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AGGIELAND

## A&M volleyball team hosts first-round mat<sup>The Battalion</sup>

SPORTS

## BY BREE HOLZ The Battalion

Page 12 • Thursday, December 2, 1999

With both its season and home-match winning streak on the line, the Texas A&M Volleyball Team will head into the NCAA Tournament tonight at 7 at G. Rollie White Coliseum. The 12th-ranked Aggies (25-5) will take on

Stephen F. Austin State University riding a 14-0 record at home this season, the first-ever perfect home season in A&M volleyball history. They also are making their seventh-straight NCAA tournament appearance.

No. 25 University of North Carolina will face the University of Northern Arizona at 5 p.m., with the winner taking on the A&M-SFA winner Friday at 7 p.m. at G. Rollie.

A&M finished second in the Big 12 Conference this season, the Aggies' highest-ever fin-ish in conference play. The University of Ne-braska won its 22nd conference volleyball championship, while the University of Texas finished third.

SFA won the Southland Conference Tournament with a 26-9 overall record.

A&M senior outside hitter Summer Strickland said the Aggies are confident in their chances of advancing further than in previous tournaments.

Last year we played one team ranked lower than us, and then we had to turn around and play the sixth-best team in the nation," Strickland said. "Right now we're sitting in a really good position and we know what to expect.

Senior outside hitter Celia Howes said the Aggies have been careful to keep sight of the task at hand.

"Everyone's really anxious and excited," she said. "But we are trying to really get our focus in the right place and trying to make everything perfect right now.

Sophomore outside hitter Michelle Cole said the team is fired up, especially because of its home-court advantage.

"We are so comfortable in this gym," she said. "Every time we step on our court, we're ready to do battle.

With four seniors who have substantial NCAA tournament experience, Howes said the Aggies have a definite advantage over less experienced teams.

"Having gone to the NCAA tournament the past three years, and having to deal with that anxiety and stress and excitement, it's good that so many players on our team have gone through that already," she said.

A&M volleyball coach Laurie Corbelli said the Aggies' experience has worked in their favor since last spring. "From as far back as last spring, with so

many players coming back, the team knew what it was going to take to get [to the

NCAAs]," Corbelli said. "This team is very mature, and they use their experience very wisely. They are very prepared for whatever happens to be thrown at them.

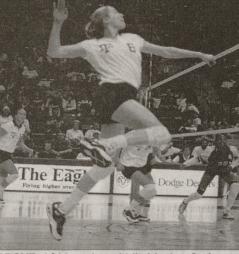
Along with seniors Strickland and Howes, middle blockers Amber Woolsey and Lauri Leahy will be participating in their final NCAA tournament.

Strickland said she and her senior team-mates are determined to make their last season a memorable one. What really stands out right now is that this is it," Strickland said. "This is our last

chance, and if we can keep winning, we can keep playing. None of us wants it to end yet. This whole season has just been way too much fun.

Cole said the Aggies have their goal within sight.

"Everything we've worked for is right out in front of us," she said. "All we have to do is reach out and grab it."



ABOVE: A&M senior middle blocker Amber Woolsey reaches for the ball against Baylor University Nov. 10 at G. Rollie White Coliseum.

RIGHT: A&M sophomore outside hitter Erin Gibson spikes the ball against lowa State Nov. 27 at G. Rollie.

PHOTOS BY JP BEATO/THE BATTALION





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