

Sports

A&M takes bite out of Bears in three-game victory

BY ROBERT HOLLIER
The Battalion

Despite an upcoming showdown against No. 13 Texas this Wednesday, the No. 17 Texas A&M Volleyball Team (9-1, 2-0) did not look past Baylor in its conference home opener Sunday at G. Rollie White Coliseum.

Coming off a victory over Texas Tech Friday, the Aggies wasted little time, taking care of the Bears in three games 15-10, 15-7, 15-9. With the loss, Baylor falls to 6-7 and 0-2 in the Big 12.

In the first game, the Aggies opened with a quick 1-0 lead on a service ace from junior outside hitter Summer Strickland, but Baylor responded with seven of the next 10 points.

Trailing 7-4, the Aggies would reel off five straight points to take a 9-7 lead. With the Bears making a comeback, the momentum went back to the Aggies on a tremendous dig by Strickland that gave the Aggies a 13-10 lead.

A&M put the game away on two straight kills by sophomore middle blocker Heather McWhirter and senior outside hitter Stacy Sykora.

Strickland led the team on the defensive side of the ball with five digs and a block. She had 19 digs and four blocks in the match.

"Summer (Strickland) is one of the best blockers I've ever coached," Aggie Volleyball coach Laurie Corbelli said. "No one knows about her, and she showed you can't attack her. Her game is so complete. She has great technique and timing."

Game two was more of the same for the Aggies

as they jumped out to a commanding 7-0 lead, including a service ace by junior middle blocker Amber Woolsey.

Baylor rallied with four early points and three points late in the game, but A&M was too strong in the end, scoring three straight points. A&M's final point came on a kill by Sykora, her ninth of the game.

"We struggled early on getting our offensive rhythm going, but you have to give Baylor credit. ... they are well-coached."

— Laurie Corbelli
A&M Volleyball coach

The Aggies asserted their defense in game two, holding Baylor to a .033 hitting percentage. The Aggies also blocked eight shots in the game. Baylor only blocked four A&M attacks. The Aggies had a .297 hitting percentage.

Baylor jumped out to a quick 5-0 lead in game three before the Aggies rallied to tie the game.

The Aggies would dominate the rest of the way, scoring eight points for a commanding 13-5 lead. The Bears responded with four straight points before the Aggies put the final two points down for the victory.

Baylor coach Bryan Hosfeld said his team was ready to play, but just ran into a team hitting on all cylinders.

"The Aggies were quite impressive today," Hosfeld said. "They didn't hit the ball as well as they did against Texas Tech, but they were still very good. They have good ball control, and their defense is solid. Sykora also does a good job of keeping the freshmen under control on the court."

Corbelli said she was impressed with the way the team played but wanted to see a sharper performance early in the match.

"We had some momentum coming into the Baylor game," Corbelli said. "We struggled early on getting our offensive rhythm going, but you have to give Baylor credit. They always play excellent defense and they are well-coached."

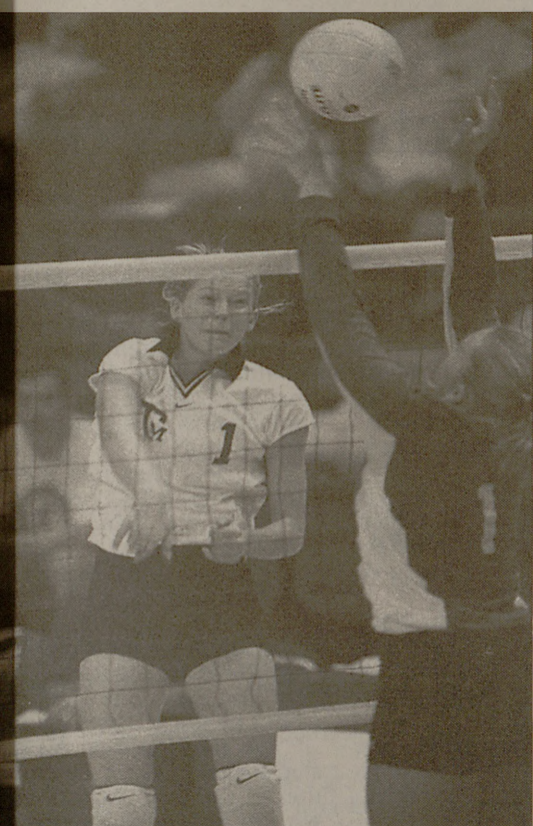
"Our blocking wasn't as dominant and our timing was off. Early, I thought we were impatient, but our middles hung in there and kept their focus. Once the team settled down, our blocking and our hitting came around."

The Aggies out-hit and dominated the net the entire match.

A&M held the Bears to a .108 hitting percentage in the first game and a .069 percentage in game three.

Despite strong performances on both sides of the net, All-American Sykora said the team still has some work to do before it reaches its peak.

"We are starting to come together more as a team," she said. "We still have to come together more, though. Our coach can't be out there with us all the time, and the players have to look to each other more on the court."



MIKE FUENTES/THE BATTALION

Senior outside hitter **Celia Howes** spikes the ball in A&M's three-game win over Baylor Saturday.

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