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Aggies finish second at UTA softball tournament

BEN WESTBROOK
 The Battalion

The Texas A&M Softball Team made it to the championship game at the UTA/Pepsi-Cola Inter-Collegiate Classic in Grand Prairie Sunday before falling to No. 24 Illinois-Chicago, 3-1.

The women are off to their best start since the 1991 season, in part because of the strong pitching of Amy Vining and Jordana Barrack. The two hurlers combined to finish the tournament with a 0.29 earned run average.

The women opened tournament action Friday against the Tulsa Golden Hurricane. A three-run first inning would be all the women would need as they went on to beat Tulsa, 6-1. Vining dominated by pitching the complete game and surrendering just four hits. The one run scored by Tulsa was not earned.

The Aggies' second game of pool play was against the University of Texas-Arlington Mavericks, whom the Aggies defeated twice in a doubleheader last Tuesday. The women showed they still had UTA's number by pounding out an 8-0 victory, rocking Maverick pitcher Amanda Kirk for thirteen hits. For the Aggies, Barrack shut UTA out for the second time in four days.

The Aggies improved their record to 5-0 Saturday with a 2-0 win against the Arkansas Razorbacks. In the first-ever meeting between the two teams, the Aggies escaped with two unearned runs in the second inning.

Vining improved her record to 3-0 and struck out eight while keeping her ERA at 0.00 for the

season. The win gave the Aggies the top seed in their bracket and a first-round bye in the tournament.

In the softballers' first game of the championship bracket, the women continued the trend of a quick offensive start by jumping out to a 2-0 lead after the first inning. Another run in the third gave the women all the offense they would need as they went on to beat the Stephen F. Austin University Lumberjacks by a score of 4-2. Getting the win for the Aggies was once again Barrack, who struck out five and surrendered just two hits.

Sunday, the women faced the Southwest Texas State University Bobcats. Vining pitched her fourth complete game and second shutout as the women scraped by with a 1-0 win. Lisa Klam got the game-winning RBI with a first-inning single to right field to score center fielder Hollee Hayden from second base.

Next up for the Aggies was a rematch with Tulsa. The women's offense returned for the game, rocking Tulsa for 11 hits and scoring six runs as the Aggies went on to defeat Tulsa, 6-3, and clinch a berth in the championship game. Barrack continued to pitch well with six strike outs but surrendered the first earned run of the season to the Hurricanes.

The Aggies rode an eight-game winning streak into Sunday's championship game against No. 24 ranked Illinois-Chicago University, mostly due to their strong early-inning offensive production.

"A big key to our wins is that we have been scoring early in the game," A&M coach Jo Evans



MIKE FLEET

A&M Softball coach Jo Evans talks with **Angle Long** before an at-bat.

"Getting that early lead helps the momentum, and the other team sees down a little." ICU would be the ones who were plating two unearned runs in the first. The Aggies committed three errors and Vining surrendered her first run of the season. A lack of hitting contributed to women's defeat as the hot bats cooled. The loss dropped Vining's record to 2-1 as she surrendered nine hits to ICU.

NFL, Houston clash over expansion

HOUSTON (AP) — Houston officials might withdraw their lucrative stadium-package offer to the NFL if the league's owners do not locate the 32nd franchise here.

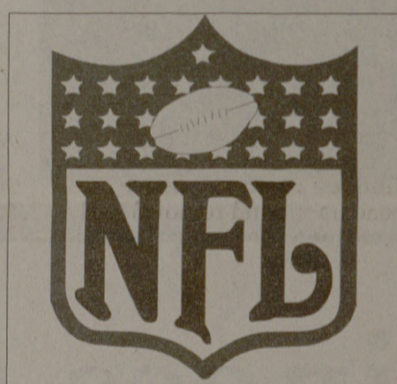
Officials at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, one of the largest annual events in the nation's fourth-largest city, will consider using new stadium money to renovate the Astrodome if supposed NFL expansion front-runner Los Angeles gets an expansion team.

During a rodeo meeting last month, Steve Patterson, who is helping businessman Bob McNair try to win the expansion team, said talk of Houston's demise was premature. Conversations with NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue suggested that Houston was in a virtual dead heat with Los Angeles, Patterson said.

Rodeo officials seem satisfied, for now.

"But we can't afford to be that way forever," rodeo President Jim Bloodworth told the *Houston Chronicle*. "We're facing life alone in the Astrodome after the Astros

leave (in 2000 for a new baseball park). If we don't get into a new stadium, then we're going to have to begin looking fairly soon at spending money on the Dome."



Harris County Judge Robert Eckels said if the city spends a lot of money upgrading the Astrodome, "That won't leave enough for a new stadium, even if we want to build one."

NFL officials were scheduled to meet Tuesday to discuss whether

McNair or a Los Angeles group should get an expansion team. Some owners are not convinced the league needs another team.

League owners hope to make a decision by May.

The consensus among those watching the league is that Los Angeles will get the expansion team because of pressure from television networks wanting to capitalize on that city's huge market.

Even if Tagliabue follows through with suggestions that Houston would be the top destination choice the next time an existing franchise wants to move, Bloodworth and Eckels said that decision would have to be made fairly fast.

"If I can't get an expansion team, I will try for a while to buy another team and move it here," McNair said. "But at some point, I have to put my efforts elsewhere."

Bloodworth said that if Houston has no indication by November that it will get another team, and thus will need a new stadium, the rodeo will begin pushing to update the Astrodome.

KU's Bishop looks at

Fort Worth, Texas

Kansas State University's Michael Bishop, winner of the Davey O'Brien National Quarterback Award, said Monday he would consider playing professionally in Canada if it meant continuing his chosen position.

Some NFL scouts expressed reservations about Bishop's 6'1" height, but he is too short to be an effective passer in the NFL, Bishop said he might take a detour through the Football League to pursue his dreams.

"Canada could turn out to be a good option. But I'm going to stick with the NFL first," Bishop said.

Bishop's agent, Steve Truitt, said he is looking for a team that can use Bishop's skills. He is currently in negotiations with several teams.

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