

Track teams close regular season in Iowa

By Marcus White
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M men's and women's track and field teams will close out a successful indoor season this weekend when they travel to Ames, Iowa, to compete in the Iowa State Classic. This will be the Aggies' last indoor meet before the Big 12 Indoor Championships in Lincoln, Neb.

A&M's last action was at the Houston Indoor Classic Saturday, where it placed first in five events. The Aggie men and women posted especially strong performances in the field events, taking four of five gold medals.

The Aggie men performed well enough in Houston to crack Trackwire's top 25 weekly power rankings. A&M is ranked No. 18 overall, tied with Big 12 conference rival and perennial track and field powerhouse University of Texas.

Senior Chris Pinnock posted a season-best 7.78 seconds to take first place in the 60-meter hurdles.

"(Chris Pinnock) has a legitimate shot at winning the national championship (in the 60-meter hurdles) and an outstanding chance at winning the conference championship," A&M track and field Head Coach Ted Nelson

said. "He's the best hurdler in the Big 12 and arguably the best in the NCAA."

Several of the nation's top athletes will be competing in the men's events. The 60-meter dash features Oregon's Samie Parker and UTEP's Taiwo Ajibade, two of the country's top 10 sprinters. Top Aggie hurdler Chris Pinnock also faces stiff competition in the 60-meter hurdles from Oklahoma's Jason Stanley, ranked third nationally in the event.

On the women's side, freshman Abby Ruston impressed again, winning the shot put competition for the third time in four events this season.

Ruston's winning throw of 48-5.25 also broke the school indoor record of 48-2 set by Amy Paulsen in 1991.

Associate Head Coach Ed Marcinkiewicz could only beam about Ruston's performance this season to reporters.

"Abby has been nothing short of spectacular this season," Marcinkiewicz said in a press release following the meet in Houston. "She will continue to improve as she gains experience."

Many of the top women's track and field programs will accompany the Aggie women to Iowa this weekend, including No. 9 Illinois and No. 15 Kansas State.

Senior Perdita Felicien heads into the Iowa

State Classic as the top women's hurdler while Nicole Whitman is among the top triple-jumpers in the country.

"We are having some people start to come around for us," Illinois Head Coach Gary Winckler said in a press release after last week's Illini Classic. "Nicole (Whitman) continues to jump very well, and we had a number of people set personal bests in their respective events. We plan on getting a little better each week, and that's what people are starting to do."

Kansas State's Lady Wildcats have risen steadily in the rankings since the beginning of the indoor season thanks in part to the increasingly impressive performances of 3000-meter runner Amy Mortimer. Mortimer posted a NCAA-qualifying time of 9 minutes 38.20 to become one of Trackwire's top seven runners in the women's 3000-meter run. The Lady Wildcats' field crew will depend on Rebekah Green to continue her six-meet unbeaten streak in the shot put. Green's throw of 56-1 last week at the Adidas Classic in Lincoln, Neb. bested the second-place mark by more than 4 feet and solidified Green's place atop the women's shot put nationally.

The Iowa State Classic is set to begin Friday at Lied Recreation Center in Ames, Iowa.

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49ers hire Erickson to fill coaching vacancy

By Greg Beacham
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO — Dennis Erickson's big plans for the San Francisco 49ers are mostly small adjustments to the franchise's successful formula.

Erickson was introduced Wednesday as the 49ers' 14th head coach. He replaces Steve Mariucci, who was fired by owner John York on Jan. 15—and he plans to add one element to the 49ers that consistently was thought to be lacking during Mariucci's tenure.

"I think it all comes down to aggressiveness," Erickson said. "I want us to be aggressive on offense and on defense. I want to throw the ball down the field. I want us to hit hard, tackle hard, block hard. That mental aspect is the most important thing I can pursue."

The 49ers hired Erickson on Tuesday after their lengthy coaching search culminated in two intense interviews during the final four days. Erickson met with York and general manager Terry Donahue at the team's training complex in Santa Clara on Saturday, then hammered out

contract details in Portland, Ore., on Monday.

York and Donahue firmly believe Erickson can improve on his 31-33 record with the Seattle Seahawks from 1995-98. Though the 49ers retained several assistant coaches, kept their venerated West Coast offense in place and gave Erickson no say in personnel matters, the team's bosses insist Erickson will have the leeway to build the 49ers in his image.

"I would be very disappointed if he didn't approach this team with a sense of independence and freedom to do what he wants to do," Donahue said. "This is his team to coach, and we're just here to work together with him."

York, who skipped the news conference to announce Mariucci's firing, is pleased with the choice. After years of organizational infighting with Mariucci, York has cleared out every major football-related component of the 49ers hired by Eddie DeBartolo, the 49ers' former owner and York's brother-in-law.

"I think Dennis is going to have a better relationship with the organization (than Mariucci did), and I think he's going to be more aggressive in his offen-

sive approach," York said. "Dennis wants to be here, and he wants to win."

Erickson has known Donahue since 1982, but his best memory of their relationship was a 1988 game in which Erickson's last Washington State team beat Donahue's top-ranked UCLA squad. Months later, Erickson was hired by the University of Miami, where he won two national titles.

True to York's desire in a strictly regimented organizational plan, Erickson has no interest in being involved in player personnel decisions. Donahue and his front office staff will conduct the draft and all free-agent signings.

"I don't want the power to make every decision personnel-wise," Erickson said. "I want to coach football. That's what I was hired to do."

The players apparently approve of the choice, as well. On his flight from Portland to San Francisco on Tuesday night, Erickson was surprised in the first-class cabin by All-Pro receiver Terrell Owens. They had an amiable chat — a

good first sign between the coach and his most talented player.

"I think he was definitely the right person for this job," said Pro Bowl quarterback Jeff Garcia, who earlier criticized the 49ers' long search as embarrassing. "I look forward to working with him. We finally have a coach in the fold, and I think it's somebody who definitely deserves to be here."

Erickson also got the approval of Walsh, the former coach and general manager who's a top consultant to Donahue and York.

"I don't think they're that much different," Walsh said of his West Coast offense and Erickson's offense. "I just think he'll emphasize a part of our offense that we haven't emphasized much recently. I think he'll throw the ball down the field."

"His track record is as good as anybody out there. It's impeccable. Dennis is the guy that can get this offense turned around. Last year, the ball just wasn't getting released to our receivers downfield."

"It wasn't for me to coach it, or to complain and try to change it. Our coaching staff was doing the same things it always did, but it just wasn't happening. Our downfield game was nonexistent. I think he can shake things up and get us going again."



ERICKSON

"This is his team to coach, and we're just here to work together with him."

— Terry Donahue
49ers general manager

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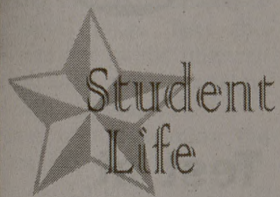
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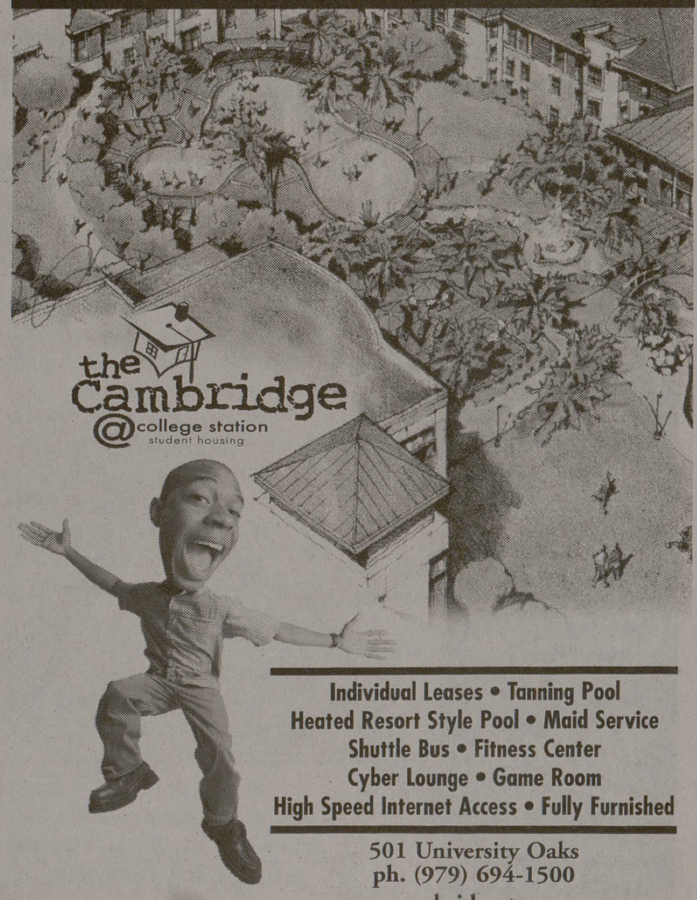
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