

Aggies close out regular season against Cornhuskers

BY JASON LINCOLN
The Battalion

Four starting freshmen, a mere three conference wins, eight double-digit losses to Big 12 opponents — the season would have a hard time getting worse for the Texas A&M men's basketball team. However, the Aggies still have time to close their first true rebuilding season under men's basketball coach Melvin Watkins on a positive note.

Their opportunity will come Saturday as the Aggies (7-19, 3-12 Big 12) face off against the University of Nebraska in Reed Arena at 12:45 p.m. The Cornhuskers (11-17, 4-11 Big 12) are ranked ninth in the conference while A&M is in the eleventh spot.

Yet, with an A&M victory, the Aggies could finish the regular season in ninth which would pit them against Baylor University in the Big 12 Tournament in Kansas City, Mo.

The Aggies will rally behind freshman guard Bernard King and senior forward Aaron Jack in an effort to close out the season with a win.

"It would be nice to finish up strong," Watkins said. "Nebraska is somewhat like us. They've played up and down. At moments they've played some good basketball. For us every game is a challenge. We expect those guys to give us all we can handle on Saturday afternoon."

Big 12 Freshman of the Year candidate King leads the Aggies' offensive threat averaging 16.8 points per game. That num-

ber leads all Big 12 freshmen, ranks fourth among all freshmen in the nation and leads

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— Melvin Watkins
A&M men's basketball coach

all Big 12 guards of any classification.

Saturday, King has the opportunity to set a number of A&M and Big 12 regular

season records. The freshman phenom is on pace to break Iowa State University forward Marcus Fizer's freshman scoring record of 447 points. He has already broken Fizer's points-per-game record of 14.7 and only needs nine points to seal the second. With four treys against Nebraska, King would tie the freshman Big 12 three-point scoring record.

King could also break A&M freshman records in total points and points per game.

Jack provides the veteran experience in the paint for the Aggies on both sides of the court. In his first game back from dehydration on Wednesday, the senior had 14 points, shooting a perfect 5-5 on the floor and 4-4 on the free throw line.

Nebraska poses a number of threats to

the Aggies. Forwards Larry Florence and Steffon Bradford along with center Kimani Ffriend all bring double figure scoring averages into the match.

The three offer an inside presence that usually poses problems for A&M.

Not many members of the young A&M squad were around to remember last season's 87-68 loss in Lincoln to close out the 1999 conference season. Those that do remember the trip to Nebraska will be looking to return the favor on home territory.

The Cornhuskers' road record plays right into the Aggies' favor. NU has dropped 10 straight road contests.

After closing out the season on Saturday, A&M will prepare for the Big 12 Tournament next weekend.

Softball hosts 2nd tourney

BY BREE HOLZ
The Battalion

Confidence is something the Texas A&M Softball Team will be lacking heading into this weekend's GTE Aggie Invitational II at the Aggie Softball Complex.

"The team has been playing with a lot of confidence," A&M softball coach Jo Evans said. "We're finally settling into our lineup which has allowed us to play much more consistently."

The Aggies are undefeated at home this season and hold an 11-0 record. Other teams competing in the weekend's tournament are the University of Mississippi, the University of New Mexico and the University of Minnesota.

The Aggies will battle Ole Miss at 4:30 p.m., and will take on Minnesota at 6:45. They will play New Mexico on Saturday at noon.

The Aggies are playing it cautious against Ole Miss, knowing that they have the potential to upset A&M tournament start.

"Ole Miss is not very consistent," she said. "They could play great one night, but play horrible the next night, so we really have to be on our toes."

New Mexico is an offensively dominant team and the Aggies will have to be strong on defense to be victorious.

"[New Mexico] is a great hitting team, but I think with our strong pitching, we'll be able to stop them."

According to Evans, A&M has established a rivalry with Minnesota because of the Aggies' victory over them last year.

"When we played them last year, [junior pitcher] Amy Vining pitched a one-hitter against them," she said. "To top it off, it was my 400th career win. Playing them will be very competitive."

The Aggies won the GTE Aggie Invitational I which took place Feb. 18-20, by winning six consecutive games.

The goal for the team in this tournament is to perform with the same type of dominance.

"The field of teams is tougher for this tournament," she said. "Our offense is great right now, with eight of our players hitting over .300. My concern will be the consistency of our defense."

"Our pitching has really come alive," she said. "Vining has really taken charge this season with her numerous victories, and [senior pitcher] Danielle Lemuth is finally settling into her role."

The team's many come-from-behind wins and scoring in late innings have contributed to the Aggies success this season. A&M hopes it can continue its late game play in the matches.

"When you can play even when you're down, it shows the team is competitive and won't give up," she said. "It shows we've got a chance to win every game."

BAYLOR

Continued from Page 9 of the ninth inning to steal the game from the Owls.

Leading the way for the Bears is pitcher Chad Hawkins. Despite a 2-2 record this year, Hawkins is posting a miniscule 0.89 ERA. In 30 1/3 innings of work, he has allowed only 18 hits, struck out 18 batters and walked only four. Opponents are only hitting .171 off of Hawkins.

Johnson said Hawkins has improved immensely since facing the Aggies last year. "He has unbelievable numbers this year," Johnson said. "He's got a 0.89 ERA on the year so he's not even giving up a run a game. He pitched a two-hitter against OSU and lost last weekend. He faced him last year, but apparently he's better than he was last year."

The series starts Friday night at Olsen Field, while the series shifts to Waco for the final two games Saturday and Sunday.

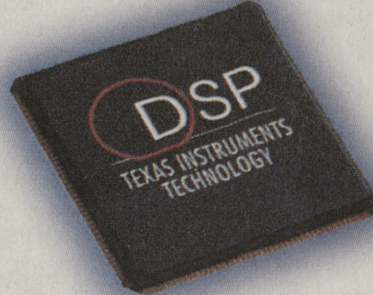
Holt said winning Friday night's game at Olsen is imperative for A&M.

"It's pretty critical that we win the game on Friday," Holt said. "It's not the end of the world, but going into Baylor it's a tough place to play. They have over four thousand and it's going to be packed. So I think it's pretty important that we win that Friday game so we can go down there and take one out of [to win the series]."

HEADBANGERS



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