

## Aggies head to Arizona for weekend series

### No. 16 A&M continues climb in national rankings

By Troy Miller  
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M baseball team is off to a hot start, and the nation is taking notice. The Aggies have climbed as high as No. 16 in some polls after beginning the season unranked.

Helping the Aggies (9-2) climb the national rankings are the performances of a handful of newcomers. Among the new faces is junior transfer Cory Patton, the 2002 National Junior College Player of the Year. Patton is on a streak of his own as he hit two home runs and knocked in 10 RBIs during his Most Valuable Player performance in the Domino's Pizza Aggie Classic last weekend.

"I was real anxious and jumping at the ball and trying to

do too much early (in the season)," Patton said. "We've settled down and I've settled down now and found a little success."

In all, the Aggie baseball team has welcomed 17 new players to this season's squad. Eleven of those are freshmen, and plenty have seen playing time. Freshman third baseman Cliff Pennington has played in 10 of the Aggies' 11 games and has a batting average of .333. Freshman pitcher Robert Ray threw five shutout innings against UCLA in A&M's 3-0 win. It was Ray's first outing after having knee surgery.

"I think we've got a great class of freshmen," Ray said. "It was good getting out there and getting some experience."

Now the newcomers will travel to Tucson, Ariz. with the

rest of the Aggie team and try to keep the hot streak alive as they take on the University of Arizona (9-4).

Arizona is one of the most storied programs in the nation, now playing in its 100th season. During that time the Wildcats have reached 14 College World Series and won three national championships. The season is shaping up to be another solid one for Arizona.

The Wildcats already boast wins over Big 12 teams such as No. 8 Baylor and Oklahoma State. Arizona has won six of its last seven games.

The Aggies will most certainly see Arizona junior pitcher Sean Rierson on the mound. Rierson started the season slow, but was named the Collegiate Baseball/Louisville Slugger National Pitcher of the Week after he threw a two-hit shutout

against the University of California-Irvine.

Rierson will be a true test for new Aggie sluggers such as Patton and junior transfer Justin Ruggiano. To have success against Arizona the Aggies must see production at the plate and have production from their newcomers.

"We played on average four freshmen a ballgame (at the Domino's Pizza Aggie Classic)," said A&M Head Coach Mark Johnson. "We've talked about the junior class, but there are some freshmen that have really done a good job. Our junior class is going to have to help us, but our freshmen really stepped up."

Last season the Aggies swept Arizona in a three-game series at Olsen Field. In Tucson, the Aggies have lost five of six to the Wildcats.



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Junior Cory Patton slides into second base against Utah Monday at Olsen Field.

## Men's tennis team to make West-coast swing

By Jeff Allen  
THE BATTALION

The No. 12 Texas A&M men's tennis team has gone off in search of a more tennis-friendly climate after the recent cold snap in College Station. The club, which has reached its highest national ranking of the year after defeating then No. 5 Ole Miss last weekend, is heading to California this weekend to brush up on its doubles play at the La Jolla Doubles Invitational, before moving down the coast for a dual match against No. 28 Pepperdine in Malibu, Calif.

"This is a great event for us," said A&M Head Coach Tim Cass. "It will allow us to focus on doubles for the next four days. I think playing Pepperdine has been great. We have had some great matches. They are a good non-conference rival and are a perennial top 10 tennis team."

The Aggies, who have struggled this season in doubles play, have started to show signs of life. The duo of sophomores Lester Cook and Ante Matijevec have continued their strong play from earlier in the season and have worked their way to a career-high national rank of No. 3 in the latest polls after defeating a top-5 duo from Stanford in the Aggies' loss last weekend. Lately they have also been joined by the upstart duo of senior Ryan Newport and junior Khaled El Dory. The pair has won three straight matches since being paired together in the number three spot.

"Number three has come on since we have been searching for combinations. They are a good number three team, but our number two has struggled a bit. We might have to switch them," Cass said.

This weekend the Aggies, along with some of the best teams in the nation, including No. 3 UCLA, No. 18 USC, Stanford and Pepperdine, will compete together without any team scoring taking

place at the La Jolla Doubles Invite. The event will provide the teams a rare chance to focus on doubles in the middle of the season.

"I think it's a great tournament," said Pepperdine Head Coach Adam Steinberg. "It's a beautiful place and it's Spring Break for us. It's a good opportunity to do something fun and get some good work on doubles playing."

Pepperdine, the Aggies' opponent Monday, is coming off of a tough stretch in its schedule. The Waves have dropped out of the nation's top 25 after losing their last two matches, a position that the program is unfamiliar with.

"As a young team we've been going through some ups and downs," Steinberg said. "But we've been getting better with every match."

Pepperdine's roster contains only two players with previous college experience, and does not include seniors. The inexperience has caused the team to face off with struggles that are not uncommon to such a young squad. Much like the maturing Aggie team, they have struggled to get the doubles point in matches, and have had trouble at the number three spot.

Monday's match between the Aggies and the Waves affords both teams a chance to solve their doubles woes and implement lessons learned in La Jolla. Cass and the Aggies are looking forward to the chance at revenge after losing to the Waves at home last season 4-3. Pepperdine leads the all-time series with five wins to the Aggies' two, and despite having the home court advantage, Pepperdine still isn't overly confident.

"We're comfortable at home," Steinberg said. "But we have to approach every match like the NCAAs, and A&M is always a challenge."

The La Jolla Doubles Invitational begins Friday and runs through Sunday. The Aggies are set to take on Pepperdine Monday at 1 p.m.

## Softball team prepares for tough trip

By Pete Burks  
THE BATTALION

After a week of bitterly cold weather in College Station, the Aggie softball team will get a respite from the unrelenting cold and head to Palo Alto, Calif. for the Stanford Classic this weekend. The sunny California skies will be a welcome change since the Aggies' game on Wednesday against the No. 15 Michigan Wolverines was cancelled due to bad weather. However, the break gave the Aggies an extra day of practice before they head out to California.

This weekend's tournament should provide a challenge for the Aggies, as they will have to face some of the best competition they have played all year in No. 11 Stanford, No. 12 Georgia and Long Beach State University, Texas A&M will open the tournament by squaring off against the Long Beach State 49ers and the Georgia Bulldogs on Friday before going toe-to-toe with the Stanford Cardinal on Saturday. A&M senior catcher Selena Collins

said a good showing at the tournament could give the Aggies a morale boost.

"Stanford is a great team," she said. "Playing in this tournament will give us a chance to maintain our confidence. We've been getting under the ball a lot, but after hitting like we did in the Aggie Invitational this past weekend, it will be nice to take that extra bit of confidence to California."

In playing against the 49ers of Long Beach State (6-5), the Aggies will compete against a team that they haven't seen since the 1996 season.

The 49ers have had a week off and should be well rested when it steps on the field on Friday. They are also looking to rid themselves of the taste of a bitter late-inning defeat against the No. 8 Oklahoma Sooners, ending a bid for an upset.

Meanwhile, the No. 12 Georgia Bulldogs will come into the tournament boasting an 18-1 overall record. However, only one of Georgia's games has been against a ranked opponent. The Bulldogs are led by junior center fielder Nicole Barber, who is one of 40

candidates for National Player of the Year honors.

Georgia Head Coach Lu Harris is in her third year in Athens, and while the Bulldogs beat the Aggies 3-1 in the 2000 Fiesta Bowl Tournament, she has never faced A&M Head Coach Jo Evans' squad and is looking forward to playing A&M.

"I personally have yet to coach against A&M, but I am excited about the prospects of playing them," Harris said. "It will definitely be a good game."

Stanford, which will serve as host for the event, will also be looking to continue its winning ways after going 2-1 in the NFCA Leadoff Classic in Columbus, Ga. Stanford is 6-1 at home this season.

"This will be a great tournament," Evans said. "The goal for us is to play with intensity and bring the success and confidence we have had of late to Palo Alto. It will definitely be a good test for us."

The tournament begins a long road trip for the Aggies, who will not return to play at home until March 22, when they host No. 3 Nebraska.

## Women's basketball to host Lady Bears

By Michael Crow  
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M women's basketball team will close out its home schedule on Sunday when the Aggies host the Baylor Lady Bears. The final game at Reed Arena is one of only two contests A&M has remaining this season prior to entering the Big 12 Conference tournament on March 11.

The Aggies (10-15, 3-11 Big 12) enter the game in search of an elusive conference win. A&M has lost its last three conference games, the most recent of which came on Wednesday at home against Oklahoma State University. The Aggies were pummeled by OSU 68-48, largely due to A&M's shooting only 35 percent from the field as a team. The win was the Cowgirls' fifth straight at Reed Arena. Trisha Skibbe led OSU with 26 points and 14 rebounds, while Thia Willis added 21 points of her own.

"We just couldn't score and we let them get on a tear," said A&M Head Coach Peggie Gillom. "Two players nearly outsourced us by themselves."

A&M junior Toccara Williams was among three Aggie players with 10 points. Williams did extend her national lead

in steals in the losing effort, bringing her career total to 335. Baylor's Lady Bears boast an overall record of 17-9, but they have not fared much better than A&M in Big 12 play. All but one of their nine losses this season have come in conference action, with the most recent being a 79-57 thrashing by the No. 10-ranked Texas Longhorns.

Baylor's troubles against UT came primarily in the second half. The Longhorns exploded out of the locker room, scoring 15 points in the first three minutes of play after the intermission.

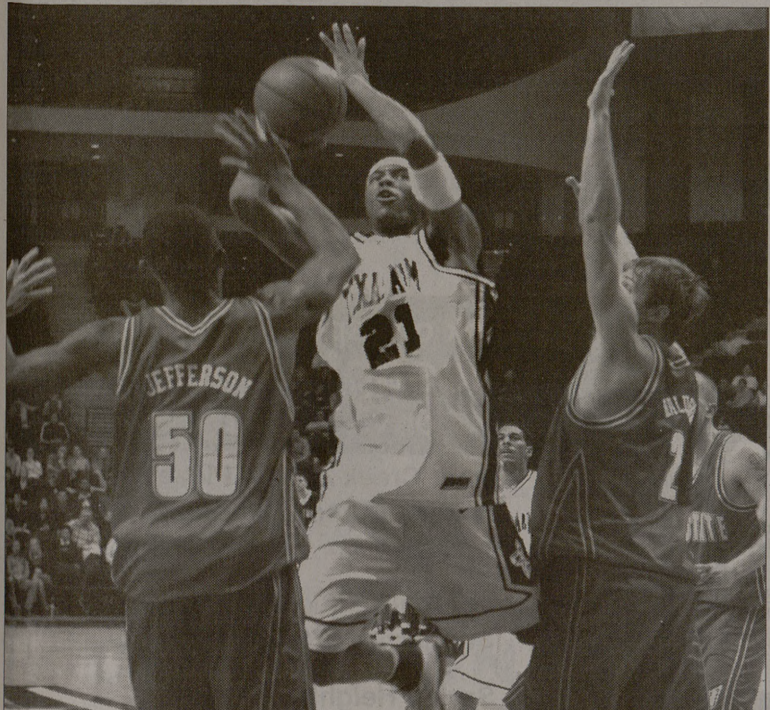
"(Texas') perimeter game has brought them so much more than they had last year," said Baylor Head Coach Kim Mulkey-Robertson. "Everybody looks to score."

Baylor has plenty of scoring threats of its own. Steffanie Blackmon scored 20 points as one of three Lady Bears' players to post double-digit points against Texas.

Amid frustrating seasons and with the Big 12 tournament looming, both A&M and Baylor will be looking to improve their tournament seeding. Tip-off is set for 3 p.m.



WILLIAMS



ALISSA HOLLIMON • THE BATTALION

Freshman guard Antoine Wright fights into the lane for a shot between two Iowa State defenders in the Aggies last home game at Reed Arena on Feb. 19.

## Ags look to rebound against No. 3 OU

By Michael Crow  
THE BATTALION

When the Texas A&M men's basketball team hosts No. 3 Oklahoma University on Saturday, the two teams will each be in recovery mode.

The Aggies will enter the game fresh off of a 40-point loss to the Kansas Jayhawks, which gave A&M its sixth straight conference road loss. The Aggies were unable to get anything going offensively in Kansas, as A&M's leading scorer, junior Leandro Garcia-Morales, finished the game with only nine points.

Things will not get any easier for A&M (13-11, 5-8 Big 12), which has only two home games remaining before the Big 12 Tournament begins on March 13. Aggie Head Coach Melvin Watkins said he realizes how important it is to finish the season strong at home.

"It is very important," he said. "That is something we have said all

year long. You have to defend your home court."

The Aggies have done just that so far this season, posting a 9-3 record at Reed Arena. The record is A&M's best start at home since the 1994-1995 season at G. Rollie White Coliseum.

Much of this early success has come thanks to senior guard Bernard King and freshman guard Antoine Wright. The two are part of an A&M backcourt that has scored an impressive 53.2 points per game. Wright is an early candidate for National Freshman of the Year, leading the Aggies in rebounding, steals and blocks, and is second only to King in scoring. King has scored in double digits in 18 straight games and has averaged just more than 22 points in the Aggies' last four outings.

Oklahoma, a team that beat Kansas a week ago and pulled into a tie for the Big 12 Conference lead, went on to lose convincingly on the road at Missouri. The Sooners (19-5, 10-3 Big

12) led by one point with 10:40 to go, but a late Missouri surge from Arthur Johnson and Ricky Clemons led to the 67-52 Tigers' victory.

"Missouri played like the game was more important to them than it was to us," said OU Head Coach Kelvin Sampson. "We have to find a way to put (the game) behind us."

If the Sooners are to rebound from the disappointing loss in Missouri, junior guard Hollis Price will no doubt be a factor. Price, who averages 3.5 three-pointers per game led the Sooners with 16 points and had five rebounds in the loss. Price has a hot hand, as he leads the nation with a 94.5 percentage from the free-throw line.

Oklahoma will look to utilize Price and Quannas White to put quick points on the board. The Sooners have won an astounding 48 of their last 50 games when scoring at least 80 points.

Tip-off is scheduled for 3 p.m. at Reed Arena.