

Aggies host All-Stars in last exhibition game

Watkins is optimistic about this year's team

By Michael Crow
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M men's basketball team will play its final exhibition game Tuesday night at Reed Arena against the EA Sports All-Stars. The Aggies enter the game 1-0 in exhibition play, following an 86-73 victory over Ukraine's MBC Nikolaev in the team's preseason opener.

A victory to close out the Aggies' two-game exhibition series would provide a confidence boost for the team as they enter regular season play. The Aggies are coming off a 2001 season (9-22, 3-13 Big 12) that culminated in a last place finish in the league.

Still, there are plenty of reasons for optimism for head coach Melvin Watkins and his team. The 2002 roster features 10 returning lettermen, including all five of last year's starters.

"If early practices are any indication, the potential of this team is there," Watkins said. "I'm excited about the potential of both us and you all seeing a different Aggie basketball team."

A talented crop of freshmen has also contributed to the excitement surrounding this year's team. The most notable freshman standout is forward Antoine Wright, who scored

24 points against the MBC Nikolaev and has been included on Dick Vitale's "Diaper Dandy" list entering the 2002 season.

Senior guard Bernard King described Wright as a complete player on the basketball court.

"Antoine can shoot, can drive, can open up for teammates, he's pretty much a do-it-all guy," King said.



In addition to the increase in talent, a challenging off season regimen led by veteran players helped the team to make gains in both strength and speed from a year ago.

"(We've) been in the weight room a whole lot and are getting stronger," said senior guard Bradley Jackson. "Those are some of the little things the returnees have done that make us more optimistic this year."

While a strong nucleus of players and a sound series of practices have given Watkins and his team a vote of confidence, the Aggies have not been without their share of setbacks. The

most significant of these is a back injury to 7-foot center Andy Slocum.

Slocum underwent surgery on his back during the preseason and is expected to miss six to eight weeks in rehabilitation from the procedure. In addition to Slocum's junior leadership, his size and presence under the rim will be sorely missed in the early stages of the season.

"We might not have a big body in there, one that can rebound," Watkins said. "Still, we do have options and enough bodies to do different things. We can play different ways this year."

With their towering center sidelined, the team will focus instead on creating matchups specific to each team that they face.

Several early tests should provide an indication of just how effective this strategy is and just how far the team has come since last year's disappointing finish. Miami, Louisiana State, and Tennessee should prove formidable opponents for the Aggies in the first half of the season.

"We'll surely be tested by some of those teams, and we'll get an indication on how we sit going into Big 12 play," Watkins said.

The regular season will kick off following Tuesday's matchup with the EA Sports All-Stars, when the Aggies host Texas Southern on Nov. 24 at Reed Arena.



Senior guard Bernard King lays the ball up over MBC Nikolaev's Oleksandr Rayevskyy in the Aggies 86-73 victory in their first preseason scrimmage last week.

Houston Texans' rushing game still searching for results and identity

HOUSTON (AP) — The Houston Texans seem to run into the same problem every week: they can't run the football.

It happened again Sunday when the Texans rushed for only 78 yards and quarterback David Carr was the team's leading rusher in a 24-21 loss to the Jacksonville Jaguars.

That's not how coach Dom Capers planned it.

"We have to get better running the football," Capers said Monday. "Any time your quarterback is your leading rusher, that's not a good statistic."

The Texans (2-8) have struggled to improve their running game all season with little success. They've been held under 100 rushing yards in eight of their 10 games this season.

"I know for us to be the kind of offense we want to be we have to get better at running the ball," Capers said. "The only way you do that is keep working on it."

Jacksonville forced the Texans to get

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— Dom Capers
Texans' head coach

most of their yards on Carr's passing and scrambling. Carr completed 22 of 30 passes for 228 yards, including a 52-yard touchdown pass to Corey Bradford.

Running back Jonathan Wells managed only 15 yards on nine carries and James Allen got 30 yards on 11 carries.

"It's inconsistency, different things here and there," Wells said. "We're run-

ning the football hard, it's just a couple of missed holes here or a missed block there. It's nothing major. We just haven't put it all together yet with 11 players at one time."

Wells is the leading rusher on the season with 367 yards on 118 carries for a 3.1 yards per carry average.

"He hasn't been as productive as he was earlier but our running game in general hasn't been as productive," Capers said. "You look at our rushing yards and yards per attempt the last two weeks, it wasn't as good as some weeks earlier in the season."

The Texans have scored only four rushing touchdowns and three belong to Carr, who had runs of 2 and 14 yards Sunday for touchdowns and finished with 33 yards on 13 carries.

"At one point, we were averaging 1.9 yards in the fourth quarter and it's hard to get things done when you do that," Carr said. "I'm not taking shots at the line or the running backs, it's part me too."

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Hampton traded to Atlanta in exchange for pitchers and cash

ATLANTA (AP) — Mike Hampton got his wish to leave Coors Field — but only after tens of millions of dollars changed hands in a baseball trade that resembled a complex corporate merger.

The money trail goes like this: The Atlanta Braves got Hampton, \$30 million to help pay his massive contract and the flexibility to re-sign Tom Glavine or Greg Maddux.

The Colorado Rockies rid themselves of Hampton's contract and will wind up paying \$49 million for two dismal seasons. Florida saved about \$23 million in salary commitments in a trade that sent catcher Charles Johnson and outfielder Preston Wilson to the Rockies, but the Marlins were weakened on the field.

Commissioner Bud Selig signed off on the three-way deal

Monday, approving a record transfer of cash — \$36.5 million — as Hampton went from Colorado to Atlanta after a brief stopover in Florida.

The Braves were interested in signing Hampton two years ago, but the left-hander took a \$121 million, eight-year deal from the Rockies — a record for a pitcher.

The Braves obviously feel the last two seasons were a Coors aberration. Although, his ERA was 6.44 on the road compared to 5.68 at home.

The Marlins acquired Hampton, outfielder Juan Pierre and \$6.5 million from the Rockies in exchange for Johnson, Wilson, left-handed reliever Vic Darenbourg and second base prospect Pablo Ozuna.

Florida was anxious to dump the contracts of Johnson (\$26 million over the next three years) and Wilson (owed \$28 million through 2005). But in order to move Hampton, the Marlins agreed to pay Atlanta \$30 million over the next three years.

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