

Ags set to open Big 12 conference play

Fifth-ranked Texas A&M travels to Lubbock to take on Red Raiders

BY REECE FLOOD
The Battalion

While the Texas A&M Football Team spent the week preparing for its first Big 12 game of the season against the Texas Tech University Red Raiders in Lubbock, the Aggies kept one thought in the back of their heads: anything can happen on the plains of West Texas.

A&M will take on Tech in Lubbock for the twenty-third time Saturday, and the Aggies are expecting a rowdy crowd in Jones Stadium.

"I think it's one of the best kept secrets in terms of a hostile environment," A&M offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Steve Kragthorpe said. "The fans are fired up. Anytime the Aggies or the Longhorns come to Lubbock, it's a big game."

A&M has an 11-11 record against the Red Raiders in Lubbock, where weird things seem to happen to the Aggies. They were defeated in their last two trips to the Jones Stadium, 16-13 in 1997 and 14-7 in 1995.

"We kind of described going out to Lubbock as the Bermuda Triangle," junior offensive lineman Chris Valletta said. "Weird things just happen out there."

This year's Aggie team is trying not to dwell on what has happened in the past and seems to realize it has no effect on how the game will go on Saturday.

"I'm pretty sure it [the game] will be wild," senior running back Dante Hall said. "But the way you offset that is to go out and execute."

Although A&M is 3-0 and ranked 5th in the nation, and Tech is only 1-2, including a loss at home against the University of North Texas, the Aggie coaches and players are not overlooking the Red Raiders and are expecting a tough game.

"It's [going] be a dog fight from start to finish," Valletta said.

Tech seems to always play the Aggies close, especially in the last five contests between the two teams, in which the games were decided by seven points or less. Tech has won three of the last five games.

But the Aggies won last year at Kyle Field by a score of 17-10, breaking a three-game Tech winning streak in the series.

Because of its close loss last year to the Aggies, A&M coach R.C. Slocum said he is expecting the Red Raiders to be ready for the game. In addition, Tech was off last weekend allowing it to have two full weeks of practice to prepare for the Aggies.

"The Tech team that we play will not be the Tech team any one has seen so far this year," Slocum said. "I know that from experience, having been in this situation before. We're going into a very challenging situation."

The A&M offense is planning on taking control of the game by utilizing this year's improved passing attack to help open up the running game and keep the Tech defense guessing.

"Our focus is take what the defense gives you," Kragthorpe said. "Make them play both the run and the pass, where as maybe in the past they just played the run."

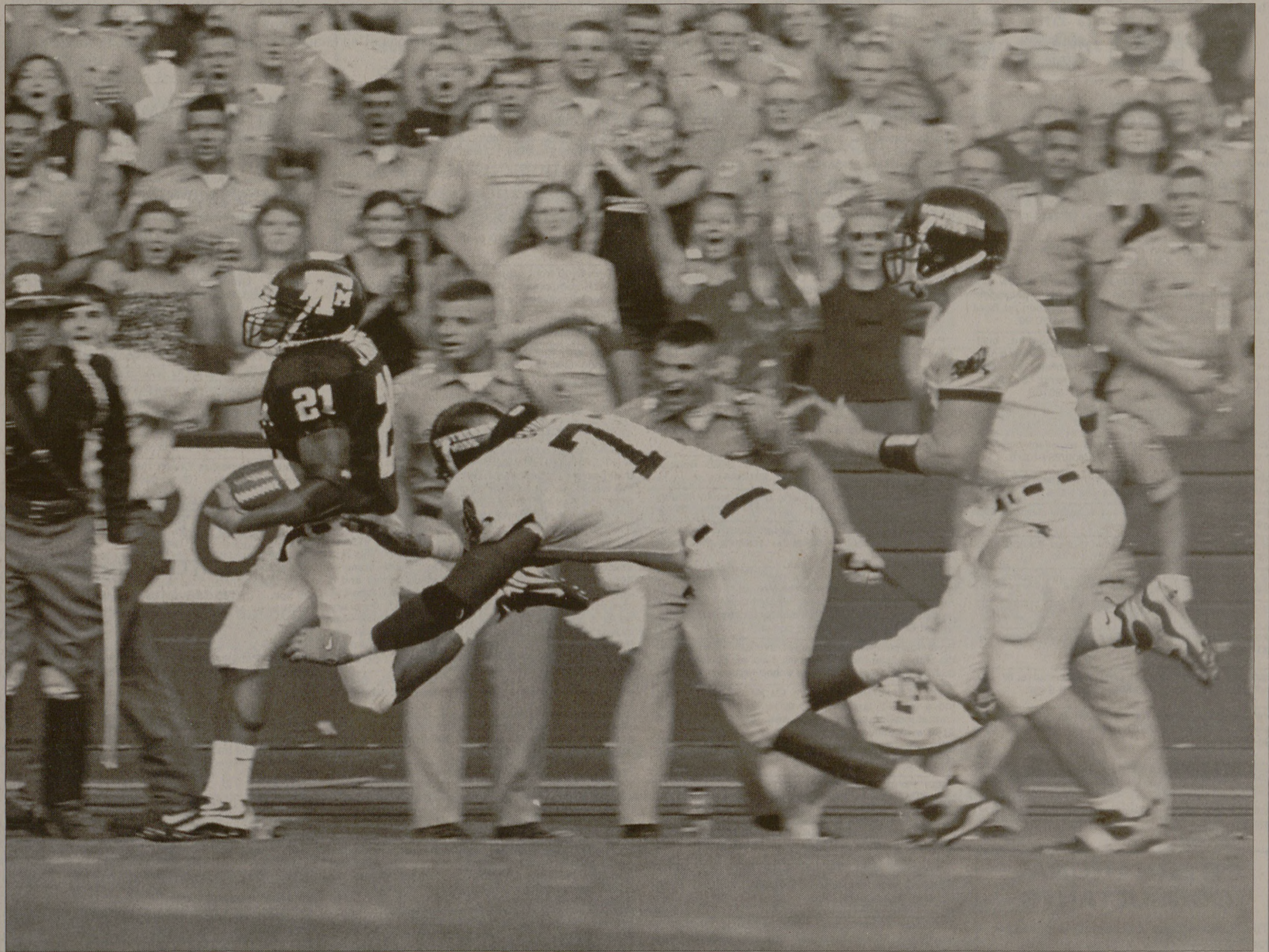
The Aggie defense plans on shutting down the Tech offense with the help of speedy senior cornerback Jason Webster, who leads the team with three interceptions and 25 tackles.

The Aggies will also look to junior inside linebacker Cornelius Anthony and junior outside linebacker Jason Glenn to have big games. The two have combined for 41 tackles, 10 of which were behind the line of scrimmage.

"We're not a big physical defense, but we've got pretty good quickness," Slocum said.

Injuries should play a major role in this weekend's game for both teams.

Tech's biggest loss is junior



GUY ROGERS/THE BATTALION

Sophomore cornerback **Jay Brooks** heads toward the endzone after an interception in last Saturday's game against the University of Southern Mississippi. **Brooks** returned the interception 41 yards for a touchdown.

running back and preseason Heisman candidate Ricky Williams, who re-aggravated a knee injury in practice this week and is out for the season.

But the Red Raiders are hoping true freshman running back Shaud Williams will be able to pick up where Ricky Williams left off.

Williams produced impressive numbers in Tech's last game against North Texas with 151 yards on the ground and two touchdowns.

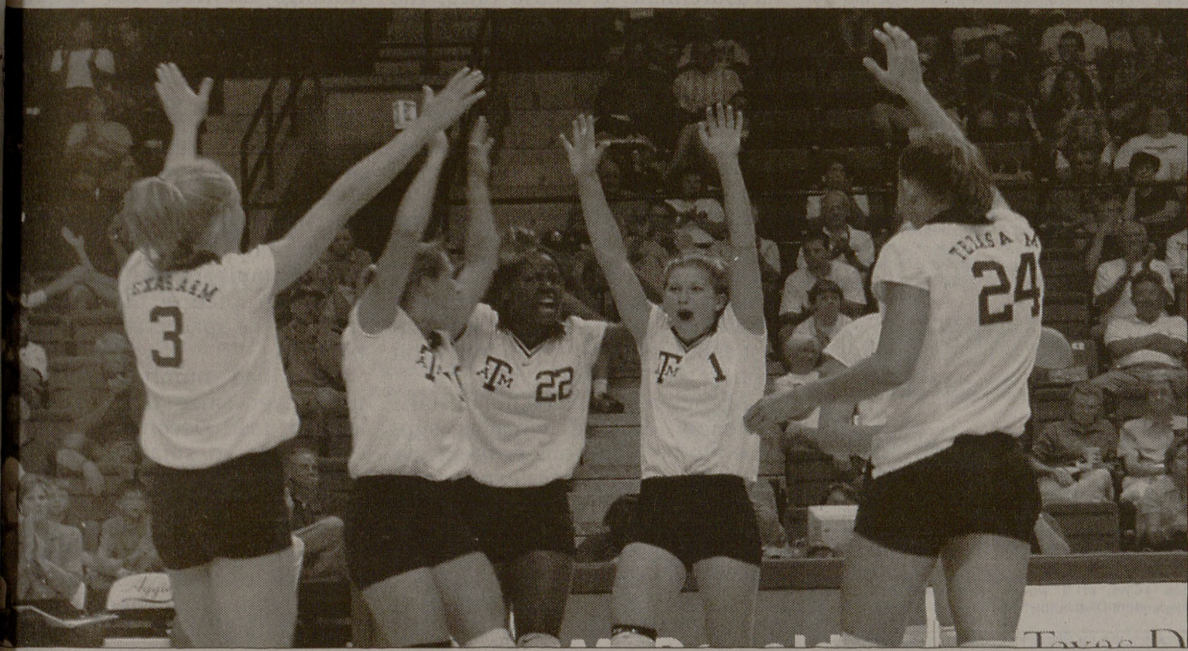
Tech senior fullback Sammy Morris is working off a bruised shoulder and is questionable for the game.

For the Aggies, senior offensive lineman Shea Holder tore his right anterior cruciate ligament in last week's game against the University of Southern Mississippi and will miss the rest of the season.

Holder's backup, sophomore Tango McCauley, is nursing a sore

ankle but is expected to play against the Red Raiders.

Senior fullback D'Andre "Tiki" Hardeman will not start this weekend's game due to an ankle injury but is expected to see some playing time. Sophomore fullback Ja'Mar Toombs will start in his place.



BRADLEY ATCHISON/THE BATTALION

Texas A&M Volleyball Team players celebrate after defeating Santa Clara University 15-10, 15-5, 16-14.

No. 16 Ags host Cornhuskers

BY BREE HOLZ
The Battalion

The Texas A&M Volleyball Team will have its hands full tomorrow night when it clashes with the eighth-ranked Nebraska University Cornhuskers at G. Rollie White Coliseum at 7 p.m.

The Aggies have "repeat" on their minds after last season's shocking victory over the defending Big 12 Conference champions. A&M last met then-third-ranked Nebraska at G. Rollie White Coliseum on November 20, 1998. The Aggies stunned the Cornhuskers by defeating them 8-15, 15-12, 8-15, 15-6, 16-14, and handing them their only Big 12 Conference loss.

"Last year it was really exciting to play them because they hadn't lost a game yet," senior middle blocker Amber Woolsey said.

Senior outside hitter Celia Howes said the crowd was extremely supportive in last season's victory over the Cornhuskers.

"Our crowd was really pumped up," she said, "and it totally pumped us up."

Howes added that crowd support is always an advantage in big matches.

"Whenever we go to Nebraska they always have these huge crowds, and it's really intimidating," she said.

"It's a good thing when people are against them [Nebraska] instead of always for them."

Nebraska leads the all-time series between the two teams, 10-5.

The Cornhuskers return four starters from last season's squad that finished 1998 with a 32-2 overall record. Their near-perfect season came to an end with an NCAA tournament loss in the Final Four semifinal to Penn State University.

A&M volleyball coach Laurie Corbelli said Nebraska is successful because their team is so well-rounded.

"Nebraska has their own style," she said. "They're really strong in all positions and overall they have some of the best players in the nation."

"They have a really good right side attacker and two experienced middles," Woolsey added.

"Out of the teams that we've

seen, we haven't seen a really good middle attack," Howes said. "Nebraska, with their strong middles, that's definitely gonna be something that we need to defend."

Nebraska is currently 10-3 overall and 2-1 in Big 12 Conference action.

The Cornhuskers were upset 3-2 by 24th-ranked Kansas State University in their first Big 12 match of the season.

Senior outside hitter Summer Strickland said the upset by Kansas State University shows that Nebraska is a beatable team.

"It makes us know that we can definitely beat them," she said. "This is our chance to show that we can win the Big 12."

Corbelli said that because Nebraska was defeated by a lower-ranked team, their play is now more vulnerable.

"Nebraska knows that there is more pressure on them now to maintain their ranking and their position in the nation."

"I think that Nebraska is now susceptible to losses," Howes added. "We are very ready to maximize on that."

Softball set to kick off preseason

BY BREANNE HICKS
The Battalion

The Texas A&M Softball Team will swing into the preseason Saturday when it hosts an exhibition tournament at College Station's Central Park. The Aggies are scheduled to play three games throughout the day on Field 1, opening against Galveston at 9 a.m. They later meet Centenary at 10:45 a.m. and Northwestern State at 2:15 p.m.

A&M softball coach Jo Evans said the Aggies have been working diligently in the offseason to fill the cleats of last season's successful team, which appeared in the NCAA tournament.

"Our practices have been productive," Evans said. "We are learning about our strengths and weaknesses and making adjustments in order to be ready for this weekend's games."

Highlighting the Aggies' lineup this season are sophomore standout Lisa Klam, who was named to the 1999 Softball All-Midwest Region second team; and pitching ace junior Amy Vining, who led the team last season in wins with 22 and an ERA of 1.26.

A total of seven seniors return to this year's squad, including shortstop Jamie Smith, a member of the All-

Regional team at the NCAA regional tournament.

Evans describes the team as a mix of experience and youth.

"It should be a great year for our team," she said. "We are more talented and have more depth than our past teams, and we have a good team chemistry."

Saturday's exhibition will feature a mix of junior College and Division I teams. Evans said the tournament will her an opportunity to evaluate the team's strengths and weaknesses in order to better prepare for the individual workouts during the offseason.

"Our game plan for the tournament is mainly to give our players some playing time and test them in a game situation," she said. "These games are a measure of what we need to work and improve on in the offseason."

Evans said she is eagerly awaiting what she predicts to be the best year since she has been at A&M.

"Our team is very anxious to compete, and we are looking forward to the challenges we will face in this weekend," she said.

Other team participating in the 16-team exhibition are Abilene Christian University, Alvin Community College, Blinn College, Incarnate Word University, Lon Morris College, Navarro College, Northwood University, San Jacinto College, Stephen F. Austin University, Tarleton State University, the University of Texas and Texas A&M-Kingsville. Admission to the tournament is free.



EVANS

SPORTS IN BRIEF

8th-ranked Soccer takes on Nebraska

The Texas A&M Soccer Team will host two Big 12 games this weekend when the University of Nebraska and Iowa State University come to College Station.

Tonight the eighth-ranked Aggies (9-1) will take on the 4th ranked Nebraska Cornhuskers (8-1-1) at 7 p.m. at the Aggie Soccer Complex. Nebraska will be A&M's highest ranked opponent so far this season.

The Aggies will take on Iowa State University (8-1-1), Sunday, at 1 p.m.

The Aggies look to improve on the already impressive stats they have produced this season.

Right now A&M has a goal-per-game average of 3.50, which is one spot above Nebraska who has a 3.40.

Leading the way for the Aggies is

junior forward Nicky Thrasher with nine goals in ten games. She also has five assists and leads the team in points with 23.

Thrasher is not the only scoring threat for the Aggies. Thirteen players of the 26-person roster have scored goals for A&M, giving the Aggies a total of 35 goals on the season.

The Aggies have also been stout on defense and are fourth in the nation with a 0.50 goal-per-game against average. Nebraska is the only other Big 12 team in the defensive rankings with an average of 0.67.

Tennis teams head to co-ed tourney

Five members from Texas A&M's Men's and Women's Tennis Teams will join forces today as they join 15 of the nation's top college teams in the first-ever co-ed Wingspan-

Bank.com/World Team Tennis National Collegiate Championships at Stanford University's Taube Family Tennis Center.

Making the Aggies' team are junior Shuon Madden and sophomore Jarin Skube from the men's team, and senior Lisa Dingwall, sophomore Martina Nedorostova and freshman Olivia Karlikova from the women's team.

Madden is ranked No. 12 in the nation in singles and No. 1 in the country in doubles with partner Dumitru Caradima.

Nedorostova is No. 43 in singles and is the defending Big 12 No. 1 singles champion.

Dingwall and Nedorostova teamed last season to earn All-Big 12 honors in doubles.

The Aggies will be in the championship's featured match with the host team Stanford tonight at 7. The Cardinal men's team won team national championships from 1995-1998.