

## Life on the fast track

### Freshman forward making immediate impact on Aggie soccer squad

Story by JEREMY BROWN

There are athletes who must balance the demands of both their coaches and professors.

There are the cowgirls and cowboys who enjoy A&M's rural atmosphere and its great agricultural school. There are those who bleed maroon inherited from their parents. There are those who are very religious and look to God to guide them. There also are those who are leaving home to settle down with their one true partner.

It is unusual when all of these descriptions fit one person. However, that is the case with the Texas A&M soccer team's new star, freshman forward Linsey Johnson.

The side of Johnson that most people see is the blazing speed that allows her to knife through defenses and catch goal keepers off guard.

Johnson scored a goal in each of the Aggie's first six games before her streak ended with Colorado on Sunday. If she holds that pace, she will break the A&M freshman record of 13 goals set by Jamie Csizmadia in the Aggie's inaugural season, 1993.

Johnson holds the team's second fastest 40-yard-dash time — only freshman Emma Smith was able to beat her — but it may be her speed at adjusting that has helped Johnson the most.

"Most freshmen, no matter how good they are, their heads are spinning," said soccer head coach G. Guerrieri. "She got a lot of that out of her system in the spring."

Johnson gained an advantage over most freshmen by graduating from high school after the fall semester of her senior year and attending A&M during the spring. That enabled her to practice with the Aggies for an entire semester before playing any games. "I've never really had the opportunity to have excellent coaching or playing with an excellent team of this caliber, and it apparently paid off," Johnson said.

With Hermann Award-nominee Nicky Thrasher and All-Big 12 first-teamer Heather Ragsdale returning at forward, Guerrieri originally tried moving Johnson to another position. But when she continued to score goals every day in practice from the defender and midfielder positions, Guerrieri decided to move her back to forward.

With such an impressive show in practice, Guerrieri was not surprised with her offensive explosion.

"We totally expected it," Guerrieri said. "When we brought her in, we knew she was a great athlete."

The other schools recruiting Johnson had little chance because of her early graduation and her many ties to A&M.

Her parents, Dennis and Laquita, her brother, Matt, and her great-grandfather, Elvin Thompson, all attended A&M, but her strongest family tie is to her fiancé Brad Woodard, who already was attending A&M. They were engaged this August and are planning to be married in July.

"We just have both felt that God has shown us to be together and be married, and we didn't see the point in waiting another four years before I graduate to get married," Johnson said. "I think it will actually help me with soccer because he is such a huge supporter."

Johnson began playing soccer at the age of four. She played eight seasons for the Midland Blast Soccer Club and was the leader in scoring and assists every year.

At Midland Lee High School, she was the school's all-time goal scorer despite playing only three seasons. Soccer was not her only athletic venture as she gained letters in track and tennis.

However, the activity she enjoyed most was the rodeo. "I'm a real big cowgirl," Johnson said. "I grew up with horses and cattle. I have my horse that I miss really bad. I love the rodeo and working cattle, and I miss it so much. I love that stuff."

After falling short of a Big 12 championship last season, the Aggies welcome Johnson to a team that should make another run at the title.

"With the record that Nicky and Heather have and the speed of Emma, I hope we are a force to be reckoned with," Johnson said. "We are still moving up the ladder. We haven't even peaked. I just think it's going to continue to get better."

GUY ROGERS • THE BATTALION

## No. 24 Aggies look to shake up Big 12 race

Don't look now, but the Texas A&M football team is starting to roll.

After playing relatively close games in their first two outings, the Aggies have completely dominated both Oklahoma State and Notre Dame with a stifling defense that did not allow the opposition more than 200 yards per game.

After Saturday's 24-3 win over Notre Dame, A&M made its first appearance of the season in the two major polls, coming in at No. 24 in the Associated Press rankings and No. 22 in the ESPN-USA Today Coaches poll.

The Aggies (4-0, 1-0 in Big 12) look like a team that has potential to post major upsets this



TRUE BROWN

season — something they have plenty of chances to do. Road games are on the schedule against Colorado, No. 12 Kansas State, No. 3 Oklahoma and always-tough Texas Tech.

The Aggies also will play No. 5 University of Texas at Kyle Field Nov. 23.

Of the seven Big 12 teams left on the A&M schedule, there is a record of 18-4. The road will not be easy.

But it was not easy in 1998 when the Aggies stunned the college football world by capturing the only Big 12 championship in school history.

The Aggies started the 1998 season ranked No. 14, but looked lethargic during their nonconference schedule, never scoring more than 28 points in a game.

Then, in its second conference game, A&M

surprised the nation by upsetting defending national champion Nebraska, 28-21, at Kyle Field.

The win gave A&M the momentum to run off five more wins and earn a spot in the Big 12 championship game.

Now, after Saturday's thrashing of Notre Dame, A&M looks to be gaining momentum much like it did in 1998.

The similarities between 1998 and 2001 are not lost on football head coach R. C. Slocum.

"I told the players all week that this reminded me of the Nebraska game in 1998," Slocum said after Saturday's game. "Prior to that game ... the team really hadn't played all that well. But we came out and beat Nebraska and grew up a lot that day."

"As the season progressed, we grew into a

championship team," Slocum said.

It is obvious after four games this year that A&M has grown.

In the last two games alone, the defense has brought its 'A' game, recording 12 sacks, forcing 15 punts and giving up an average of just 67 yards rushing. The special teams has converted two blocked punts into touchdowns and averaged 15.3 yards on kickoff and punt returns.

The offense also has shown flashes of improvement, mounting scoring drives of 80 and 76 yards against Notre Dame and using an effective running game to control the clock.

This Saturday's game against Baylor will give the Aggies a chance to grow together more, and if they do, the rest of the Big 12 will be in for a surprise.

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