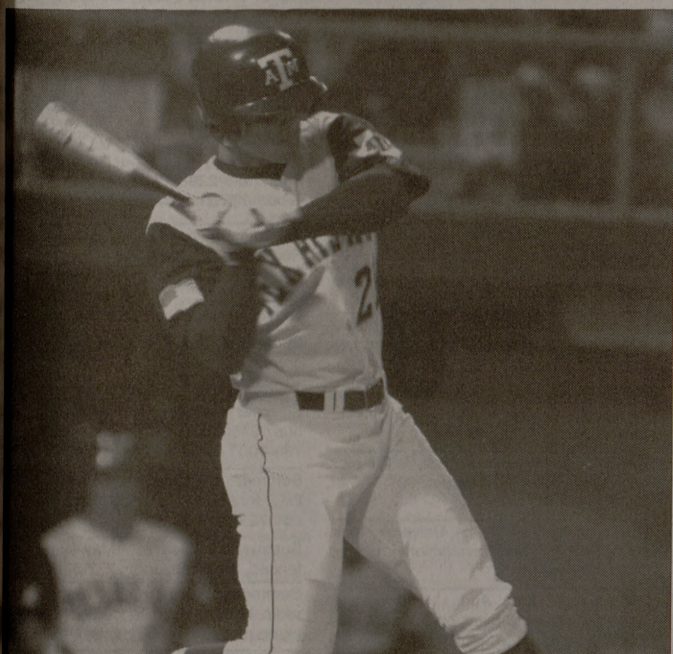


SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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Aggies begin three-game series with Baylor



JOHN C. LIVAS • THE BATTALION

A&M junior Justin Ruggiano gets a hit against Lamar University on Wednesday night. The Aggies won the game, 6-3, at Olsen Field.

By Dallas Shipp
THE BATTALION

The No. 23 Texas A&M baseball team will face one of its toughest challenges this weekend when it travels to Waco to face No. 6 Baylor on Friday night to kick off a three-game series.

Friday's game is scheduled for 7 p.m. at Reckling Park in Waco.

The Aggies are coming off a 6-3 win over Lamar University at Olsen Field on Wednesday night. A&M Head Coach Mark Johnson said the win was a "comfortable" win for the Aggies who jumped out to a 3-0 lead against the Cardinals in the first inning and never looked back.

Johnson said he knows A&M will have a much tougher time feeling comfort-

able this weekend against Baylor in a series that has become one of the best rivalries in Big 12 baseball.

"It was good to get a win and get ready for Baylor," Johnson said. "We'll go on the road and hopefully have a good outing up there and come back down here for two."

"Baylor is a challenge for anyone in the country," he said. "It's a well balanced ballclub."

Offensively, junior left fielder Scott Beerer has become the Aggies' biggest threat at the plate. In his last four games, Beerer has hammered the ball, including a 4-for-4 performance Wednesday night against Lamar.

"I'm excited about Friday night," Beerer said. "Baylor's facilities are pretty awesome and coming back home is going to be great to have the fan support. They are playing really good

baseball but so are we, it's going to be an exciting series."

Beerer is among the top five on the team in 15 different categories including hits, RBI and a team-best .347 batting average. Juniors Justin Ruggiano and Corey Patton have also provided offensive firepower this season.

Sophomore right-hander Logan Kensing will get the start for the Aggies in Friday night's game. Kensing has been the victim of facing other teams' No. 1 starter in his past few games, keeping the Aggies from giving him run support.

"We've lost two one-run ballgames on Friday nights but our guys have (bounced) back," Johnson said. "I would like to change the tune on Friday night because that makes Saturday and Sunday so much easier."

Kensing is heading into the weekend with a 4-3 record. He is second on the team with 33

strikeouts behind only senior Zach Dixon and has an ERA of 4.40.

"He's a sinkerball pitcher so he's going to get a lot of ground balls and all the ground balls fell through against Texas Tech (last Friday)," Johnson said. "A lot of times those balls are going to be double plays."

The Bears are coming off a tough 4-3 loss to No. 1 Rice on Tuesday night. Rice scored two runs on walks and another two unearned runs to edge the Bears.

Baylor (21-7) scored three runs late and had the tying run on third with one out in the ninth inning, but Chris Durbin grounded into a double play to end the game as the Owls extended their winning streak to 22 games.

Game two of the series is scheduled for 7 p.m. Saturday night at Olsen Field with game three on Sunday at Olsen Field at 2 p.m.

Women's tennis team hosts Demon Deacons

By Blake Kimzey
THE BATTALION

With the disappointment of its first setback at home behind it, the Texas A&M women's tennis team will take to the court this weekend to square off against non-conference foe Wake Forest University.

It took four hours for it to happen, but on Wednesday night the Aggies surrendered their first home loss of the season. After securing the doubles point with the help of the No. 38 doubles team in the country, juniors Jessica Roland and Roberta Spencer, the No. 28 Aggies (10-7, 5-2 Big 12) fell to No. 44 Baylor University in a

4-3 marathon match.

However, when the Demon Deacons hobble into College Station on Saturday, they will be in search of just their second win this season, coming off the 2002 season in which they tied their school record with 26 wins.

With much of its team intact from last year's squad, Wake Forest is at the bottom of the ACC standings with a 1-15 record. WFU Head Coach Brian Fleishman, the 2002 ITA National Coach of the Year, expects a heated contest in the match with A&M.

"Every time Wake comes down to College Station, we have to expect a battle," Fleishman said. "I expect this match to be just as

exciting as in the past."

In lieu of what Wake Forest's record might convey to the lay, A&M Head Coach Bobby Kleinecke is very wary of the threat that a 1-15 team presents to his club.

"You can look at their record and ... think that they are really down this year, and they probably are down a bit confidence-wise," Kleinecke said. "But, this is a very capable team that has lost a lot of 4-3 matches this year to a lot of good teams, from the top 20 all the way down."

The Aggies will be looking to senior Ashley Hedberg to continue her strong play of late. After being moved up to the No. 2 singles position three matches ago, Hedberg has yet to lose

and has defended her court in convincing fashion. South African sophomore Karin Coetzee, who is ranked No. 79 in the national singles rankings, leads Wake Forest in doubles and singles play.

"This is a team that has made it to the NCAA quarterfinals, so when you go out there and start play even at 0-0, those records don't mean anything," Kleinecke said. "Most important for us is we need to bounce back from the Baylor loss. It will be necessary for us to put our best match on the court."

First serve is set for 1:30 p.m. this Saturday at the A&M Tennis Center as the Aggies look to improve to 11-7 on the year.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Softball team takes on Mizzou

The No. 20 Texas A&M softball team will travel to Columbia, Mo. for a two-game series with the University of Missouri.

The Aggies are coming off a two-game sweep of the Southwest Texas State University Bearkats. A&M beat the Bearkats 5-3 and 11-0 in consecutive games on Wednesday night. A&M junior Jessica Slataper pitched a perfect game in latter victory.

The Missouri Tigers recently split a two-game series with the No. 4 University of Oklahoma Sooners. The Tigers took the first game 2-0 before falling to the Sooners, 5-1.

A&M and Missouri are scheduled to start play at 2 p.m. on Saturday, with a second game to follow at noon on Sunday.

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