

Aggie men to take on Lamar

By JASON LINCOLN
The Battalion

There will be no dead week for Aggie basketball this year. As the rest of the Texas A&M campus prepares for finals, the Aggies prepare for a different kind of test, with a season of hopes waiting on the results.

Tuesday's matchup against Lamar (1-2) will be the Aggies' (2-3) last chance to prepare for the toughest nonconference stretch of games an Aggie basketball team has faced in the Melvin Watkins era.

A one-month road stretch that opens with No. 14 North Carolina begins this Saturday in Houston and finishes with the Rainbow Classic in Honolulu.

For A&M's heralded group of underclassmen, the easy part is almost over. But the Aggies must first look to the game at hand against Lamar.

The Cardinals may not hold the prestige of the Top 25 opponents

A&M is preparing for, but are more than worthy of respect. Last season Lamar shocked A&M in a 76-69

"But right now we're going to focus on who we are and what we can do as a team to get better."

— Melvin Watkins
Texas A&M men's basketball coach

overtime decision in Beaumont. It marked the fourth straight time the Cardinals downed A&M in the Montagne Center.

"We're going to look at Lamar

and we're going to break the tape down," Watkins said. "But right now we're going to focus on who we are and what we can do as a team to get better."

Tonight the game will be played in Reed Arena, where A&M has blundered just once this season. Meanwhile, the Aggies have gone winless on the road. The latest defeat was in double overtime against Virginia Commonwealth.

Despite a pair of three-pointers in the final five seconds by guard Bernard King, VCU held on to the one-point win.

King scored 22 points and was the only A&M starter not to foul out in the record game that featured more points in the second overtime than any other in NCAA history.

King's first breakout performance in his 1999 rookie campaign came against Lamar, when he posted 31

A&M now has another top recruiting class with star potential.

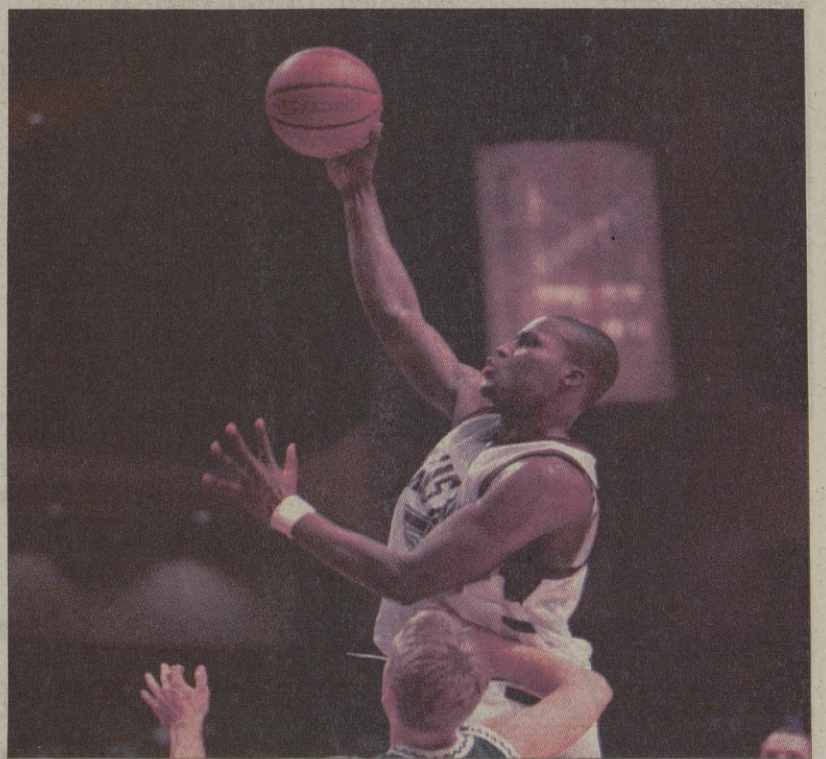
But Watkins needs his rookies to grow up fast, the same way King did a year ago at approximately the same point in his career.

True freshman Nick Anderson and sophomore transfer Keith Bean are a pair of newcomers who were thrown into the starting lineup and are looking to make an immediate impact on the team.

They add a physical presence underneath the basket that has not been a characteristic of Aggie basketball in recent years.

However, with injuries up and down the Aggie roster, the newcomers have been forced to take a much larger share of the load with little time to adjust.

Forward Tomas Riss is returning from a staph infection, but forward



CODY WAGES/THE BATTALION

Keith Bean and the A&M men's team take on Lamar tonight at 7 in Reed.

See REVENGE on Page 2B.

Indy Bowl showcases one of nation's most intriguing matchups



The conjecture is over — A&M will face its former coach Jackie Sherrill in the Sanford Independence Bowl on New Year's Eve in Shreveport, La.

A&M coach R.C. Slocum told the Associated Press he is pleased to get the opportunity to play his former boss.

Slocum is one of the best spin doctors in the coaching business, unleashing coach-speak in every answer he gives when asked how he feels about one opponent or another.

When asked how he felt about playing Sherrill's Mississippi State Bulldogs, he

gave the predictable answer, pointing out the fact they are a quality team from a quality conference.

Sherrill said all the right things too, pointing out the good memories he had of his time at A&M, including five straight wins over Texas and his first Aggie Bonfire.

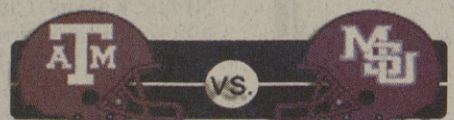
That warm fuzziness is a bit of a change for Sherrill, after he reportedly lit up when told he might take on his former employers.

Not to imply there is any animosity between the two coaches, Slocum was Sherrill's assistant head coach and defensive coordinator at A&M and both of them professed their respect for each other to the AP.

But for Sherrill, this game could mean redemption for the past.

Sherrill came to A&M in 1982, at a time when the Aggies had not been to the Cotton Bowl in 15 years, when Gene Stallings was at the helm.

INDEPENDENCE BOWL 2000



Texas A&M [7-4] vs. Mississippi State [7-4]

Independence Stadium, Shreveport, La.
Dec. 31, 8 p.m.

RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

Within four years, Sherrill had the Aggies back in Dallas on New Year's Day. Before he was done after the 1988 season, Sherrill had won three consecutive SWC Championships from 1985-1987.

But Sherrill did not leave on good terms.

He left the program slapped with NCAA probation that would haunt the Aggies into the '90s for allegedly paying a former player to keep quiet about recruiting improprieties.

Even though the player later recanted his accusation, Sherrill's legacy was complete and he was viewed as a bad boy until Mississippi State scooped him up in 1991.

Although he has stayed clear of any more NCAA rules violations, he has not completely shaken his bad reputation, and for good reason.

In 1992, before a game with the University of Texas, Sherrill castrated a bull in front of his players to motivate them to play the Longhorns.

Guess he never got over the whole UT rivalry thing — and he never even worked for the folks in Austin.

That begs the question, will Jackie's next move be the neutering of a collie

Let's hope not, but regardless of his motivation techniques, he should have his team ready to take on the Aggies in Shreveport.

In other business, for anyone wanting to see the I-Bowl, they better get in line now. The south end zone of Independence Stadium is under construction for renovation, reducing capacity to 37,000.

Regular seats are already sold out and each school will get 12,000 tickets. A&M students will be allotted 2,000 of those and the rest will go on sale to the general public after season-ticket holders' orders are filled.

Ticket prices range from \$25-\$35 and will be distributed by the A&M ticket office when they arrive from Shreveport later this week.

Blaine Dionne is a senior journalism major.

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