of its winning ways to its routine practice sessions.

"We practiced everyday," senior defenseman Kris Cravens said. "We'd skate 20 minutes of drills, then probably 30 minutes of shooting and breakout drills and then we do more skating at the end of the scrimmage."

The team makeup varies in playing experience

and origin. Most of the team started out playing ice hockey, but the desire to continue playing at A&M and the lack of local ice rinks to play on left two options — a 90-minute drive to Houston for ice or stay local and play inline hockey.

The members come from all over the continent. Their homes include places such as Texas, Colorado, Illinois and Canada. Some of the players have experience on their high-school teams, a luxury which some native Texans are not afforded.

A new Sport Court that was recently laid down provides the team with a convenient, on-campus practice facility and an opportunity to better themselves. Possible endorsements from major inline hockey equipment producers are on the horizon. Cravens attributes this to the combined work of the team and their regent Tom Reber.

"We've got a lot of support from the school," Cravens said.

People who are interested in becoming members of the Texas A&M Inline Hockey Team should be aware of some rule changes such as a four-man lineup (without a center), no icing, no center ice and a different puck.

According to Cranford, the play is considered "less physical" since there is no contact when the puck is not involved and the game is based more on fast breaks and quick shots. This opens a new window for smaller, more agile players with quick acceleration who might not have been able to play as well under the constant contact of ice hockey.

Tryouts for the team are generally held in September, but no date has been set for next year. Prospective members can look for a booth at the MSC Open House in the fall semester or contact the team's regent, Reber, for information.



THE BATTALION FILE PHOTO

...ve-Hole! Senior defenseman Kris Cravens helped the A&M Inline Hockey Team to a fifth-place finish, by shutting down opponents.

Selig prepares to accept position

NEW YORK (AP) — Nearly six years after becoming acting commissioner, Bud Selig is set to take the job on a permanent basis when owners meet July 9 at Chicago.

Selig, acting commissioner since September 1992, repeatedly has said he does not want the position on a permanent basis. However, he also has refused to rule out accepting the job.

Electing his commissioner is the top item for the special meeting, which was confirmed by an NL owner who spoke on the condition of anonymity. Owners also are expected to finalize the format of the 1999 schedule at the session.

Earlier this month, Selig told baseball executives he intends to accept the job, according to a member of the ruling executive council and a baseball lawyer who spoke on the condition they not be identified.

Selig, the owner of the Milwaukee Brewers, is expected to place his interest in the team in trust for his children and grandchildren. There is little opposition to him becoming commissioner.

Selig would become baseball's first commissioner since Sept. 7, 1992, when Fay Vincent resigned under pressure. Later that week, owners elected Selig chair of the ruling executive council.

While the position gave him much of the commissioner's leadership role, he lacked the legal authority, which remained with the 10-member council.

Tagliabue praises Houston plans

NFL commissioner visits with Bob McNair about possible new football franchise, invites formal presentation to owners

HOUSTON (AP) — Bob McNair has a deadline and a mission to meet it first.

NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue met Monday with the Houston businessman who hopes to land a new football franchise.

Tagliabue offered no guarantees but praised the city's plans for a new stadium and invited McNair to make a formal presentation to owners at their October meeting. Houston and Los Angeles are competing for one expansion franchise that the NFL expects to award. The league wants to have the new team in place by 2002.

"Whoever is prepared first gets the 32nd franchise," McNair said. "Right now, it's our belief that we've made a lot of progress and we're in front of the competition and I want us to remain in front."

He has everything in place to make his proposal except a formal agreement among the city, Harris County and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo as to who will pay for what part of a new stadium.

"We have momentum and if we continue to make progress, hopefully, we'll have an agreement in place in 30-60 days for our presentation," McNair said.

Tagliabue and Carolina Panthers owner Jerry Richardson — chair of the NFL stadium committee — met with McNair, Mayor Lee Brown and Harris County Judge Robert Eckels to see what progress the group has made in its attempts to replace the Houston Oilers, who have moved to Tennessee.

"There is competition but they (NFL) can't speak

for all interests," McNair said. "They want teams in Houston and Los Angeles. I think getting our proposal in soon will be key to who gets the expansion franchise. The other city may not get a team for four or five years."

Tagliabue liked the stadium plan. "This partnership has a great plan for a great stadium that will be an instant landmark," Tagliabue said. "With the progress that's been made, it's apparent they're going to make this stadium a reality."

Tagliabue said McNair's group would be allowed to make a formal presentation, although all parties have not agreed to a financing plan to build a 69,000-seat retractable roof stadium on county land adjacent to the Astrodome.

McNair's Houston NFL Holding is working with the Houston-Harris County Sports Authority and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo to agree on how to finance the proposed stadium. It would house a football team, the rodeo and other activities.

"Success or failure is in our hands," McNair said. "The next 30-60 days are going to be very important. I just hope that in three years Mr. Tagliabue will be sitting next to me for the kickoff of our first NFL game."

All the parties are trying to work out details over how to share the stadium's advertising and naming rights among Houston NFL Holdings and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

Rodeo president Jim Bloodworth sounded positive. "We've never been very far apart. We are close to reaching an agreement," Bloodworth said. "This is just very complicated but I'd say we're close to reaching an agreement I can take to our executive committee. They have the final decision."

Tagliabue declined to compare the chances of Los Angeles and Houston for a new team.

Nowitzki suits up for Dallas in 1998-99 season

DALLAS (AP) — German sensation Dirk Nowitzki said yesterday he will play for the Dallas Mavericks next season instead of continuing to play in Europe.

Nowitzki, who initially said he would need two more seasons overseas before being ready for the NBA, was drafted ninth overall by Milwaukee in last week's draft then traded to Dallas. Mavericks officials flew to Germany the next day to try to convince him to play in the United States next season.

Nowitzki arrived in Dallas on Sunday, stayed at the home of coach-general manager Don Nelson, held a news conference Monday and attended a barbecue with prospective teammates that night. Another news conference was scheduled yesterday to discuss his decision.

"Nellie called me 20 minutes ago and said he's agreed to play here," team spokesperson Tony Fay said yesterday morning. "Nellie was excited and probably a little relieved."

The 20-year-old forward said he was concerned that his game was not polished enough for the NBA and he wanted to make sure he was free to help the German national team qualify for the Olympics.

Nelson assured Nowitzki he's ready, as many other top league executives have said, and the Mavericks have agreed to let him leave the team in the fall and winter to

play for his country's squad.



The 6-foot-11, 237-pound Nowitzki was facing a deadline of yesterday to decide whether he would play for the Mavericks. Negotiations would be barred after midnight due to an impending lockout by NBA team owners, who are embroiled in a labor dispute with the players' union.

Nowitzki also planned to return to Germany yesterday, Fay said.

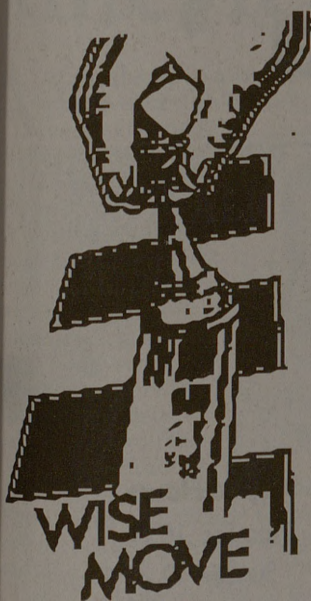
Nelson was afraid to let Nowitzki return to Germany unsigned because he would be free to negotiate with European clubs. He turned up the heat on Nowitzki by hinting that Dallas would look at other players if Nowitzki did not give the team an answer yesterday.

The Mavericks cannot offer him a contract because the rookie salary scale is up in the air due to the labor dispute.

Nowitzki said Monday that money was not a stumbling block to playing in Dallas — although he said he could earn more playing in Europe.

But Nowitzki said he still wonders if he has enough bulk on his 237-pound frame to play in the NBA.

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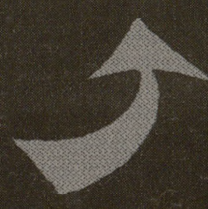
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