

Friday, September 27, 2002

Men's tennis heads to Waco

By Gary Livingston
THE BATTALION

As he sits at a desk in the players' lounge, Coach Tim Cass can't help but smile. He recently returned from Paris, where he saw Davis Cup action, the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower.

"I was actually afraid to go up the thing," he jokes.

All is fun and games for the Texas A&M men's head tennis coach, whose team will begin action today at the HEB Baylor Intercollegiate Tournament at the Baylor Tennis Center in Waco. The tournament will run until Sept. 30.

The Aggies are coming off a season in which they advanced to the round of 16 for the third consecutive season and finished the season ranked No. 8 nationally.

More importantly, the A&M men's tennis team, which has had three straight 20-win seasons, is out to make a bigger statement on the court this year.

"Last year we were under pressure to reach the tournament," Cass said. "We had to replace five out of our top seven going into last year. For us to retain a top-16 level, I

was relatively pleased."

This year the men's tennis team is returning four out of its top six players, including All-American Ryan Newport, who is currently No. 24 in the nation in singles play.

Last year Newport reached the round of 16 in the NCAA singles championship knocking off the No. 2 player in the nation along the way. Newport is only the fifth player in A&M history to be named All-American, and the third under Cass.

"Ryan is one of the top guys in college tennis," Cass said. "Twenty-four is a low ranking for Ryan in my opinion. He should be in the top 10."

Also ranked in the national top 100 are sophomores Lester Cook and Ante Matijevic who are ranked No. 78 and No. 83, respectively.

"Those two came in January and made an immediate impact on the team," Cass said.

Cass will send three players to compete at this weekend's tournament. Cook, junior Khaled El Dorry, and freshman Matt Loucks will represent A&M at the 19-team field which includes players from other Big 12 teams such as

Baylor, Colorado, Texas Tech, Texas Tech. There will be 100 competing players from the nation's top 100 competing.

El Dorry led the Aggies' singles victories last season when he compiled a 31-9 overall record and finished 16-4 in dual match competition.

Since the team season doesn't begin until the spring semester, Cass said he will use these tournaments as a way for his players to stay sharp, work on their game and even practice tactics that they don't normally implement.

"This is a good way for our guys to begin collegiate play and to work on their collegiate ranking," Cass said. "These tournaments aren't as important as the spring matches."

The tournament championships will take place Monday afternoon. Cass will begin his fifth year at the helm and in just four years has guided the Aggies to four visits to the NCAA Tournament. Last year he was named Big 12 Conference Coach of the Year and was selected as the Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) Region VI Coach of the Year.

Women's tennis opens season

By Jeff Allen
THE BATTALION

A unique aspect of the collegiate sport of tennis is its division into two distinctive seasons: one in the fall, another in the spring. When the Texas A&M women's tennis team takes the court this weekend at the Cissie Leary Memorial Invitational in Pittsburgh, Pa., it's going to be a case of each woman for herself.

"Everybody's put in one draw," said women's head tennis coach Bobby Kleinecke. "It's a matter of ending up with whatever draw you get. You might have a tough or easy one... (regardless of the outcome of the match) you're never really out of the tournament. The players are always getting to play somebody, which is what we want at this point... to get as many matches under our belt as we can."

The tournament, which marks the beginning of competitive play for the women's team in the 2002-2003 season, will last three days and will present a new challenge for the young team.

The Aggies will be taking on some tough competition coming from Ivy League and East Coast schools such as Ohio State, Penn State and Harvard, whom they seldom see during the team match schedule coming up next spring.

Even though the official team schedule doesn't start for the Aggies for a few more months, the fall portion of the schedule is not to be overlooked.

"Even though it's more on an individual basis, we're trying to get the individual better,"

Kleinecke said. "Then the team gets better and each individual player gets better."

After losing five seniors off of last year's second place Big 12 team, the women are looking at this weekend, and the remainder of the fall schedule, to evaluate where the team stands in its preparations for the spring schedule awaiting it.

"We use it like a test," Kleinecke said. "The more we go back and find out what we need to spend more time working on."

Going into this weekend's tournament in Pittsburgh, the Aggies will carry with them two players bearing national rankings earned from their performance during last season.

The highest nationally-ranked individual is junior Jessica Roland. Roland is ranked No. 59 in singles competition while she is coupled with senior Ashley Hedberg in doubles. The pair is ranked No. 12 nationally as a doubles team.

This fall carries a little more weight than usual for the women's team as it has brought in eight new players on its 12-women roster. It will be forced to look toward some young talent throughout the long year to help put it back to the top of the conference.

"We've got a good team...the chemistry is really good. I think that can propel us further than we normally would," Kleinecke said.

The 6th Annual Cissie Leary Memorial Invitational will take place today until Sunday on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. Championship matches will take place on Sunday afternoon.

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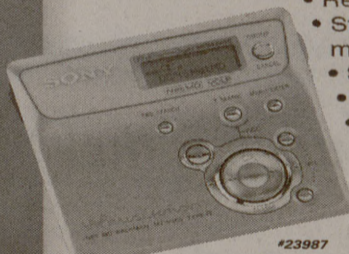
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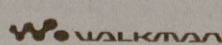
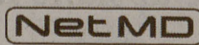


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