

Women's tennis team hosts opener

BY BLAINE DIONNE
The Battalion

As the members of the Texas A&M women's tennis team prepared for their matches with Stephen F. Austin State University and Sam Houston State University, intimidation was not a word that came to anyone's mind.

In fact, some of them were not even sure if they had played either school in the past.

One thing the Aggies, particularly A&M coach Bobby Kleinecke, were sure about was the fact that they should not have too much trouble vanquishing the Lumberjacks or the Bobcats on their home court in front of the Aggie tennis fans.

"It's in our hands," Kleinecke said. "I told the girls that the other day. If we play up in our game, we won't have any trouble."

While his confidence in his squad to pull out the victory is high, he said he was wary of the upset factor.

"You've got to be careful with [teams] like that," Kleinecke said. "But I feel like the girls are ready to play. We've been working out for three weeks, and they're just excited about playing."

Junior Eva Marcial said she is definitely ready to play and is looking forward to seeing how the Aggies' lineup fares against the Lumberjacks and Bearkats.

"The past few years have been pretty good, but I think it's going to be so good this year," Marcial said.

"Anyone on our team can play. We're strong all the way through the lineup, one through eight."

The Aggies will be taking on SFA at 10 a.m. and SHSU at 3:30 p.m. Saturday at the Texas A&M Varsity Tennis Center.

Ags travel to face No. 13 Oklahoma State Cowboys

BY AL LAZARUS
The Battalion

They were 14-1, No. 12 in the nation and fresh off a 73-65 victory over 14th-ranked University of Texas.

Tied for first place in the Big 12 and looking to break into the nation's top 10, the Oklahoma State Cowboys probably figured their Jan. 22 contest against Texas A&M would be a mere speed bump on the road to joining college basketball's elite.

Instead, they ran into a roadblock. The Aggies, who had not defeated a ranked team in nearly 13 years, shocked OSU, 64-59, before 5,563 stunned fans at Reed Arena.

The 13th-ranked Cowboys (17-2, 6-

1 Big 12) will have a chance to avenge their lone conference defeat when they welcome the Aggies (6-13, 2-6 Big 12) to Gallagher-Iba Arena Saturday at 3 p.m. in Stillwater, Okla.

"The fact that we beat them [in College Station] will probably add a little something to [Saturday's game]," A&M coach Melvin Watkins said. "We have to go up there and try to play one of our better games."

The Aggies topped the Cowboys thanks to 10-of-12 free throw shooting down the stretch, 31 points off the bench and strong rebounding. A&M also benefited because Cowboys star Desmond Mason, who led his team with 19 points, was forced to miss much of the second half due to foul trouble.

Playing at home for the first time since defeating OSU, the Aggies dropped an 81-75 decision to Baylor Wednesday night at Reed Arena. A&M hit 13 three-pointers, including 10 in the

second half, but Baylor took advantage of the Aggies' lackluster defense throughout the game, hitting 51.9 percent of its shots. Freshman guard Bernard King led the Aggies with 20 points, and senior guard Tevis Stukes poured in 23 for Baylor.

Baylor snapped an 18-game conference road losing streak with the win, while the Aggies dropped to 0-3 since their Jan. 22 victory over the Cowboys.

OSU came from behind to knock off Texas Tech, 63-59, Wednesday in Lubbock. The Red Raiders pulled to within a point with a minute remaining, but OSU made 7-of-8 free throws to seal the victory over Tech, who remains winless in conference.

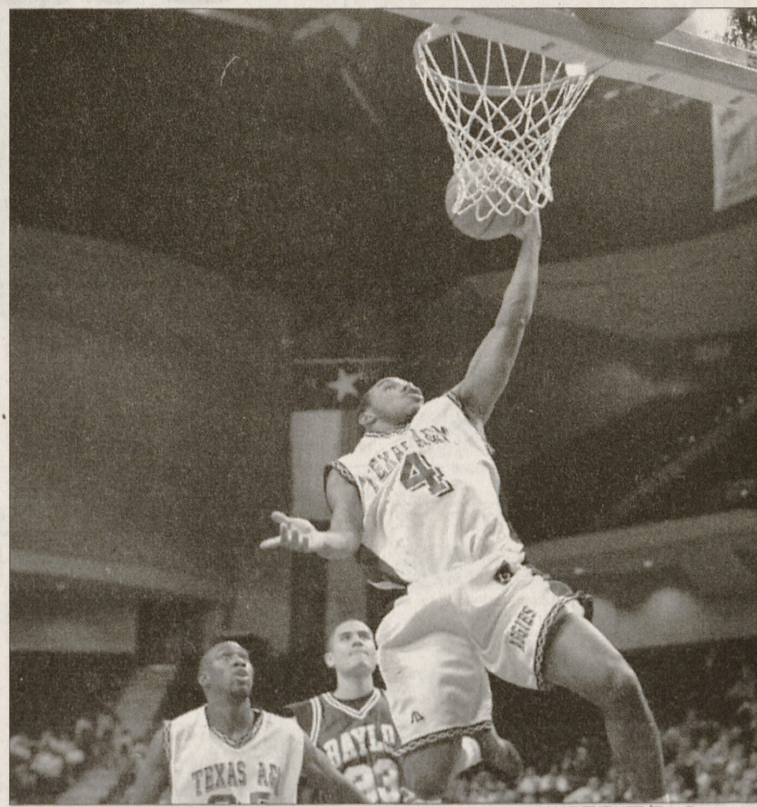
Saturday's game will mark the eighth meeting between A&M and OSU as conference opponents. The Cowboys hold a 6-1 record in their previous conference games against A&M and are 14-8 overall against the Aggies.



WATKINS



GUY ROGERS/THE BATTALION
Texas A&M point guard Brandy Jones drives on Texas Tech's Amber Tarr.



SALLIE TURNER/THE BATTALION
Aggie guard Jamaal Gilchrist rolls in the uncontested breakaway shot against Baylor on Wednesday.

Aggies try to end skid against 'Horns

BY REECE FLOOD
The Battalion

The Texas A&M women's basketball team has traveled a long and difficult road this season which has brought them to a 9-9 overall record, 1-7 Big 12 Conference record and left them in the midst of a seven-game losing streak.

Tomorrow the road will lead the team west to Austin to take on the University of Texas in a 7 p.m. showdown.

A&M coach Peggie Gillom is expecting a challenging game from the Longhorns.

"It's a rivalry, and they come out to play," Gillom said. "Hopefully, we can come out to play." Gillom said the team is anxious for a win and thinks emotion may be a factor in tomorrow's game.

"Hopefully on our part, [emotion] has a lot to do with us just wanting to compete to beat Texas," she said. "It's just a matter of us going out

and competing and thinking we can do it."

The Aggies will be going for their second conference win of the season. After opening conference play with a victory over Baylor University, the Aggies have lost their last seven.

Sophomore guard LaToya Rose said the reason for the losing streak is due to A&M's inability to do "the little things" correctly.

"We've lost the last seven games, and we've made the same mistakes in each game," Rose said.

According to Gillom, one way to correct these mistakes is to spend more time on them in practice. Fortunately for the Aggies, they did not play a game this week and have had a full week of practices.

Senior forward Kera Alexander said their week off has helped the team prepare for the upcoming game and work out some of the kinks.

"You've got to work a little more on things you're doing bad rather than just focusing for another team," Alexander said. "It gives you a little more

time to tune up the little things that are kind of going wrong."

The Aggies will have their work cut out for them against the Longhorns, who have only lost one home game this season. Leading the way for Texas are Edwina Brown and Alisha Sare, both averaging close to 23 points per game.

Gillom coached Brown this summer in the Pan-Am games and is familiar with Brown's game.

"She's a player," Gillom said. "She's going to score. She's going to shoot; she's going to get her points."

Gillom said that giving Brown too much attention will give other Longhorns easy scoring opportunities.

The Aggies will play a Texas team that has a better record and a three-game winning streak, but A&M is not overly concerned. They feel they have the ability to compete with the Longhorns and as Gillom said, "When you play Texas — it's on."

PREVIEW

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Third base is also a two man battle between sophomores Greg Porter and Ty Garner. Porter was a designated hitter for the Aggies last year, hitting .328 with seven home runs and 26 RBI. Garner only appeared in three games last year for A&M but has impressed the coaches with his preseason performance.

The competition for the starting center field job has come down to two true freshmen. Eric Reed and David Evans both will have a shot to start for the Aggies.

Johnson said he thinks Reed has

what it takes to make a difference for the Aggies.

"We are going to have some speed," Johnson said. "Eric Reed can really run. If he can get on base, he's going to steal a lot of bases and has a chance to break the stolen base record. That means he has to get on base to do that though. He also has great jump on the ball and can run down most balls."

The situation in left field is slightly murky, however. Senior Chad Hudson started in left field for the Aggies some last year and hit .265 with four home runs and 29 RBI, but he has strong competition from two sophomores for the starting job.

Neal Stephenson and Carlos Sepulveda will challenge Hudson for the starting spot.

Stephenson had a great spring practice and Johnson said he will try to get him in the lineup somewhere. Sepulveda, who sat out last season after transferring from the University of Texas, also was strong in the spring.

On the mound, the Aggies will have three new weekend starters to begin the season.

Sophomore Khalid Ballouli will step up from the bullpen to take over one of the starting spots. Ballouli appeared in 18 games last year for the Aggies, starting eight. His big moment came during

the College Station Regional when he pitched a complete game against Long Beach State University to force a second championship game.

Along with Ballouli, junior college transfer Grant Gregg and freshman Todd Deininger will occupy the other two spots in the starting rotation at the beginning of the season.

With a year of experience under his belt, Ballouli feels he is ready to step into a starting role.

"I'm ready to do it," Ballouli said.

"With Gregg and Deininger and myself, we're all ready to go. It's just about trusting yourself. I think pretty much the whole staff is ready to go."

While the rotation will be brand new, the closer will remain the same. Senior All-American Chris Russ will be the main option for the Aggies coming out of the bullpen. Russ led A&M in wins (12), appearances (28) and ERA (3.27) last season.

Johnson hopes the starters hold up in order to keep his ace closer right where he is.

"Chris Russ is a guy we hope to keep in the bullpen," Johnson said. "If those three starters can keep us in ballgames and allow Chris to come in and be a deciding factor in some outcomes, we'll do that, but if those three can't do that, Chris will probably have to come into a starter role."

A&M begins the season today at the Baseball Fiesta Tournament in Albuquerque, N.M. against Washington State University.

The Aggies hope to start off the season winning in order to gain momentum for later in the year.

"It's important with a young group," Johnson said. "I don't know how we're going to respond to negative times but it's a lot easier to build off of some wins than it is off some losses for a young team. So I think it's important we do."

The Aggies' first home game is Tuesday, Feb. 8 against the University of Texas-San Antonio.

NEWCOMERS

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field as many as half a dozen freshmen against many of the more seasoned and established teams on the Aggie schedule. That will leave the new Aggies an early chance to solidify the line-up.

With such a young team, Johnson feels that A&M needs to establish itself early.

"It's important for us because they're the guys that are going to play because we haven't got anybody else," he said. "I think they are talented, so you would hope they could figure the game out fairly quick. They're going to have to."

Johnson and the Aggies will use the 11 games before conference action to sort out the battle for starting positions.

Leading the newcomers' charge to make an early impact are a pair of transfers and a pair of freshmen who are expected to see immediate time on the diamond.

On the mound, A&M has found two-thirds of the replacements needed to rebuild the abandoned

Aggie rotation in sophomore junior college transfer Grant Gregg and freshman Todd Deininger. The two newcomers will join sophomore reliever and occasional starter Khalid Ballouli as the weekend pitchers.

"I don't know how everyone is going to respond," Johnson said. "Starting three guys on the mound that have not been starters at Texas A&M — that leaves me a little anxious."

Deininger brings pure power to the Aggie defense. The young power-pitcher hurls the ball over the plate above 90-mph, bullying his way through opposing batters.

After a successful high school campaign last year, the right-hander was named the Illinois Gatorade Player of the Year and drafted in the fifth round of the Major League Baseball amateur draft by the Chicago Cubs.

During the summer of 1999, the then-17-year old from Joliet, Ill. pitched on the USA Junior National Team that brought back the gold medal from the Junior World Championships. In 3.1 innings on the mound for Team USA, Deininger

had five strikeouts.

While Deininger bullies his way through the innings with speed and power, Gregg uses finesse to return the Aggies to offense.

A sophomore out of McClennan Community College, the lefthander finished 1999 with an 11-1 record leading McClennan to win a conference championship.

By working the corners and keeping his pitches out of opponents' power zones, Gregg brings the control necessary to keep the hits playable for the Aggie fielders.

Gregg will be A&M's opening day pitcher this Friday against Washington State with Ballouli and Deininger fielding the other two match-ups this weekend.

"I'm ready to do it," Ballouli said. "With Gregg and Deininger and myself, we're all ready to go. It's just about trusting yourself. I think pretty much the whole staff is ready to go."

The newcomers are also looking to replace some of the offensive power the Aggies lost in 1999.

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