

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

Page 5 • Friday, March 21, 2003

Aggies head to Lubbock for three-game series

No. 23 Red Raiders provide formidable Big 12 test

By Troy Miller
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M baseball team has been looking to make a move in the Big 12 Conference ever since its last Big 12 championship in 1999. A series win over powerhouse University of Nebraska showed signs that the Aggies may be ready to contend in the Big 12, but now they must try to sustain that momentum on the road in Lubbock against No. 23 Texas Tech University.

The emotional high of opening Big 12 play at home against Nebraska seemed to cost the No. 19 Aggies (19-6, 2-1 Big 12) when they lost to the University of Texas-San Antonio, 6-5, on Tuesday in San Antonio.

"We got our emotions so high (against Nebraska)," said

A&M Head Coach Mark Johnson after Sunday's win over Nebraska. "(UTSA) will be a real challenge for us."

Now A&M travels to Lubbock, where the Aggies have won one game in their last six contests at Tech's Dan Law Field.

One of A&M's many strengths comes from its pitching staff, which owns a 3.42 ERA. Sophomore pitcher Logan Kensing (4-2) will start Friday night in Lubbock. Senior left-hander Zach Dixon (3-0) will start on the mound Saturday, and junior pitcher Matt Farnum (5-0) will get the nod on Sunday.

Before Big 12 play kicked off, the Aggie pitching rotation was perceived to be their largest problem, but so far that has not been the case.

"I think we were over-

pitching a little bit (against Nebraska)," Johnson said. "I think we're going to learn from it."

Junior Scott Beerer, who has pitched 17.2 scoreless innings in the closer role, leads the Aggie bullpen.

Texas Tech (17-8, 1-2 Big 12) will start junior right-hander Steve Gooch (3-2) in the series' first game Friday. Gooch owns a 3.32 ERA and leads the Red Raiders with 48.1 innings pitched. Saturday's starter is junior Juan Razo (2-1). Razo has been pelted for 21 runs in just 34 innings of work, yet he leads the team with 25 strikeouts.

The strength of the Red Raiders lies at the plate, where senior outfielder Scooter Jordan leads the team with a .426 batting average. Jordan reaches base in 56.1 percent of his at-

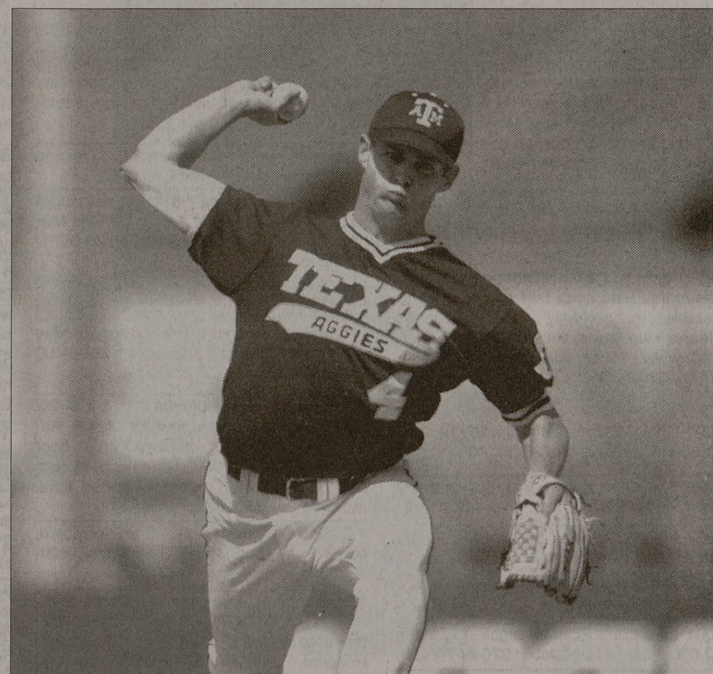
bats. Tech relies on junior catcher Evan Shahak for power, as he has hit a season total of six home runs and boasts a .303 batting average.

The Aggies counter with a lineup that has all nine starters batting above .300.

The Aggie bats are led by junior Cory Patton, who added to his team high total of four home runs against UTSA. Behind Patton is Justin Ruggiano, hitting in the cleanup spot with a .337 batting average.

On paper the Aggies look to be head and shoulders above Texas Tech, but when these two schools lock up on the athletic fields, anything can happen.

"Our guys are ready to play every day," said junior pitcher Kyle Parcus. "I think we'll be able to match what Tech does (in Lubbock)."



JOHN C. LIVAS • THE BATTALION

A&M junior pitcher Matt Farnum releases a pitch against Nebraska last weekend. Farnum (5-0) is scheduled to start for the Aggies on Sunday.

Softball team hosts No. 5 Nebraska

By Pete Burks
THE BATTALION

If road games are supposed to toughen up a team, consider the No. 23 Texas A&M softball team as tough as they come. The softball players have become road warriors as they have been on a month-long odyssey across the country, playing tournaments on both coasts.

But this weekend the Aggies will finally return to the Aggie Softball Complex. Although returning home will be nice for the Aggies (21-11), there will be no rest for the weary as the No. 5 University of Nebraska Cornhuskers come calling this weekend. A two-game series between the teams begins Saturday

at 2 p.m. and ends Sunday at 1 p.m.

Overall, the Aggies went 9-5 on the road, going 5-2 in the first half of the trip and 4-3 in the second half, including losing two games in a row in the Blue and Gold Classic.

The Aggies also played a doubleheader against Texas Tech University before coming home, splitting the doubleheader 1-4 and 10-1. The Aggies simply couldn't get their offense going in the first game, managing only one run when freshman Kristin Gunter knocked in sophomore second baseman Adrian Gregory in the top of the sixth inning. But in the second game, the Aggies finally found their groove, jumping to an 8-1 lead by the top of the fourth, led by senior outfielder

Cheryl Fowler and senior shortstop Crystal Martin, who each hit home runs to help seal the win for the Aggies.

The Aggies need to be ready for the Huskers this weekend if they expect to get off to a good start in Big 12 play, and nobody knows that better than Aggie Head Coach Jo Evans.

"Nebraska is a great team, and they are ranked in the top five," Evans said. "They were the preseason pick to win the Big 12, and their record reflects that. Junior pitcher Peaches James throws a good drop ball, and she really keeps the ball down. Also, they have a freshman phenom in Summer Tobias, who throws

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A&M meets No. 15 Tide

By Jeff Allen
THE BATTALION

The No. 11 Texas A&M men's tennis team has faced a constant barrage of challenges to start the year from the nation's elite teams, including 10 of the nation's top 50.

The story coming out of Tuscaloosa, Ala. hasn't been much different. The No. 15 Alabama Crimson Tide have seen their share of tough competition during the first few months of the 2003 season as well. The Crimson Tide (13-4) has come up against 10 nationally-ranked opponents in their first 17 matches, while competing in a very competitive Southeastern Conference.

"We've had a good year," said Alabama Head Coach Billy Pate. "But

the recent SEC matches are disappointing because those are so important. This league is so difficult, every team is capable of beating everyone else."

The two teams will meet this Saturday at the A&M Tennis Center in a match that is sure to have poll implications. The match is only the fifth meeting between the two clubs, with the first four going to A&M. Their most recent meeting came during the 2000 season when the Aggies downed the Crimson Tide in College Station 6-1.

This year, the Aggies boast an eight match win streak, seven of which have come at the Tennis Center on their current homestand. During that stretch, the Aggies made the most of their home court advantage, outscoring their oppo-

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