

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

Page 1B • Thursday, January 30, 2003

A&M faces off with Longhorns in Texas Cup

Aggies meet UT in non-conference competition

By Jeff Allen
THE BATTALION

The Texas Cup has been no cup of tea for the Aggies in its first two years of existence. The brain child of A&M Head Coach Tim Cass, the non-conference match-up with longtime rival Texas, has left the A&M men with few happy memories.

Each year, the Aggies have gone in as the favorite, most recently in 2002, pitting a No. 12 national rank against Texas' No. 16, and both years the Aggies have come away with two point losses. Each match was held at a neutral court in Houston.

"It's become quite a good rivalry," Cass said. "But we haven't won one yet. It was my invention, so I sort of wonder why I invented it."

This year, things are shaping up a bit different. For one, judging by the rankings, the Aggies are not the favorite this weekend. Texas enters the match ranked No. 12

in the nation; the Aggies enter at No. 13. Next, the match has moved from the mundane and faceless neutrality of Houston, to the Penick-Allison Tennis Center on the University of Texas campus.

Fortunately for the Aggies, the Texas Cup jinx hasn't carried over into other meetings between the two teams during the past three years. A&M has owned the series in other matches against the Longhorns by a margin of 4-1, and going into Saturday's match, the Aggies will be riding high off an opening-day tripleheader sweep last weekend.

But everything is not roses for the young Aggie team. The team is facing a shortage of proven talent in its doubles play. In the fall season, the Aggies were able to sit back and watch the combination of sophomores Lester Cook and Ante Matijevic collect national accolades. The pair achieved a national rank of No. 5 entering the team portion of the schedule.

Even as the Aggies most-proven doubles players, the duo can only account for

one win in team play. With the doubles point being awarded to the school that wins a majority of the three doubles matches, that leaves A&M lacking another doubles victory.

The situation leaves the Aggies needing to break the pair apart for the good of the team to find new chemistry.

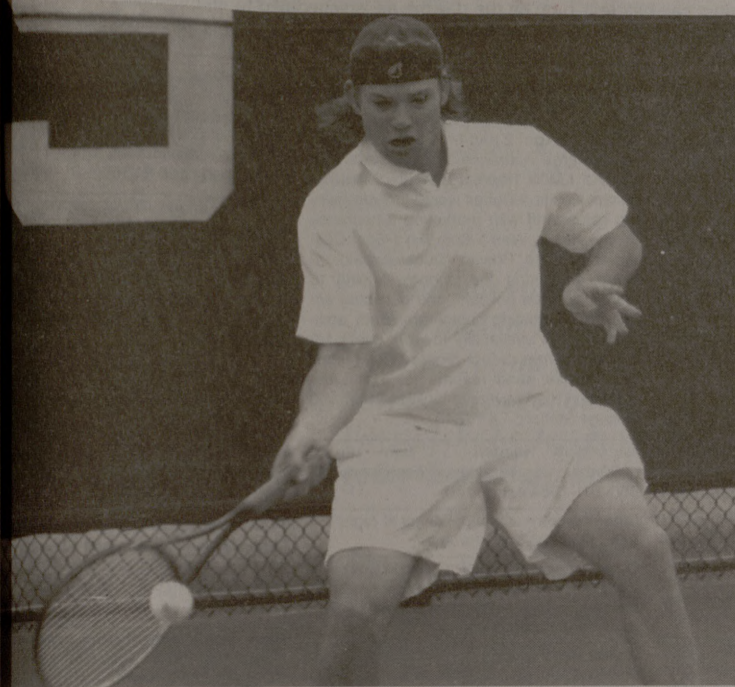
"We're going to have to experiment all semester with what makes the most sense for us in order to win," Cass said.

Heading to Austin this weekend, the Aggies will also be relying on some young talent. The men's roster contains only one senior, Ryan Newport.

"It's a lot different for me," Newport said. "(Before) there has been a lot of older guys on the team and now that it's my turn, it's a completely different role. I'm just going to try to help (the underclassmen) out with my experience along the way."

The chance for the freshmen to get

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JP BEATO III • THE BATTALION

Senior Ryan Newport returns a shot in last weekend's tripleheader at the A&M Varsity Tennis Center. Newport and the Aggies will meet UT this weekend in Austin.

Women's tennis opens season in Ames

By Blake Kimzey
THE BATTALION

When No. 15 College of William & Mary called to schedule a match with the Texas A&M women's tennis team earlier this year, A&M Head Coach Bobby Kleinecke couldn't refuse. With the Aggies ranked No. 23 in the nation and coming off a school record 23 wins from a year ago, Kleinecke was pleased with the idea of adding another competitive team to the schedule.

However, with the NCAA schedule already in order, it would take a bit of tinkering to make the pieces fit this spring.

Fortunately for A&M, Iowa State Cyclones'

Head Coach Michele Conlon did not mind moving her team's scheduled match-up against the Aggies to the first weekend in February. So, after three months away from the court, the A&M women's tennis team will open its season this Saturday at 12 p.m. in Ames, Iowa.

With the schedule conflict resolved, the Aggies will wait to face William & Mary until later this spring.

As it is, the women's tennis team will have to worry about facing the Cyclones this Saturday, and then traveling to Columbia, Mo. to face the No. 68 Tigers on Sunday.

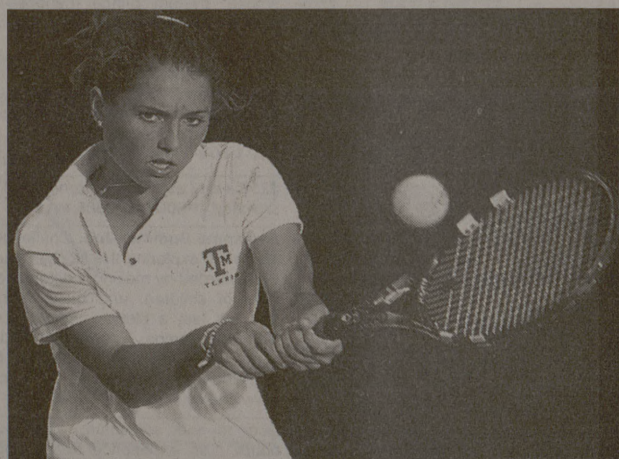
"This weekend will be good anyway you look at it," Kleinecke said. "It'll be good to start out the season with a road trip, to get those first

match jitters out of the way against ISU, and a much improved Missouri team. We're going to grow this weekend."

Missouri Head Coach Blake Starkey also sees the strides his club has made during the past year heading into early season play.

"We've gotten to the point where this program expects to have some success," Starkey said.

Meanwhile, the Aggies are looking to build on their second place finish in the Big 12 from a year ago. The team finished with a No. 22 ranking and first round appearance in the NCAA Championships to top an exciting 2002 season.

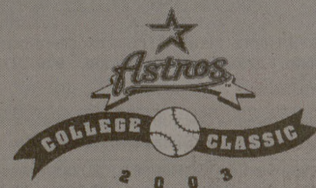


FILE PHOTO • THE BATTALION

Junior Roberta Spencer and the A&M women's team will start their dual match season this weekend against Iowa State.

See Ames on page 3B

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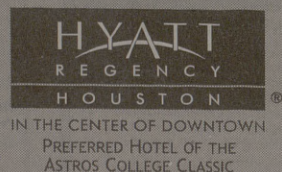
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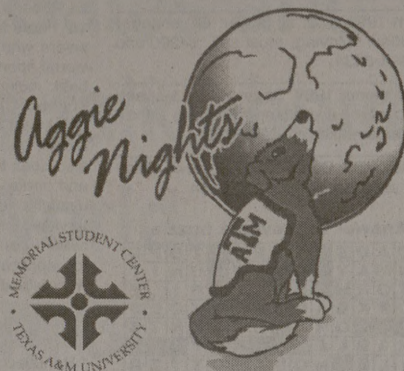
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