

Aggs ready for tourney A&M men take on Wildcats in first round

BY SANTOSH VENKATARAMAN
The Battalion

It is that time of year again, the time of improbable game-winning shots and spectacular plays. It is what is known to college basketball fans as March Madness.

For the Texas A&M Men's Basketball Team, their postseason opportunity begins today as they face Kansas State University at 6 p.m. in a Big 12 Tournament first-round game in Kansas City, Mo. A&M is the 10th seed for the tournament, while KSU is the seventh seed. Although A&M defeated K-State in the teams' regular-season meeting, 79-74, Feb. 10 at Reed Arena.

A&M coach Melvin Watkins said he feels tonight's game will be much tougher for the Aggies.

"I don't know if (beating K-State) is that much of an advantage at all," Watkins said. "K-State probably feels like they let one get away, and playing close to home, the fan base is there for them."

The Wildcats (18-11, 7-9 Big 12) are virtually guaranteed of an NIT postseason berth and feature an experienced lineup. Seniors Manny Dies and Shawn Rhodes anchor a K-State frontline that leads the Big 12 in rebounding, with sophomore forward Tony Kitt leading K-State in rebounds with 7.9 per game.

The Wildcat backcourt features leading scorer Cortez Groves, a junior-college teammate of A&M junior forward Paul Jacobs. Groves averages 10 points a game for KSU. K-State is coming off a road loss at the University of Colorado.

The Aggies (12-14, 5-11 Big 12) are coming off a road loss as well, at the University of Nebraska, 78-59, Saturday. Aggie junior guard Clifton Cook, recently named to the All-Big 12 third team, scored 21 points for A&M. Senior guard Chris Clayton nailed seven three-pointers for 21 points as well. In A&M's first game with K-State, senior forward Shanne Jones scored 23 points. KSU coach Tom Asbury said Jones is a major concern for his team.

"We didn't do a good job of containing Shanne Jones in that game," Asbury said. "He's very versatile; he scores in a lot of different ways. He is awfully strong off the dribble."

Asbury said the A&M game represents a difficult challenge for his Wildcats because the Aggies out-rebounded and outshot KSU Feb. 10.

"I didn't see a lot of weaknesses (in the first game)," Asbury said. "Chris Clayton has been shooting the ball very well. Clifton Cook is a good shooter."

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TERRY ROBBERSON/THE BATTALION

Sophomore guard Michael Schmidt looks for his shot against the University of Oklahoma Feb. 24. The Texas A&M Men's Basketball Team will face Kansas State University in the Big 12 Tournament Thursday.

Kansas State
(18-11, 7-9 Big 12)



Points leader:
Cortez Groves (10.0)

Rebound leader:
Tony Kitt (7.9)

Assists leader:
Chris Griffin (4.1)



JASON LINCOLN/THE BATTALION

Junior Keven Kehlenbach competes in a dual meet versus Rice University earlier this year. The No. 13 Texas A&M Men's Swimming and Diving Teams will travel to Austin Thursday for the Big 12 Championships.

Men head to Big 12 finale Swimmers, divers prepare for championships in Austin

BY JASON LINCOLN
The Battalion

With one of the most impressive seasons in Texas A&M men's swimming, the Aggies look to carry their momentum into battle against the University of Texas and Nebraska at the Big 12 Championships in Austin.

The action takes place Thursday through Saturday at the Jamail Texas Swimming Center with the 13th-ranked Aggies facing off against two other top 15 teams.

Three members of the U.S. national team will lead the Aggies in their search to upset the Longhorn dynasty. Seniors Jerrod Kappler and Mark Naftanel along with junior Devin Howard will be key players in a powerful lineup for A&M swimming and diving.

They head into a conference meet that has been won by UT since 1980. During that same period, the Longhorns have only finished outside of the top three in the NCAA meet twice.

"We're focused, and we know where we want to finish up," Kappler said. "The team is going for second or better."

"Nebraska is going to be tough, but we have the quality of swimmers to take Nebraska downtown and hopefully break into the top 10 at NCAAs."

The Cornhuskers are currently ranked 15th with a lineup that consists of seven foreign athletes in a 10-member squad. The Huskers have not only an age advantage but also an experience advantage over their competition.

However, the Aggies' level of experience has risen from previous seasons as they have gained more experience against tougher and more seasoned competition.

The team not only enters the meet on a 8-1 dual-meet record with their only loss coming from the Longhorns, but also during a season in which they were able to host and compete in the U.S. Open and the World Cup.

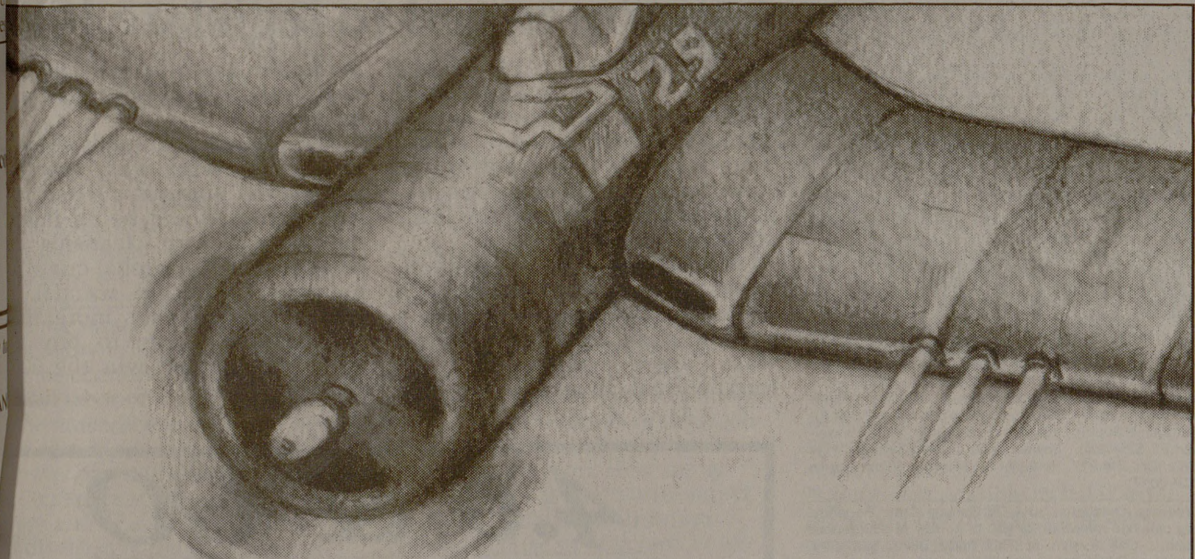
In 1997 the A&M men were 243 points behind the Cornhuskers, putting the Aggies in third place. During last year's championship they were able to narrow that gap to 59.5. This year they hope to overtake Nebraska and complete their best ever Big 12 finish.

A&M will rely on their sprints and relays to get them the majority of their points and use other events to polish off their performance.

"Sprints have been our calling card," A&M coach Mel Nash said. "Our depth at sprints is impressive, and the quality in other events puts us where we need to be."

Strong performances for the Aggies also should come from Canadian freshman Riley Janes, a member of Canada's national team, and junior Eric Toth, who has emerged from a kinesiology class to become a mainstay for A&M sprints.

The Championships will be one of the last chances for swimmers to qualify for the NCAA meet, which will be at the end of the month.



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