

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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Volleyball team stumbles, avoids Tech upset

By True Brown
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M volleyball team staged a late rally Wednesday against Texas Tech, coming from behind in the fifth game to complete a roller-coaster win over the Red Raiders.

After claiming the first two games, the Aggies (12-5, 4-4) were forced into a fifth game when Tech (7-10, 2-6) rallied to win games three and four.

A loss would have been similar to last Wednesday's match in Austin when the Aggies wasted leads in three games and dropped a five-game decision to the University of Texas.

But instead of folding against the Red Raiders, the Aggies came together and posted a 33-20, 30-27, 28-30, 20-30, 15-12 win.

"We really needed that," said A&M coach Laurie Corbelli.

Trailing 11-7 in the fifth game, the Aggies caught fire.

A kill by Tara Pulaski gave the serve to A&M sophomore Lexy Beers, who served up three straight points, including an ace.

The Aggies gained the lead at 13-12

after a block by Pulaski and Julia Rex. Rex finished off the Red Raiders with back-to-back kills to the right side, setting off a furious celebration among the 1,510 in attendance.

The two kills capped a career night for Rex, who finished with 17 kills and 13 digs.

"I felt good," Rex said. "I've never felt more comfortable with the team, and it showed in how I played."

In the win, A&M showed a spark it had lacked in the loss to Texas when the Aggies failed to put away the Longhorns.

"I'm most proud that when we were down 11-7, it changed — what was in our eyes and what we decided to do," Corbelli said. "That's been what's been missing for us in some of the matches that we've lost."

Corbelli said last week's match against Texas served as a learning experience the Aggies benefited from in the Tech match.

"(The Texas match) served as an illustration of our biggest weakness," Corbelli said. "The mental side of volleyball is something this team has to learn how to handle. Inside, they think

they know until they get in a situation and they realize they don't. In this situation, they figured it out."

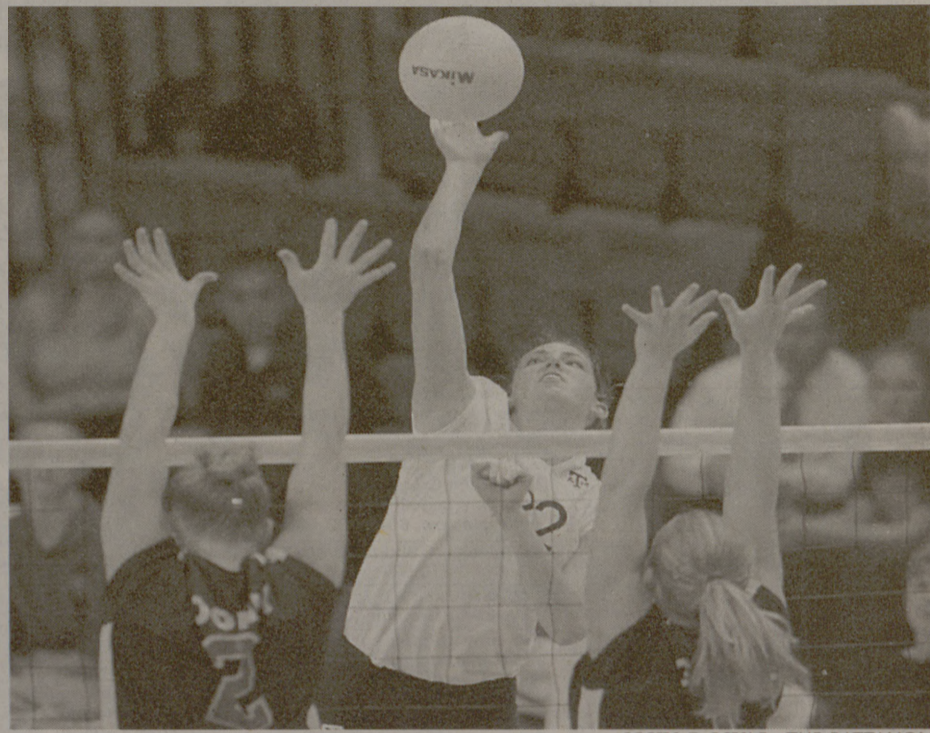
The turnaround was a valuable one for the Aggies, who avoided losing to Tech at home for the first time since 1998.

The Red Raiders battled back into the match thanks to strong play on their left side by Kelly Johnson. Johnson, Tech's team leader in kills, powered through A&M's block often in the third and fourth games, posting nine kills during the Red Raiders' comeback.

But late in the fifth game, the Aggies defense stood up to Johnson on the block by Pulaski and Rex.

The Aggies also took advantage of having three players reach double figures in digs, and had 68 digs as a team.

"That's really where you get your momentum and your confidence," Corbelli said. "We hung in there. I saw it in the girls' eyes and I could hear it on the court that the changes we talked about needing to make in our last week or two ... were made. We've made a big step in the direction of where we're going."



John C. Livas • THE BATTALION
Texas A&M freshman Laura Jones spikes over two Texas Tech blockers on Wednesday.

Cross country team prepares for the nation's best

By Jeff Allen
THE BATTALION

After a week in dry dock, the men's and women's cross country teams will be thrown back into the fire this weekend at the Pre-NCAA meet in Terra Haute, Ind. The team took last week off to prepare for what is arguably the most important race of the year, as it has the opportunity to match up against as many as 100 of the nation's Division I schools. Also included in the field this weekend will be most of the nation's top 25 teams.

"The squad was able to get a good solid week of workouts in (last week)," said cross country

head coach Dave Hartman. "They ran really hard last week in preparation for this race. (Now we can) back off a little (in practice) for this week. It is really not good for them to race every week. (The stress) can wear down your legs and you don't really have any time to build up strength."

The race stands out on this year's schedule as a chance for the team to pick up some at-large points which will go toward qualifying the team for the National meet, which takes place later this fall. If the Aggies are unable to claim first or second place — which presents an automatic National bid — in their respective Regional meet, they will need to fall back on what they have accumulated in meets against schools other than those in their regional pool.

"It is very important to race teams outside our region to get at-large points for later if we don't qualify automatically (for Nationals). If we have enough at-large points we can get a bid," Hartman said.

The men's squad is looking more healthy for this race than any other it has run this year. Top runners, senior Juan DeBastos and junior Tommy Bon, will be in action and nearing full strength. Hartman said, however, that he is not looking to them to be quite at full strength yet, but that progress is being made, and he is hopeful that by Regionals all will be well and at 100 percent.

For the women, the health issue is going in a slightly different direction.

"On the women's side we are still hurting pretty good. We went (into the season) very deep, but now we can't afford to hurt anyone else," Hartman said.

The women will once again be looking toward senior Melissa Gulli to lead them this weekend. She is going into the race with an opportunity to solidify a chance at competing for the National Championship.

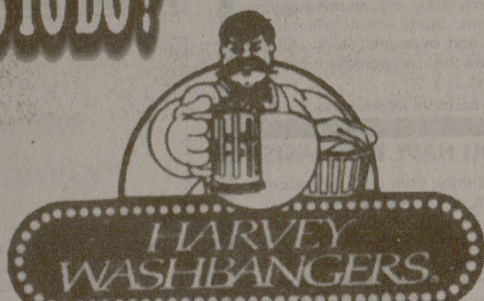
"I want to do well at this meet," Gulli said. "I want to get a top-five finish in every race...this weekend will determine where I'm at, it will give me a good view of where I stand right now and where I stand this season, even though it is still early."

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