# SPORTS

Page 7 • Thursday, September 2, 1999

## ida A&M Cross Country set for start of 1999 season

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#### **BY BLAINE DIONNE** The Battalion

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g at faster spe

ior according A&M Cross Country Team has not handle this had much success over the years. In fact, the women's team has d that it will never qualified for the NCAA xpected jump championships, and the last time ning at 6 pm the men qualified was in 1982. nidnight Mon However, if second-year cross ocusing on scountry coach Dave Hartman has anything to do with it, all that will

> change very soon. Going into the 1999 season, Hartman said he is confident the anges are starting already.

On the women's team, six of ven runners who placed in races 1998 return to the 1999 squad, ur of whom are sophomores. Two newcomers, transfer An-

Bishop, should be able to con- among high-schoolers last year. tribute immediately.

Hartman said the Aggies' talent should put them in position for a strong season.

We have a lot of depth," he said. "We have the potential to be in the top five, hopefully top three if we have a real good race.'

The entire men's team is returning from last year, so the Aggies should have a veteran group bolstered by the return of senior team captains Scott Lengefeld and Stephen Erath.

Hartman said he expects both two be frontrunners in the Aggies' races this season.

Freshman Tommy Bonn should also give A&M a boost. Bonn comes to the Aggies after posting the sec-

drea Bookout and freshman Leslie ond-fastest mile time in the nation Hartman said the men's team

has the talent in place to have a breakout season.

"The guys have a good chance to qualify for the NCAA meet later this year," he said.

Optimism is all well and good, but what the two teams are up against in the Big 12 Conference is forboding to say the least.

On the women's side, Hartman called the Big 12 the best in the nation. The perrenial leaders of the conference are Kansas State University, the defending women's champions, the University of Colorado, Baylor University and University of Texas. The men are in store for tough

competition, as well. Colorado has won the Big 12 Championship each



The Texas A&M Cross Country Team is set to begin its season this weekend in Houston at the Houston Relays.

year since the conference's inception, and Oklahoma State, Missouri, and Texas putting up consistently strong teams.

Running well at the conference championship, which is in College

Station on Oct. 30, is high on the Aggies' list of goals.

But in cross country, it is the regional meet that counts toward NCAA invitations, with the top two teams at each regional receiving

automatic bids to the national championship meet and the rest of the field rounded out with at-large bids. This year's South Central NCAA Regional is in Denton on Nov. 13.

## Houston signs point guard Francis

around often."

- Rudy Tomjanovich

kie guard Steve Francis to a contract yesterday, five Charles Barkley, although Barkley has not re-signed ys after acquiring his rights from Vancouver in the with Houston yet. largest trade in NBA history

Francis, the second overall pick in igh - neighthe June draft, had refused to sign ferent state-with the Grizzlies, setting in motion spread beyona three-team, 11-player trade. Houston made the deal under the preials are asumption it would be able to get ndalism ass Francis under contract.

Although terms were not dist years from closed, Francis is due a three-year " to potential contract worth about \$9 million ungun attacks. der the rookie salary cap. The paraficials have meters of which would have been ns at Arkansas the same in Vancouver.

"Steve is a special player" Rockets coach Rudy Tomler it a wewjanovich said. "I don't think you see a guy with his gh principal kind of talent come around often. We feel blessed to e Texarkana Canhave the opportunity to bring him here and make him t will go before a big part of our future.

Francis joins a lineup of a future Hall of Fame front-

HOUSTON (AP) - The Houston Rockets signed court of Scottie Pippen, Hakeem Olajuwon and

Earlier this week, Francis said with those guys as his teammates he "If I don't ... something will be

Along with Francis, Vancouver

sent journeyman forward Tony Massenburg to Houston for forwards Othella Harrington and Antoine Carr and guards Michael Dickerson and Brent Price. Rockets coach

The Rockets also gave the Grizzlies an undisclosed amount of cash plus a first-round draft pick over the next three years. Orlando sent Don MacLean and a future firstround pick to Houston in exchange for the Grizzlies' Michael Smith, Lee Mayberry, Rodrick Rhodes and Makhtar Ndiaye. The Magic also dealt their 2002 second-round pick to Vancouver.

### Rockets arena scheduled for November vote HOUSTON (AP) — As the dust overextending its finances. settled following a late-night agreement to put a sports arena proposal before voters, critics of the \$160

million deal seemed at least partially appeased by some last-minute adjustments. Harris County Judge Robert Eckels, who had voiced numerous con-

cerns, on yesterday applauded amendments by the Harris County-Houston Sports Authority.

"The changes that were made Tuesday, I think, substantially improved the deal that was put forward," he said, adding the county commission was "reserving judgment" while its attorneys reviewed

Changes include the addition of a ticket tax on events and a clause to ensure the authority would avoid

The ticket tax came after intense lobbying by Harris County commissioners, the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo and businessman Bob McNair, who hopes to get a National Football League team for

The three parties expressed concern that the deal could leave insufficient revenue for the authority to pay its commitment to a \$310 million football stadium.

The authority, a public agency created in a 1996 election, haggled all day Tuesday over the proposal by Mayor Lee Brown and Houston Rockets owner Les Alexander to split the cost of the arena.

The board finally approved the deal yesterday morning and scheduled a referendum for Nov. 2.

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Under the agreement, the city will buy the downtown land for the arena. It remains unclear whether the city will swap land with the real estate company that owns property around both the new arena site and the existing Compaq Center, which could be torn down.

Sports Authority Chairman Jack Rains said the Compaq Center must be razed.

"If you leave a competing facility, it's a market disruption. It's hard to compete against yourself," he said. Brown was confident yesterday that voters will support the proposal.

"The reason I feel that way is that we're providing a home for our champion Rockets, champion Comets, champion Aeros and potentially a National Hockey League team as well," he said.

"I don't think you should lead the league in assists. see a guy with his wrong," said Francis, Houston's projected starting point guard. kind of talent come

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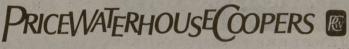
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