

Aggies hit road for weekend

By Kevin Espenlaub THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M men's tennis team will resume its defense of the Big 12 title this weekend with road matchups against Texas Tech University and the University of Colorado beginning Friday at 2 p.m. in Lubbock.

The No. 12 Aggies (14-3, 1-0) have won nine of their last 10 matches and the only loss came at the hands of then-No. 11 Pepperdine University on Saturday at the A&M Varsity Tennis Center, 4-3.

In the matchup, A&M freshman Ante Matijevic performed in dominating fashion with victories in his singles and doubles matches against the talented Tech team.

"Ante has really played great lately," said A&M head coach Tim Cass. "He's been able to do some great things for us both on the court and off and really has played a quiet leader role on this team even as a freshman."

Matijevic and the team will try to improve on their overall record of 29-3 against the Red Raiders and win their seventh in a row against Tech (10-7, 1-2).

The match opens a string of four consecutive road matches for the Aggies against Big 12 opponents before returning home for the final two matches of the season against Oklahoma State and Baylor.

"We divide each season into several sections," Cass said. "We are finished now with our non-conference schedule and we start a tough series of matches with four on the road. I think it is really going to pose a challenge for us to come away with wins in some tough places to play, but I think we are playing well now and this stretch is coming at the right time."

The Colorado (10-7, 0-2) matchup will be on Sunday afternoon in Boulder, and the Buffaloes will host the Aggies only a day after they are set to host the No. 8 University of Texas. Their last matchup was an upset of No. 38 Miami last weekend.

The Aggies, who dropped from the top 10 in the nation earlier this week, will try to regain the Big 12 title on the backs of several nationally-ranked singles players.

Junior Ryan Newport leads the team and



A&M senior Jarin Skube goes for a volley during the Aggies' match against the Pepperdine Waves last Friday at the Varsity Tennis Center.

is ranked No. 34, followed by senior Jarin Skube at No. 97, No. 104 freshman Lester Cook and No. 114 Matijevic.

The doubles duo of Newport and Cook rose to the No. 12 team in the nation following the Pepperdine match.

"Matches like the Pepperdine one

should really help us with the rest of the Big 12 coming up," Newport said. "Especially the younger guys learned a lot from playing a tough opponent like them and keeping ourselves in the match. We are going to have to keep playing as hard as we can to repeat as champions."

Rangers prepare for home opener Gonzalez returns to Texas, Valdes makes Rangers pitching debut

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Juan Gonzalez is coming home and a third starting pitcher will make his Texas debut Friday.

Still, some things haven't changed for the Rangers. When they play their home opener, they will still be in last place in the AL West, where they have spent most of the past two seasons.

OK, it is less than a week into the new season, and Texas is coming off a 7-5 victory Thursday at Oakland after losing its first three games. But the Rangers have showed that despite the revamped pitching staff, they still have not solved their main problem: poor pitching.

Ishmael Valdes, whose best season was 15-7 for Los Angeles in 1996 when he was 22, gets his turn when he makes his starting debut for Texas in Friday's home opener against Anaheim. He was 9-13 with a 4.45 ERA for the Angels last season.

The home opener will also

mark the return of Gonzalez, who was the two-time AL MVP while with the Rangers from 1989-99. But he was traded after the 1999 season — after Texas won its third AL West title in four years.

New Rangers general manager John Hart, who had Gonzalez in Cleveland last year, brought the slugger back to Texas — the team that originally signed him when he was just 16 — with a \$24 million, two-year contract.

All-Star shortstop Alex Rodriguez, who hit .318 with an AL-leading 52 homers and 135 RBIs last season in the first year of his record \$252 million contract, went hitless in the first three games for the first time in his career. He went 1-for-2 Thursday, after getting hit twice by pitches.

When Rodriguez was plunked by Cory Lidle for the second time to lead off the sixth inning, he stared angrily and cursed at the right-hander. The benches emptied, but no scuffles ensued and there were no ejections.

In addition to bringing Gonzalez home, Hart signed 16 new pitchers and brought 34 to camp.

Chan Ho Park, the prize pitcher in the offseason free-agent pool who signed a \$65 million, five-year contract, and Dave Burba made their first Texas starts in the series against Oakland.

Park gave up six runs on five hits over five innings in an 8-3 loss in the season opener Monday. He was placed on the disabled list Thursday because of a strained right hamstring and will miss his first two scheduled starts at The Ballpark in Arlington.

Burba had six strikeouts in his start Wednesday, but also walked four and gave up four runs in five innings.

After Burba left, the Rangers came back with five runs in the seventh to take a 6-4 lead. But the bullpen blew that game, with Oakland taking advantage of six walks — three each from new relievers Rudy Seanez and Rich

Rodriguez — to score five times in their final two at-bats.

A night earlier, newcomer Dan Miceli gave up the game-winning homer to Carlos Pena to start the ninth. Pena was a top prospect the Rangers traded to Oakland during the offseason.

Even in the win Thursday, closer John Rocker took over with a 7-2 lead and gave up three runs before finally closing out the game.

The three-game series against Anaheim starts a 10-game homestand in which the Rangers will play all three of their AL West rivals. After the Angels, Oakland and Seattle come to Texas.

The last time the Rangers opened the season with a road series was 1994, the year The Ballpark in Arlington opened.

They started on the road two other times, but those were single games in Puerto Rico against Toronto last year and at New York in 1995 after a strike delayed the start of the season.

Berkman's homer propels Astros to victory

HOUSTON (AP) — Lance Berkman insists there is no agreement between him and Houston Astros owner Drayton McLane.

But Berkman keeps hitting home runs, just in case.

Berkman tied a club record for homers at the start of a season with his third in three days, leading the Astros over the Milwaukee Brewers 6-3 Thursday.

Berkman has connected in all three of the Astros' games, repeating what Chris Truby did last year.

"Each game, (McLane) has said if I don't hit a home run I have to get my hair cut," Berkman said. "He thinks we have a deal, but I never agreed to it."

Berkman, who has let his shaggy hair grow down over his neck in back, did not place much emphasis on the club record. He was surprised to learn the major league record for home runs at the start of the season is four straight games, shared by Willie Mays (1971) and Mark McGwire (1998).

"You don't really think about a record like that," Berkman said. "All it means is I had three home runs in three games and we have 159 games to go. If this is all I do, it will be a terrible year."

"I won't be thinking about the major league record tomorrow, but it would be neat to tie, I guess."

It wouldn't surprise the Astros. "I call him Cave Man because of the long hair and he's big and strong," winning pitcher Shane Reynolds said.

"He is such a great hitter. He could wake up and step out of bed and get a hit. He works at the game, but he absolutely loves it and he's a great hitter."

Manager Jimmy Williams likes what he sees in Berkman.

"He's really swinging the bat well," Williams said. "He's driving the ball and hitting with power. And hitting with men on base. He's just a very good hitter."

The Brewers are aware of Berkman, who drove in three runs as he went 2-for-4 to raise his average to .462.

"He should have been a lot more careful," manager Dave Lopes said of pitcher Jamey Wright, tagged for Berkman's homer in the fourth inning. "At 3-1, you can't give that guy something to hit. You've got to

make him chase a pitch up in the zone or in the dirt.

"You can't throw him a strike there. It's not embarrassing to pitch around the guy," he said.

Wright realizes that now. "I made a good 3-0 pitch to him," Wright said. "I thought I made the right pitch on the changeup and left it up. You make a pitch like that, he's not going to miss it."

The game at Astros Field drew 21,528, the smallest crowd in three seasons at the park formerly called Enron Field. That broke the mark set Wednesday night when 23,381 fans showed up.

Reynolds (1-0) allowed two runs on seven hits in six innings.

Wright (0-1) went 4 1-3 innings and allowed four runs on seven hits and six walks. Wright remained winless for his career against the Astros. He is 0-6 with a 6.71 ERA in 10 starts against them.

Berkman's RBI single started the scoring in the first inning. His two-run homer in the fourth gave Houston a 3-0 lead.

In the fifth, Morgan Ensberg singled and went to third on two passed balls by catcher Paul Bako. Reynolds' squeeze bunt scored Ensberg for a 4-0 lead.



BERKMAN

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line, entry level, on board positions available. Great benefits. Seasonal or permanent. (941)329-6434. www.cruise-cruisers.com.

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4-bdrm/3bath home, sell Avon, \$10 starters fee. Call Holleman, Good Agency, 1-800-873-6313-00 (free) or 693-1635. 812/784-8638.

2-bdrm/1.5bath extra income by cleaning offices M-O/mo + util. \$25 after 5p.m. 823-5031. 693-0985.

August 1st-15th, adult workers to join our nursery at Christ United Methodist Church. 8am-12:15pm, some weekday 8:00-9:00pm. Starting pay \$7.00/hr. Pick-up application: Christ UMC, 4203 St. Mary's Rd., CS.

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M-roommate needed. 3bdrm/2bth duplex, \$350/mo. +1/3bills. Starting July, w/d, fenced yard, pets ok. Shane 575-7366.

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Friday, April 5, 2002

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