

## Back to the Dance

### Aggies set for eighth straight NCAA tourney

By BREE HOLZ  
The Battalion

For the eighth consecutive season, the Texas A&M volleyball team will go to war in the NCAA tournament. Its first-round match against Houston in Stockton, Calif., at the Alex G. Spanos Center, is set for 5 p.m. today.

The match will be played at Pacific. Pacific is the No. 2 seed in the Mideast region and will battle Oral Roberts at 7 p.m. The winners of each first-round match will square off Saturday at 9 p.m.

The 23rd-ranked Aggies finished league play in a three-way tie for second place with Kansas State and Missouri with a 19-8 Big 12 record.

The Houston Cougars, former Southwest Conference foes, finished second in Conference USA with an 11-5 record. Houston is making its 10th consecutive postseason appearance.

The Cougars are led by two transfers, outside hitter Jennifer Wittenburg from UCLA and middle blocker Michelle Frazier, a transfer from Florida. As a team, Houston is out-hitting its opponents, .210 to .154.

The Aggies and Cougars met earlier this season in A&M's home opener, in a 3-0 A&M win.

"This is a great draw for us," said A&M coach Laurie Corbelli. "It is a good setup where we meet Houston a team we already defeated earlier this season. They are good competition, and we can't overlook them. We have a good rivalry going with them and both teams will be up for the match."

As for the series record, Houston has a slim 29-28 lead over A&M. However, the Aggies have won the last six meetings. Houston and A&M have met 57 times in their volleyball history.

Oral Roberts has appeared in every NCAA championship since 1995 and received an automatic bid to the tournament by winning the Mid-Continent Conference. The Aggies have defeated Oral Roberts the last four times they have met and lead the all-time series, 6-3.



FILE PHOTO/THE BATTALION

Senior middle blocker **Heather Marshall** looks to lead the Aggies into the NCAA tournament, where each game could be her last.

No. 7 Pacific enters the tournament riding an 18-match winning streak. The Tigers hold a 16-1 home record with their only loss to Santa Clara. This will be Pacific's 20th trip to the tournament after winning national championships in 1985 and 1986. The Aggies are 0-4 against Pacific.

A&M is riding a two-match winning streak after sweeping No. 22 Kansas State and Texas last week in College Station.

The Aggies are 6-0 in NCAA first-round matches with Corbelli leading the way and 8-2 all-time in the first round. A victory over Houston will give the Aggies their 18th 20-win season in the last 25 years.

"I am so excited about how this team has pulled through this season," Corbelli said. "As long as they stay relaxed and play like we played against Kansas State and Texas, we should do great."

Last week, the Big 12 announced the 2000 All-Big 12 Conference Team, which was chosen by the

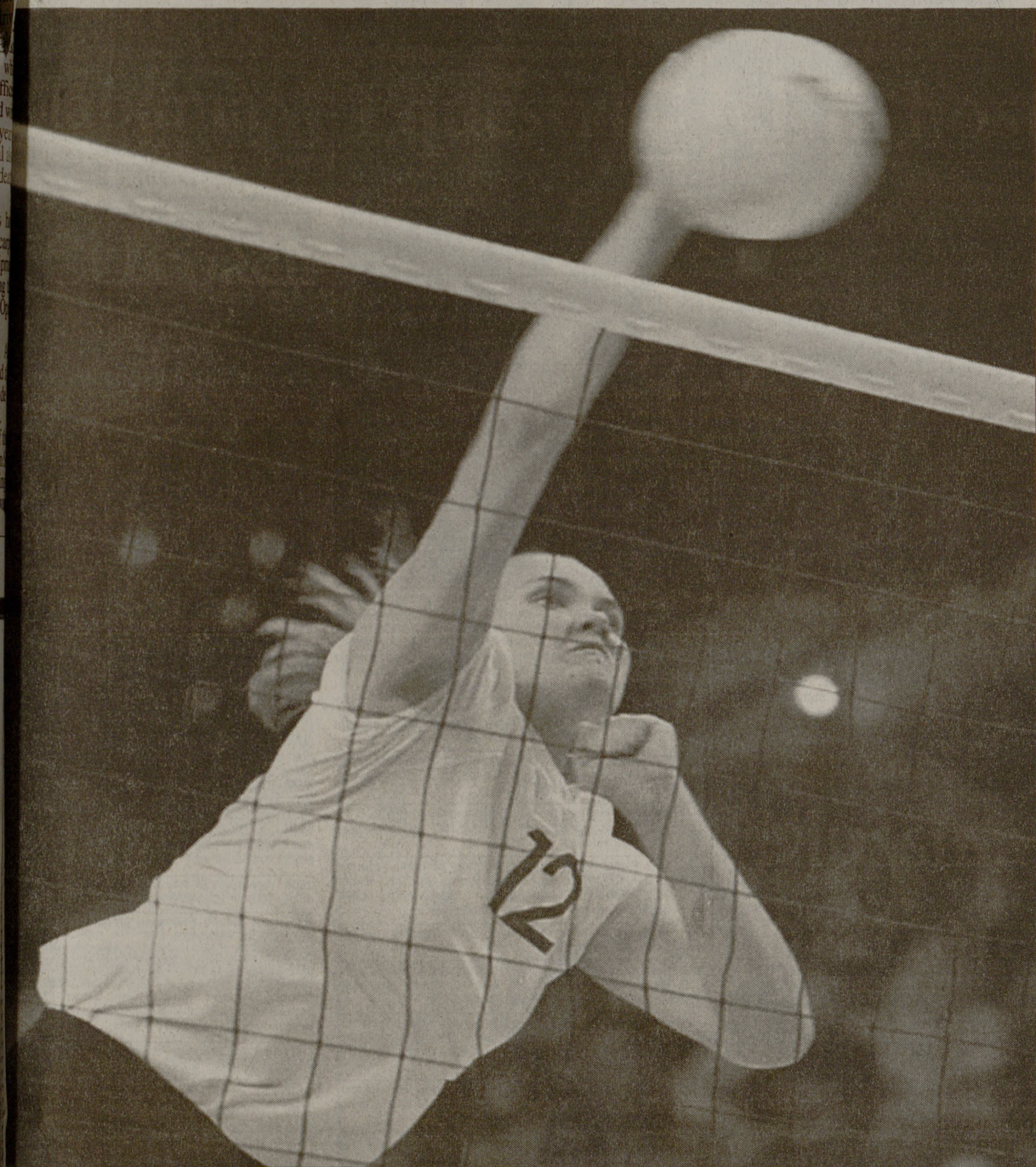
league's head coaches. Four Aggies were named to the list.

Setter Jenna Moscovic was selected to the first team for the second straight season. Earlier this year, she was voted Big 12 Preseason Co-Player of the Year, and as a freshman, garnered Big 12 Freshman of the Year honors. Moscovic is averaging a school-record 14.0 assists per game.

Outside hitter Erin Gibson is making her inaugural appearance on the first team. Gibson leads the Aggies with 4.36 kills per game and 4.54 digs per game in her first season as a starter.

Redshirt freshman middle blocker Tara Pulaski became the first Aggie in Big 12 history to receive Newcomer of the Year honors. Pulaski leads the starters with a .351 hitting percentage and is second on the team with 1.06 blocks per game.

Middle blocker Heather Marshall received honorable-mention honors and is averaging a team-high 1.42 blocks per game.



FILE PHOTO/THE BATTALION

Freshman middle blocker **Tara Pulaski** was named the Big 12 Conference's Newcomer of the Year. She was just one of four Aggies to receive conference honors, prior to the launch of this weekend's NCAA tournament.

### Alabama contacts TCU coach

FORT WORTH (AP) — Texas Christian coach Dennis Franchione talked with Alabama athletic director Mal Moore on Thursday about the Crimson Tide's coaching vacancy.

Franchione told the Associated Press that he spoke with Moore on the phone Thursday morning and planned to meet with him in person Thursday night. He would not say where they would meet.

Franchione said he had not been offered the position, but indicated that he is intrigued by the opportunity.

"All I said when he called me is that there is a group of people that I'm not interested in," said Franchione, whose name has been linked to many recent openings.

He said he liked the idea of coaching the Crimson Tide.

"You know how much I enjoy the tradition of college football," he said.

Alabama is looking to replace Mike DuBose, who resigned after the season. The Tide was 3-8. Butch Davis of Miami and Virginia Tech's Frank Beamer already have rejected the job.

Alabama reportedly is also pursuing Pittsburgh coach Walt Harris. Longtime Florida State defensive coordinator Mickey Andrews has openly campaigned to be a candidate.

Franchione is a hot commodity because he's taken the 1-10 team he inherited three years ago and posted three straight winning seasons, reaching a bowl each time. This year's team is 10-1, ranked No. 13 and headed to the Mobile Alabama Bowl to play Southern Mississippi on Dec. 20.

While there was not yet an offer, Franchione said he hoped to have things settled quickly.

"I want to get all of this behind me," he said. "I don't want to do anything to harm TCU or Alabama."

### Equestrian team hosts defending national champions

By DIANNE XAVIER  
The Battalion

After taking second and fourth in Western shows at West Texas A&M on Oct. 28, the Texas A&M equestrian team will be back in action this weekend.

A&M will host its final set of home shows for the fall season in N.W. Dick Freeman Arena in College Station.

The Aggies will host two English shows on Saturday beginning at 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. The Western shows will take place Sunday at 8 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Despite getting the opportunity to perform on home turf, head coach Tana Rawson said her squad does not have home advantage.

"It's going to be really tough to have our show here since we have to borrow the majority of the horses and provide them to all the other schools," Rawson said.

The equestrian team borrows and leases its horses from A&M's animal science department.

"We also have to make sure that the horses are functional and that can be time-consuming and take away from our practices," Rawson said.

"Our riders will not be familiar with these horses, so it's hard to predict which school will come out on top."

The Aggies will compete against some of the top equestrian teams in the region this weekend. The team will take on Kansas State, West Texas A&M and defending national champion Oklahoma State.

"All of those schools are very competitive, so it's going to be the luck of the draw to see who's the winner," she said.

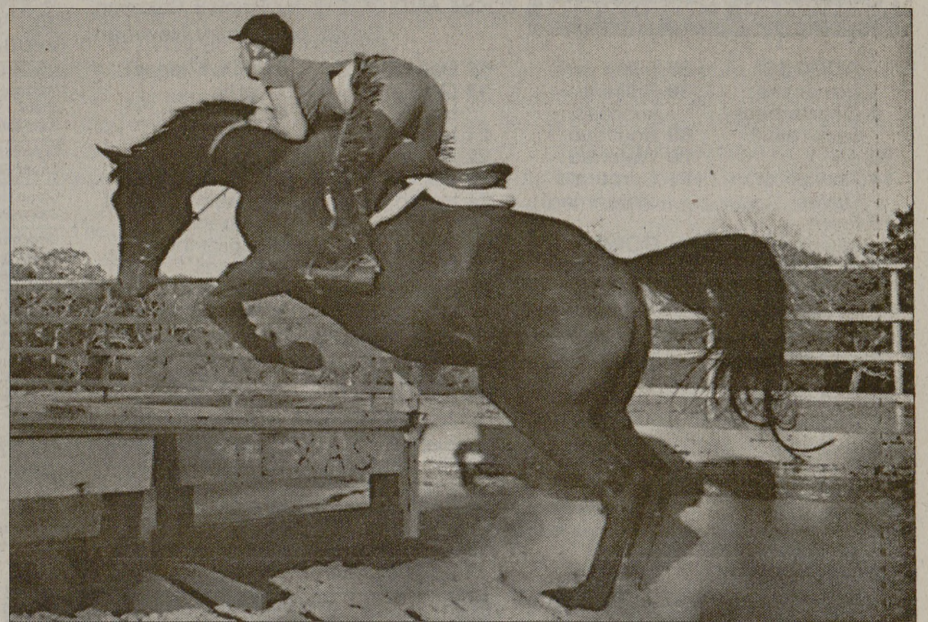
The Western team is led by Quincy Cahill, who won her reining class in both shows at West Texas A&M. Cahill needs only one fourth-place finish to qualify for regionals.

"Quincy has been practicing really hard these past weeks, so I expect her to have a strong showing," Rawson said.

Rawson said putting this show together has been overwhelming.

"We had to hire judges, get functional horses, ring stewards and get the right equipment," she said. "A lot of the students don't see these horses since they are new."

"Our goal is to just stay focused," she said. All shows are free of charge and a concession stand will be available for spectators.



FILE PHOTO/THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M equestrian team concludes its fall season this weekend, hosting defending national champion Oklahoma State, Kansas State and West Texas A&M.

### Yankees add Mussina to starting rotation

NEW YORK (AP) — After beating the rest of baseball on the field, the New York Yankees beat everyone to Mike Mussina.

"It just came down to who really seemed to want me on their team the most," Mussina said Thursday after agreeing to an \$88.5 million, six-year contract.

The deal gives the three-time defending World Series champions a starting rotation that includes Roger Clemens, Andy Pettitte, Orlando Hernandez and Mussina. With just 16 players signed, New York's payroll is \$80.4 million.

"It probably isn't fair," Yankees manager Joe Torre said. "But, again, George Steinbrenner has had winners here in New York and he probably thinks about how to keep doing it."

Mussina, who turns 32 on Dec. 8, compiled a 147-81 record with a 3.53 ERA in 10 seasons with the Baltimore Orioles. He gets a \$12 million signing bonus payable over six years, \$8 million in 2001, \$9 million in 2002, \$10 million in 2003, \$14 million in 2004 and \$17 million in each of the final two years.

New York has a \$17 million option for 2007 with a \$1.5 million buy-out, and Mussina gets a complete no-trade clause.

And he is not even the ace. "It's been a long time since I wasn't considered the No. 1 starter from the first game of spring training," he said. "We might go to the playoffs next year and I might not even get a chance to pitch. That's how strong they are."

### Cowboys, Smith revisit Florida

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — It is as close to a homecoming as Emmitt Smith has had since his rookie season, and the NFL's third all-time leading rusher is excited about it.

The Dallas Cowboys face the Tampa Bay Buccaneers for the first time in 10 years Sunday, affording Smith an opportunity to play for just the third time as a pro in the state where he grew up.

The Cowboys last visited Florida in 1996 to face the Miami Dolphins. But the eight-time Pro Bowl running back has not played in Tampa, a two-hour drive from Gainesville, where he played college ball, and another six hours from his hometown of Pensacola, since 1990. That year he would have been a senior at the University of Florida if he had not elected to turn pro a year early.

"It's special in a number of ways. I'll be two hours from the university where I played and just a couple of hours away from some

of my closest friends in Florida," the four-time league rushing champion said. "This should be a great situation."

Smith returns 130 yards shy of becoming the third player in NFL history to run for 15,000 yards. He is on pace to break the league's career rushing mark of 16,726 yards set by Walter Payton.

The first of his 69 regular-season 100-yard rushing performances came during a victory over Tampa Bay in the fifth game of his rookie season. The Cowboys beat the Bucs again two weeks later, with the 5-foot-9, 209-pound running back gaining 48 yards on 16 carries at Tampa Stadium.

"Jerry Jones said it set a tone for bigger and better things," Smith, who has played on three Super Bowl champions, recalled. "We were on the road ... It was something that the ballclub needed and it worked well for us. But correlations from 1990 to

2000, it's a different kind of setting for us. We're 4-7 (actually 4-8) now and trying to get things on track. Tampa Bay seems like it has some things on track. It's going to be a tough game for us."

The Bucs (7-5) are coming off a 31-17 victory over the Buffalo Bills and battling to stay in contention for a playoff berth. The Cowboys have dropped four of their last five. They have to win their remaining four games to avoid a losing record for the just the third time in Smith's 11 seasons.

Dallas has been decimated by injuries. However, the Bucs said it would be a mistake — not to mention a serious blow to their postseason hopes — to take the Cowboys lightly.

Smith, who had 100 yards rushing on just 12 carries before sitting out part of Dallas' Thanksgiving Day loss against Minnesota because of a concussion, is still capable of taking over games.