

Make up match has Big 12 weight

By Kevin Espenlaub
THE BATTALION

The No. 17 Texas A&M men's tennis team enters Thursday's makeup match against Oklahoma State University with the pressure of the Big 12 race on its shoulders.

The match, originally scheduled for March 13 before the teams agreed to postpone it, will be the Aggies' third of four matches this week against Big 12 opponents, and without a win against the No. 44 Cowboys (10-5, 2-2), A&M's chances for the Big 12 title will be virtually eliminated.

"We have two very important matches with Oklahoma State and Baylor," said A&M head coach Tim Cass. "Our goal of competing for the Big 12 championship is still very much alive, and the means for us to achieve it are very simple. It all starts Thursday night with Oklahoma State."

The Aggies (17-3, 4-1) also face undefeated No. 7 Baylor University on Saturday, and the only way for the Aggies to earn a share of the conference championship would be to sweep the final two matches. A sweep would give A&M the opportunity to share the title with Baylor and the University of Texas.

The Aggies' only loss of the Big 12 season was last Saturday

at Austin when they fell to 12 Texas, who had lost only earlier to Baylor, leaving more than one team hoping for an Aggie victory on Saturday.

"We are going to be proud of our Aggie hats on Saturday when Baylor heads down to College Station," said head coach Michael Cass. "Without any big upsets on Saturday, that will be the match that decides who gets a shot at the Big 12 title."

Oklahoma State has the opportunity to play spoiler here, ever, days before Baylor comes to town.

The Cowboys' last match on Saturday against Baylor, they were shutout, 7-0. However, OSU was able to bring four of the six singles matches to a tie set before bowing out.

OSU was also scheduled to meet Texas late Wednesday night.

"In one week, we've got Texas, Nebraska, Oklahoma State and Baylor," said Aggie freshman Lester Cook. "That's not an easy week at all, but I think the loss to Texas will really motivate us to come out strong against the other teams we're playing because I know we don't want to lose another match. We've got to come out fired up for every match because with that loss, every match is important, and one loss means we're out of the Big 12 race."

Magic

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Wardinsky, followed suit on his at bat, bunting to SWT first baseman Chris Micheles. Micheles bobbled the ball, loading the bases for the Aggies.

"They had some trouble with the bunts, and that is part of the reason you put a bunt on," Johnson said. "The bunt has to be defended too if it is a good one. They would of had to make a big play even to get the lead runner out."

With the bases loaded, Johnson called on Jordy Mitchell to pinch hit for Tim Petru. Mitchell lined the second pitch he saw over Gonzalez's head into center field for the game-winning RBI.

"I got one out over the plate and put a good swing on it," Mitchell said. "Maybe the Olsen magic was on my side a little bit."

The errors by SWT spoiled what was a good performance by the Bobcat pitchers. Starter

Paul Schappert, who was touched up for eight runs by A&M on opening day at Olsen Field, allowed only five hits and no runs in 4 1/3 innings of work Wednesday.

Relievers Brandon Hankins and Chris Hill combined to allow two hits before Hill entered the game in the eighth inning.

The Aggies, while posting 11 hits, struggled with runners in scoring position before the ninth inning. In the first eight frames, A&M was 1-for-8 with runners in scoring position with the lone hit being an infield single by Eddie Lang. A&M also hit into three double plays.

"I didn't feel like we were as bad offensively as the scoreboard showed," Johnson said. "For our ball club, it was about what we normally do. I wish we could have gotten some balls to fall. The double plays were just one of those things."

The Aggies return to Big 12 play Friday with a three-game set against Baylor.

Empty

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when Baylor left fielder Carrie Leerberg slapped a grounder to second base and advanced to second on a wild throw. Leadoff hitter Kelly Levesque followed with a base hit back to the pitcher, and she took advantage of an Aggie lapse of concentration to advance to second, putting Baylor runners on second and third.

"We got burned the first time, and we talked about it so it was really frustrating to get burned again," said A&M head coach Jo Evans. "We knew they had speed and would put pressure on us defensively, and we needed to stay focused."

A&M pitcher Lindsay Wilhelmson (9-4) hit the next batter to load the bases before forcing a fielder's choice at home off a line drive hit back at her by Lady Bear Sarah Caudle. Wilhelmson let one fly, and two Baylor runners scored on the wild pitch and an error by A&M catcher Selena Collins.

"We completely fell asleep out there," Evans said. "There is no excuse for playing that way. You can't do that against a good team."

Baylor third baseman Kristen Lancaster slammed a double off A&M reliever Jessica Slataper to score Caudle, increasing the Baylor lead to 3-0. Slataper allowed no hits for the rest of the game, but the damage had been done.

Though A&M only had two hits on the night, Evans was pleased with the way the Aggies jumped on Baylor's pitchers and hit the ball.

"I liked the way we came out swinging the bats against Cristina Vitek," Evans said. "The team that hit the ball harder tonight didn't win, but softball is not about that. We didn't take advantage of opportunities to score early, and our errors lost it for us."

This season has been full of missed opportunities for the Aggies, who have dropped several close games due to bad innings. This weekend, they begin a three-game road trip against ranked conference opponents Nebraska and Texas. A&M will take on No. 4 Nebraska in a two-game series this weekend, beginning Saturday at 1 p.m.

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