

SPORTS

The Battalion

A&M Cross Country set for start of 1999 season

BY BLAINE DIONNE
The Battalion

It could be said that the Texas A&M Cross Country Team has not had much success over the years.

In fact, the women's team has never qualified for the NCAA championships, and the last time the men qualified was in 1982. However, if second-year cross country 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 changes are starting already.

On the women's team, six of seven runners who placed in races in 1998 return to the 1999 squad, four of whom are sophomores.

Two newcomers, transfer An-

drea Bookout and freshman Leslie Bishop, should be able to contribute 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 to 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-

ond-fastest mile time in the nation among high-schoolers last year.

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 perennial 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. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AGGIELAND

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

HOUSTON (AP) — The Houston Rockets signed rookie guard Steve Francis to a contract yesterday, five days after acquiring his rights from Vancouver in the largest trade in NBA history.

Francis, the second overall pick in the June draft, had refused to sign with the Grizzlies, setting in motion a three-team, 11-player trade. Houston made the deal under the presumption it would be able to get Francis under contract.

Although terms were not disclosed, Francis is due a three-year contract worth about \$9 million under the rookie salary cap. The parameters of which would have been the same in Vancouver.

"Steve is a special player," Rockets coach Rudy Tomjanovich said. "I don't think you see a guy with his kind of talent come around often. We feel blessed to have the opportunity to bring him here and make him a big part of our future."

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

court of Scottie Pippen, Hakeem Olajuwon and Charles Barkley, although Barkley has not re-signed with Houston yet.

Earlier this week, Francis said with those guys as his teammates he should lead the league in assists.

"If I don't ... something will be wrong," said Francis, Houston's projected starting point guard.

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.

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 first-round 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.

"I don't think you see a guy with his kind of talent come around often."

— Rudy Tomjanovich
Rockets coach

Rockets arena scheduled for November vote

HOUSTON (AP) — As the dust 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 concerns, 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 details.

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

overextending its finances.

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 Houston.

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.

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.

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