

SPORTS

A&M kicks off three-game weekend series



Aggie catcher **Justin Pouk** holds onto the ball as he tags an A&M-Corpus Christi baserunner. The Aggies begin a three-game weekend on Friday against Rice.

By Kevin Espenlaub
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M baseball team will take its swings at two national powerhouses this weekend when it travels to Houston to compete in the third annual Minute Maid Park Classic.

The Aggies will open action against the nation's No. 2 Rice University Owls Friday night at 7 p.m. at Minute Maid Park, home of major league baseball's Houston Astros.

The Owls (1-0) will open their season without the services of All-American right-hander Steven Herce, who is expected to miss the first two months of action due to shoulder inflammation.

Rice Head Coach Wayne Graham is searching to replace his star pitcher and has spent a considerable amount of time working his pitchers in intersquad scrimmages as opposed to a

heavy early season schedule of games.

"I think everybody else started early," Graham told the Houston Chronicle. "I'd rather have my arms past the point of where I think there's a possibility of hurting them before I start."

Graham will start right-hander Jeff Niemann against the Aggies (1-0) Friday. Niemann made his first career start last season on April 23 when the Owls defeated A&M at Olsen Field. Niemann left the game after 4.2 innings and was not awarded a decision in the contest.

Friday will be Niemann's second career start and he will face off against Aggie junior left-hander Kyle Parcus, who is making his first appearance of the season.

Parcus finished last season 5-4 with a 3.56 earned run average and is expected to be a leader on a team with 16 new faces on the roster.

The Aggies will begin

play early Saturday afternoon with a contest against University of Louisiana-Lafayette at 3 p.m.

The Ragin' Cajuns (3-1) will likely take to the plate against A&M senior left-hander Zach Dixon, who impressed Aggie coaches on opening day by fanning six batters in only 2.1 innings of work against A&M-Corpus Christi Tuesday.

"I thought Zach Dixon was a key guy (against A&M-CC) because he beat the three and four-hole hitters and those were their top hitters," said A&M Head Coach Mark Johnson. "He stepped in and beat them twice, and that was huge for us."

While Johnson was pleased with the pitching performance, he was concerned about the team's offensive struggles early in the game against the Islanders and hopes his team will not repeat the performance this weekend.

"(A&M-CC) threw a lot of offspeed pitches, which

is really tough to face early in the season," he said. "We didn't do a good job with runners on and less than two outs."

The Aggies will try to avoid a repeat from last year's tournament on Sunday as they battle the No. 13 University of Houston Cougars, who three-hit A&M in last season's tournament in a tight 2-1 decision.

Parcus pitched five innings in the game and recorded the loss despite allowing only one run on four hits while recording six strikeouts.

This year, the Aggies will put junior transfer Scott Beerer on the mound. Beerer pitched two hitless innings in the Aggies' victory over A&M-CC.

UH will counter with left-hander Danny Zell, who went 8-2 last season with a 2.86 ERA. Zell is 1-0 this season after pitching seven one-hit innings against Pepperdine Saturday.

UH has won its past three games against the Aggies.

Women's team to face Nebraska

By Troy Miller
THE BATTALION

Junior guard Toccara Williams will stare down history again when the Texas A&M women's basketball team (9-12, 2-8 Big 12) takes on the University of Nebraska Cornhuskers (8-13, 1-9 Big 12) Saturday at Reed Arena.

Williams has already broken A&M's all-time steals record, surpassing Lisa Branch earlier this season. Now with 499 assists, Williams is moving in on Branch again as she is second to her in all-time career assists. With one more assist Williams will become only the second player in Big 12 history to score 800 points with 500 assists and 300 steals. Ironically, the only other Big 12 player to do so was Nicole Kubik, who played for Nebraska from 1997-2000.

The Aggies have done well as a team in creating

opportunities for themselves. For the third consecutive season, A&M leads the conference in steals per game at just less than 14 takeaways per game.

The Aggies are coming off their worst loss of the season, an 83-38 thrashing by No. 7 Texas Tech in Lubbock on Wednesday. Williams and freshman Melissa Picone each led the Aggies with just seven points. A&M scored only 18 points in the first half, which tied its lowest output in a half this year.

"I thought we competed in the first half," said A&M Head Coach Peggie Gillom. "We shot 28 percent...if we had only made our shots."

In the second half the Aggies shot even worse to finish with 25 percent shooting from the floor for the game.

"We had open shots and open looks and couldn't score," Gillom said.

The Aggies are hoping to

rebound in front of a home crowd against a struggling Nebraska team. The Cornhuskers have lost 11 of their past 12 games. The latest loss came from No. 5 Kansas State 64-47.

"We don't feel good about losing by 17 points," said Nebraska Head Coach Connie Yori. "But we did outscore them in the second half."

Junior forward Alexa Johnson leads the Cornhuskers with 15.7 points and 6.8 rebounds. If the Aggies are to win this game, they will have to contain Johnson in the paint.

This may be difficult for the Aggies with the rash of injuries suffered in the Tech game. Williams, sophomore Sabrina Mitchell, senior Tressie Mason and junior Lynn Classen all left the game due to injury. Classen could be the largest concern because of her presence in the post. She is second on the team in scoring with 9.1 points per game.

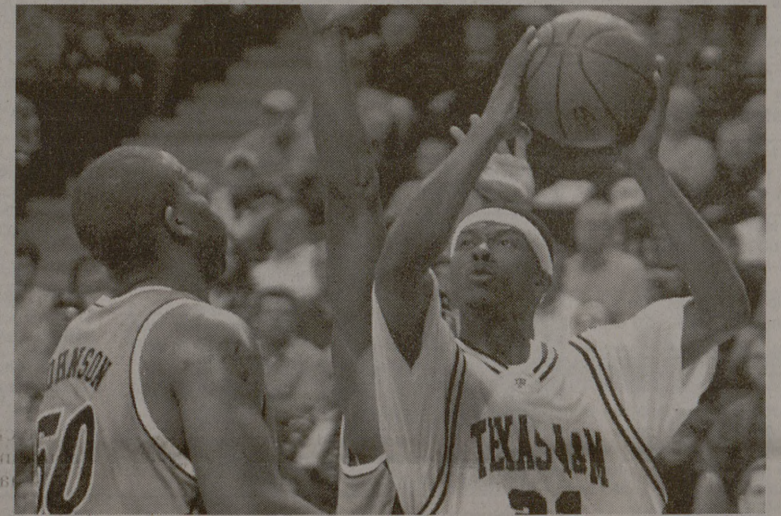
"We had four players hurt," Gillom said. "But they played and fought (against Tech). When you don't have four in good health, it's going to be a long night."

Injuries have simply added to a difficult Big 12 season for A&M. Kim Moore retired earlier in the year, and the Aggies have not been as successful since losing her rebounding ability.

One bright spot for Gillom and her team has been the play of junior Janae Derrick. In Moore's absence, she has taken over the position of A&M's leading rebounder, averaging 6.2 boards per game.

The Aggies hope to avoid another long night in a game that should see Williams reach another milestone in her already storied career at A&M.

The Aggies will face Nebraska on Saturday at 2 p.m. at Reed Arena.



Texas A&M freshman guard **Antoine Wright** puts up a shot against Missouri on Wednesday night. The Aggies upset the No. 21-ranked Tigers.

Aggies head to Colorado

By Dallas Shipp
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M men's basketball team is hoping it can bottle up some of the momentum gained after Wednesday night's win over No. 21 Missouri at home and take it on the road in the high altitudes of the Rocky Mountains against the University of Colorado Buffaloes.

The Aggies are hoping to get a win on the road in a venue that has been a speed bump for two of the top teams in the Big 12. Colorado has knocked off No. 6 University of Texas and No. 9 Kansas at home this year and are 10-1 at home this season.

Texas A&M Head Coach Melvin Watkins said he knows it is a tough place to play, and the team is taking steps to prevent fatigue due to the extreme altitude in Boulder.

"As with most Big 12 teams, Colorado is very tough to beat at home," he said. "They've already beaten Kansas and Texas up there, so we know what kind of challenge this game will be."

The Aggies have not beaten the Buffs on the road in their previous four meetings. In all four trips, the Aggies played well until fatigue set in late in the ballgame.

This year the Aggies are not traveling to Boulder until Saturday morning before the game.

Colin Killian, associate media relations director, said Texas and Kansas traveled the day prior to their games, as A&M has done in the past. But this

year the Aggies are going to try something different.

"The altitude doesn't affect you for the first 24 hours," Killian said. "We are going to try to put that to the test and see what happens."

The Aggies may not be used to playing in the mountain tops of Colorado, but they did show Wednesday night that they are used to playing the top teams of the Big 12 with a 72-70 win over Missouri.

Watkins said that he is proud of the fight he has seen in his team and reemphasized that it is a big difference from his teams in the past.

"I like the effort that we're giving right now," he said. "It's very important for us to try to build on the momentum from the Missouri game as we head into the last half of conference play."

The Aggies are still without the services of junior Andy Slocum who was arrested earlier this season. His absence will be felt against Colorado, which likes to use its 7-foot sophomore center David Harrison down low.

Harrison is second on the team in scoring with 13.3 points per game.

"Colorado is very strong inside and we'll have to find a way to keep them from hurting us down low," Watkins said.

The Aggies are hoping senior guard Bernard King can put on an encore performance of his 29-point effort at home against Missouri and that freshman forward Antoine Wright can rebound after an unusually slow game Wednesday.

Tip-off is scheduled for 8 p.m.

Softball team hosts BYU, McNeese St.

By Pete Burks
THE BATTALION

After a tough weekend in Phoenix against three highly-ranked opponents and two veteran squads, the Texas A&M softball team returns home for a Valentine's Day weekend tournament at the Aggie Softball Complex.

The Aggies had to endure a brutal schedule in the Fiesta Bowl Softball Tournament a week ago, beating Utah and No. 15 Fresno State and dropping games to No. 2 Arizona, No. 10 Cal State - Fullerton and Mississippi State.

A&M will seek redemption this weekend when it hosts Brigham Young University (2-2) and McNeese State (0-0) in the first part of the St. Joseph's Invitational. The second half of the tournament will take place next weekend. While the Aggies did not play poorly in Arizona, A&M Head Coach Jo Evans said she sees room for improvement.

"We hit a few home runs this past weekend, but we need to work on putting some hits together," she said. "We need to work on getting more consistent

hitting. However, it's always good to play tough competition, and you learn a lot about your team when you do that."

BYU will likely be looking to wreak havoc on the bases this weekend, led by All-American first baseman Oli Keohohou. The Aggies and Cougars will square off in an afternoon tilt today at 2:30 p.m. in A&M's first game of the tournament. This will be BYU's first trip down to College Station, but the Cougars are not likely to be intimidated.

"BYU is a great hitting team," Evans said. "Oli Keohohou is a great hitter...and they have surrounded her with other great hitters."

Unfortunately for BYU, its All-American first baseman may not even be able to step on the field due to an injury. Keohohou's health will be worth monitoring.

"It's going to be a really good challenge for our team, and we look forward to these challenges," said Cougars' Head Coach Gordon Eakin. "Oli Keohohou is questionable to play, suffering a minor injury this last week and will be a game-time decision as to whether she plays or not."

Losing Keohohou would be a major blow to BYU, since she led the team to a 2-2 record last weekend in the Southern Utah University tournament, hitting two home runs including the 40th of her career.

McNeese State is a team that will look to gain early season experience this weekend. The Lady Cowgirls have yet to play a game this season, and they know that stealing two wins from the Aggies in a round-robin tournament is no easy task.

"We're not quite sure what to expect from our team at this point," said McNeese Head Coach Scott Eastman. "We are a young team, and I know we'll be nervous going in to a place like A&M. We haven't played them in a while, but they're always a tough team."

The Aggies will have a busy weekend, playing each team twice on Friday and Saturday. The first meeting with McNeese State will take place at 5 p.m. today. Saturday's games against the Cougars and Cowgirls will also be at 2:30 p.m. and 5 p.m. respectively.

WOMEN Saturday **A&M** Texas A&M vs. Nebraska **A&M** 2:00 p.m.

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