

Aggies set aside sorrow for annual showdown

Slocum says team has obligation to play hard

By Kevin Espenlaub
THE BATTALION

Days after tragically losing one of its own, the Texas A&M football team will travel to Austin to take on the University of Texas Longhorns in the annual contest between the state's biggest schools.

The death of freshman defensive lineman Brandon Fails, 18, on Monday has put a damper Friday's game, which is one of the nation's most heated rivalries.

"Today is an example of the inescapability of the realities of life that we all have to deal with," said A&M head coach R.C. Slocum after announcing Fails' death to the media on Monday. "Everybody's hurting and we just have to try to help them get through it."

Fails died in his dorm room

Monday morning, and as a result, the University of Texas canceled its annual Hex Rally that was scheduled for that evening.

The event had taken place officially since 1986, only being canceled once before after the 1999 Aggie Bonfire Collapse.

Unofficially, the event began in 1941 as a way of cursing the Aggies, whom the Longhorns had lost 18 consecutive times to.

"In respect to (Fails') family, it would be wrong for us to be celebrating with people before the game," said Texas head coach Mack Brown in response to the cancellation.

The game will take place Friday at 11 a.m. at Darrell K. Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium.

The teams will be squaring off for the 109th time and the series is the fourth longest in Division IA college

football. The teams first played each other in 1894.

For A&M, the game will be the most important of the season, but the Longhorns also have a heated rivalry with the University of Oklahoma, which they lost 35-24 earlier this season.

"There is not as much anger in (the A&M-UT) game in my estimation," Brown said. "It's a different rivalry because so many families are split between these two schools. I also think that the Bonfire tragedy changed this rivalry."

The Aggies (6-5, 3-4 Big 12) will enter the contest after losing to Missouri 33-27 in their last home game of the season on Nov. 16.

Freshman quarterback Reggie McNeal started the game before injuring his ankle, making way for sophomore Dustin Long to lead the team back from a 14-point first half deficit before throwing an interception in the second overtime period and handing the Tigers the victory.

"Reggie has great speed for a quarterback and Dustin is a guy we recruited who can scramble and run the quarterback draw too," Brown said. "They run the same offense, so there will be no change in our defense either way. We're planning on Reggie playing some."

The loss added more pressure on Slocum, whose job had been in question and a source for rumors in the past few weeks.




"It's really what you do all the time," Slocum said in response to what the game means to him personally. "The outcome of a football game doesn't determine my life and it won't this week. (Fails' death) is the big



JOHN C. LIVAS • THE BATTALION
Sophomore quarterback Dustin Long looks downfield for a touchdown against Missouri. Long will look to improve his career of 2,314 yards in the Texas game Friday.

thing for me right now, and how his family is dealing with the situation." Texas (9-2, 5-2 Big 12) is coming off a tough loss to Texas Tech in a game that officially knocked the Longhorns out of the Big 12 Championship. "We were disappointed in our loss to Tech, but we haven't lost back-to-back games since 1999," Brown said. "Our guys have shown great intestinal fortitude in fighting back after a loss." The Longhorns have an 18-game home winning streak, the third longest current streak in NCAA football.

TEXAS A&M / TEXAS Predictions

| | |
|---|---|
|  | Kevin Espenlaub 28 - 24 Texas "Emotional Aggies fall short in fourth quarter." |
|  | Dallas Shipp 34 - 10 Texas "This score worked for OU, maybe it will work for t.u." |
|  | True Brown 34 - 21 Texas "t.u. offense wears down the Wrecking Crew." |

RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION

Soccer team faces North Carolina in Elite Eight

A&M hopes second meeting goes better

By Troy Miller
THE BATTALION

On Sept. 13, the Texas A&M women's soccer team lost to the then No. 1 University of North Carolina Tar Heels, 4-1. Since then, the Aggies have reeled off 18 wins in their past 20 games. When the Aggies and Tar Heels meet for the second time this season, a Final Four berth will be on the line.

"That was a game (Sept. 13) where we learned some difficult lessons about ourselves," said A&M head coach G. Guerrieri. "The players were challenged to step up their level of play, to step up their level of commitment and after that game is when we went off on our 16-game unbeaten streak."

The second-seeded Tar Heels own 16 national championships as well as 20 Final Four appearances. The Aggies are making their second trip to the Elite Eight and are looking for their first Final Four.

"It helps knowing the Carolina players are human," Guerrieri said. "We'll go into Chapel Hill not playing against Mia Hamm and Christine Lilly and the ghosts of Carolina past. We'll be going in against a team we have already played once this season."

The Tar Heels are currently riding a 12-game unbeaten streak into their match against A&M. To

reach the NCAA Quarterfinals, North Carolina had to come back to beat the University of Tennessee.

After being down 1-0, Carolina rallied to score three goals and win, 3-1.

"Carolina is Carolina," said Tennessee head coach Angela Kelly. "They wear teams down."

The Aggies have won two squeakers to reach their second consecutive Elite Eight. After dominating Northwestern State 8-0 in the first round, the Aggies have prevailed in two straight penalty kick shootouts. Freshman goalkeeper Kati Jo Spisak has come up big to advance the Aggies.

"Her most special skill is to learn from situations," Guerrieri said. "She has gotten better at so many things. The strength and conditioning training as well as our goalkeeper sessions has made her a very agile and explosive keeper."

"She's always had great talent, but now, add that dimension to it as well as her confidence and you got someone who could be the best in the country."

Spisak saved three penalty kicks to seal a win over Southern Methodist University in the second round. She then saved three more in a shootout to beat UCLA in the round of 16.

"I guess I was in the zone," Spisak said. "I was just having fun out there."

Now, the Aggies will go from the West Coast to the East Coast looking for the elusive Final Four berth that will finally earn them the respect they have been looking for.



ALISSA HOLLIMON • THE BATTALION
Texas A&M freshman midfielder Becky Olson looks to pass downfield against SMU last Sunday.

"At the beginning of the year against UNC we were missing a couple of players," Spisak said. "Now we have everybody. I think we're ready and we want it bad."

The Aggies will attempt to reach the Final Four against North Carolina Friday in Chapel Hill at 2 p.m.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Tech safety Aycock cleared of assault charges by DA

LUBBOCK, Texas (AP) — Texas Tech starting safety Ryan Aycock has been cleared of criminal charges stemming from a fight as part of an agreement with the Lubbock County District Attorney's Office.

The agreement requires Aycock to serve 80 hours of community service, pay \$500 to the Lubbock Boys and Girls Club, abstain from alcohol and pay an unspecified restitution to Francisco Ortiz Jr., the other participant in the May 26 fight.

"Charges were dropped. I think that speaks for itself," Aycock's father, Gary Aycock, said in Tuesday's editions of the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal.

Aycock turned himself in for arrest on Sept. 16. He claimed he was reacting to being threatened by Ortiz at Bleacher's Sports Cafe.

Ortiz, 29, claimed Aycock blind-sided him either with a punch or bottle. Ortiz said he's understanding he's to receive \$500 restitution.

"I think the outcome is pretty fair, considering it was his first offense," Ortiz said. "More than likely, I will be following up with probably a civil suit, some sort of civil action."

Aycock, a junior, is the Red Raiders' second leading tackler this year. He started all 13 games for the team this season.

He was available for comment and had declined comment on the matter previously.

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