

No. 23 softball hosts Aggie Invite II

By Micala Proesch
THE BATTALION

The No. 23 Texas A&M softball team will try to replicate its home field success of two weeks ago as it hosts the Verizon Aggie Invitational II this weekend.

The Aggies will battle No. 19 University of Louisiana-Lafayette, No. 24 University of Notre Dame and Illinois State in the three-day tournament.

Heading into this weekend, the Aggies (14-4) seem confident. They made it to the semifinals of the gold bracket at the NFCA Leadoff Classic in Georgia last weekend before being beaten by No. 4 Nebraska, who went on to win the tournament.

The Aggies upset then-No. 11 Oregon State, No. 14 Cal-State Fullerton and Notre Dame on their way to the semifinals, playing extremely solid softball and showing the country that their team was one to watch out for.

"Our defense was solid, and our pitching staff did a great job this weekend," said A&M head coach Jo Evans. "We just played all-around good softball."

The media took notice this week as the Aggies moved to No. 23 in the USA Today/NFCA Top 25 poll.

Evans reached a career milestone this weekend as she recorded her 500th career victory when the Aggies beat Notre Dame 2-1 on Saturday. Evans is in her 17th year as a collegiate head coach.

"A lot of my family and friends came up there to watch us, so that is what made the moment special," Evans said.

The Aggies' offense in the tournament was led by freshman standout Adrian Gregory, who went .615 in five games with two home runs and five RBIs.

Juniors Selena Collins and Crystal Martin were named to the All-Tournament team, with Martin pounding her first home run of the season and playing exceptional defense in the field.

Jessica Slataper (7-2) took the loss to Nebraska for the Aggies, after walking four and striking out seven batters, and giving up three earned runs.

The Aggies committed four errors and were outplayed all the way as Peaches James threw a four-hit shutout and pounded a two-run homer for the Cornhuskers.

Before the loss to Nebraska, the Aggies were on a 12-game winning streak, their longest since 1993. The streak included four wins over teams ranked in the top 20, and a complete sweep of the field in the Aggie Invitational I.

A&M kicks off the tournament Friday against Illinois State at 11 a.m. at the Aggie Softball Complex before playing UL-L at 2 p.m.

All tournament games will be played at the Aggie Softball Complex or Bryan High School fields, with times subject to change due to inclement weather.



A&M senior first baseman Kelly Ferguson fields a ground ball during the Verizon Aggie Invitational I on Feb. 16. The Aggies host the Verizon Aggie Invitational II this weekend.

No. 24 A&M men look to bounce back at home

By Kevin Espenlaub
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M men's tennis team has had trouble finding a consistent level of play in the past few weeks and lost two of its last four matches after peaking at the No. 12 team in the nation earlier this season.

Now that its ranking has dropped to No. 24, A&M head coach Tim Cass believes part of the cause for his team's weak play was a challenging period pitting the Aggies against difficult opponents with little rest between matches.

"I was pleased with the effort against Florida," said Cass of the Aggies' 4-3 victory last Friday against the University of Florida Gators. "The last few weeks have been a challenge for us because we've been playing opponents at such a rate that we often only get 36 hours between matches. We were able to come out strong in the doubles matches and we beat a good Florida team."

The Florida match was just two days after a 4-3 upset by the Rice University Owls in which

the Aggies were swept in the three doubles matches to open play and were never able to recover.

If rest between matches has been a concern for Cass, then he might not be looking forward to this weekend's doubleheader when the Aggies host Abilene Christian University and No. 69 Boise State University at the Varsity Tennis Center on Saturday.

To complicate things further, the second match against Boise State, originally scheduled for 6 p.m., has been moved to 3 p.m. due to expected inclement weather.

The first serve for the Abilene Christian match is scheduled for 10 a.m., and if either of the matches is affected by the weather, the contest will be moved indoors to the City of Bryan Tennis Center on Austin's Colony Road.

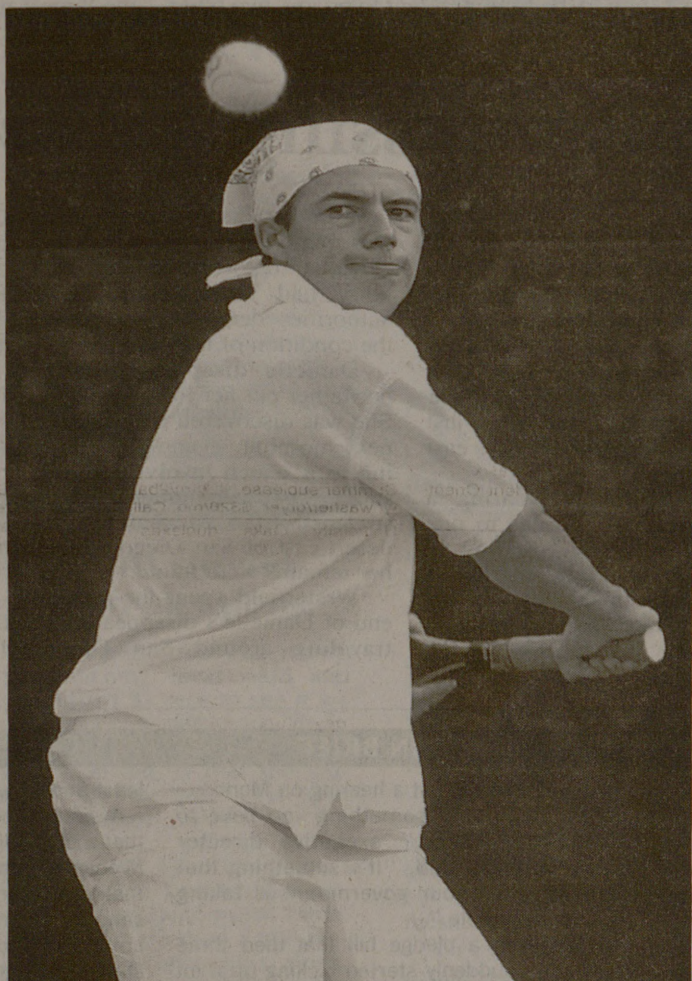
For the Aggies to be successful, they will need several key players to improve their form and join sophomore Khaled El Dory and freshman Ante Matijevic in the win column.

El Dory has won his last six

matches and Matijevic has compiled a 6-1 record so far this season, but senior Keith From lost his last four singles matches and No. 36 junior Ryan Newport has lost two of his past three completed matches.

Freshman Lester Cook, No. 63 in the nation, has been asked to carry a significant load for the team this season by playing on court two. Despite some positive signs, he has yet to find consistent success in his singles competitions. Cook lost three of his past four matches after he upset the nation's No. 24 player when the Aggies defeated No. 9 Duke University on Feb. 1.

"I think it's important for us to get everybody on the same page on this team," Cass said. "I'd really like to see Keith (From) get back on track and Lester (Cook) has played some tough opponents, but we need him to fully adjust from his senior year in high school to playing on court two on a college tennis team. This is a young team and we're learning things with every match. For the most part, I'm pleased with the direction we're heading."



A&M freshman Lester Cook attempts a backhand during the Aggies' match against Auburn on Feb. 17 at the Varsity Tennis Center.

Madden joins booth on 'Monday Night Football'

NEW YORK (AP) — Boom! Just like that, John Madden is in, and Dennis Miller is out.

Madden is carrying his inimitable mix of enthusiasm, opinions and analysis to "Monday Night Football," leaving Fox Sports and agreeing to a four-year, \$20 million deal with ABC Sports to pair with Al Michaels in a two-man booth.

Miller — a comedian known for obscure references, not football smarts — leaves after two seasons and declining ratings. Dan Fouts and Eric Dickerson also were taken off ABC's prime-time NFL broadcasts, while Melissa Stark stays as a sideline reporter.

"I had this opportunity, and I wanted to do whatever it took to get it done," the 65-year-old Madden said Thursday. "This is where I want to finish."

Michaels, on "Monday Night Football" since 1986, is Madden's first new booth-

mate in more than two decades. Madden and Pat Summerall were paired at CBS in 1981, then moved to Fox in 1994, along the way becoming the signature voices of NFL games.

Madden had one year at \$7.5 million left on his contract with Fox, but the network agreed to scrap that deal after Madden rejected a three-year, \$15 million extension and asked permission to talk to ABC, an industry source told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Madden and ABC then hammered out a contract worth about \$5 million per season, another source said, also on condition

of anonymity. It all happened in about six hours Wednesday.

"This is something that came very quickly. I'm numb, but even through the numbness I realize how lucky I am," Madden said.

"This is something that came very quickly. I'm numb, but even through the numbness I realize how lucky I am."

— John Madden
'Monday Night Football' announcer

Now, Madden moves to the only game in town on Monday nights.

And ABC gets the strongest NFL color analyst it's ever had, along with the sort of

buzz that Miller's hiring only initially generated and that "Monday Night Football" really hasn't held since the days of Cosell, Meredith and Gifford.

Mirroring a general TV trend, the show's ratings declined seven straight years, including a 9 percent drop this season to a new low of 11.5 (each rating point represents a little more than 1.05 million TV homes). Fox's NFL games averaged 10.2, down 4 percent from last season, while CBS stayed at 9.5.

"I don't want to put too much pressure on John — he's been with us all of 20 minutes now — but," ABC Sports president Howard Katz said, "yeah, I expect the ratings to go up."

Madden "has a tremendous knowledge of football and of television," Michaels said. "I can't imagine the blending not working almost perfectly from the first telecast."

Arizona

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stronger," Roland said. "I started walking on it [Wednesday] and it was feeling fine, but we will have to wait and see on Friday after I practice."

Roland hopes to compete in what promises to be a competitive match for Aggie tennis fans on the No. 1 doubles court as No. 22 Jessica Roland and Ashley Hedburg will face No. 21 Maja Mlakar and Debbie Larocque of Arizona.

The second game time decision for Kleinecke will be whether to play outdoors at the Varsity Tennis Center or move the match indoors, where the Aggies have practiced this week to prepare for indoor conditions.

"Once we get used to being indoors I enjoy it," Roland said. "The ball travels a little faster, and I play better indoors."

The match is scheduled for 6 p.m. at the Varsity Tennis Center. Any decision to move the match indoors will be posted at the Varsity Tennis Center.

Invade

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experience and come out hot in the first game of the doubleheader, even if the task seems daunting.

"Well, you'd like to," Johnson said, "but the problem is the first game of the series is usually against tough pitching. The guy they're throwing against us was 12-3 last season and all-conference, so he's good."

"We're probably not going to score a lot of runs. I hope we can

But to shut down the series because we didn't hit good on Friday is a mistake and that's something we talked to the team about."

The pitcher against the Aggies in that first game is Tech ace Chris Phillips. Phillips (2-1) sports a 2.79 ERA with 39 strikeouts in 38.2 innings and three complete games on the season.

Texas Tech's rotation will fill out with Steve Gooch (2-0) in the second game on Friday and Nathan Fouts (3-1) in the series finale on Saturday.

The Aggies will try to match

the Red Raiders pitcher for pitcher, with the matchup in the first game Friday shaping up to be a pitcher's duel.

The Aggies will throw sophomore Justin Moore opposite Phillips in the first game. Moore (2-0) has an ERA of 0.41 and has allowed only one run all season. He has struck out 16 batters in 22 innings of work and has one complete game.

The rest of the A&M rotation will be junior Khalid Ballouli (3-0) in the second game Friday with sophomore Ryan Warpinski (1-1) finishing the series on Saturday.

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