

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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Houx riding high for A&M equestrian team

By Jeff Allen
THE BATTALION

A rhythm is being beaten into the sands of Freeman Arena, a pattern of movement carefully stepped out by the hooves of an animal that has a mind of its own and its own personality. The horse, traipsing through a small visible circuit and occasionally leaping over a short, white fence, directed by a young woman.

She sits high on the back of the animal, moving with the beat of hooves out beneath the clad hooves of the large athletic creature, its muscles visibly contracting and releasing with each step it takes.

"The horse has 100 percent control," said junior Meredith Houx of the Texas A&M equestrian team. "I have to learn to reach it and compromise with it. You cannot force them to do something — all it will do is make it more difficult."

It was early in Houx's life that she first discovered her desire to ride. Not long after her fifth birthday, Houx and her family moved into a new home in Albuquerque, N.M. The house happened to be located across the street from a horse barn, and Houx's parents took the opportunity to enroll her in a program teaching her how to ride. It was then that Houx began competing and started down the road that has taken her to the top of the national equestrian scene at A&M.

"I started showing horses when I was eight or nine because of the barn I started at, and that was just because that's what they (the barn) strove for," Houx said.

It wasn't until age 10 that Houx received her first horse, a gift from her folks. A few years later she realized that she would be able to compete well at the national level thanks to some good advice from a personal coach.

"A trainer told me I could do

whatever I wanted to and made me realize that I had the potential to do it if only I had the drive," Houx said.

It was by the grace of the good old Aggie network that Houx found her way to Aggieland. Her father, a former student, recommended that she come to College Station and visit the campus. At the time, the equestrian program was still young, having only been started in 1999, but the organization still impressed her.

"I looked at the school at the last minute and loved it and loved the team program here," Houx said.

Since becoming an Aggie, Houx has made significant contributions to the growth of the sport at A&M. In the 2001-02 season she was the top open flat rider in the region, but she has really begun to shine more recently. Houx became the region's high-point rider this season and has taken a leadership roll on the very competitive Texas A&M English-

style equestrian team.

"During practices it's like I'm not the only coach out there," said A&M Assistant Coach Pam Bruemmer. "The team gets to see what it's like to be a top rider; they see what it takes. Those girls really are role models in and out of the arena."

Houx has become an integral part of the A&M Equestrian team, but she has also worked hard to become a part of the athletic community. Competing on the team has given her a chance to learn lessons that would be difficult to learn while riding on her own.

She will be competing for the A&M team Saturday at the Zone 7 Championships at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, N.M. Houx has already qualified to represent Region 2 and A&M at the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association National Championships to be held in May.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS A&M SPORTS INFORMATION DEPARTMENT
Meredith Houx completes a jump at the equestrian team's practice facility. She will compete at the Zone 7 Championships on Saturday.

Women's tennis team returns home after extended road schedule

By Blake Kimzey
THE BATTALION

For the first time more than a month, the Texas A&M women's tennis team has found out what the A&M Tennis Center looks like during the week. With a full week of uninterrupted practice time to prepare for their doubleheader on Friday, Head Coach Bobby Kleinecke said having this much court time to prepare for Sam Houston State University and Texas Tech is a welcome break in the schedule.

"I'm extremely excited about getting a full week of practice in, especially at this time in the season," Kleinecke said. The biggest thing has been our focus all

week long. It seems like this is the first time since the start of the season that we've had a full week of practice where you don't have to worry about traveling or your schedule."

Although SHSU is just east of College Station by 30 or 40 miles, the Aggies know precious little about the Bearkats, who hail from the Southland Conference. With a roster loaded with four freshman and three sophomore netters, first-year Sam Houston Head Coach Scott Shankles said this year has been more about development than their 5-11 record.

"This year we haven't done as well as we had last year," Shankles said. "We're a very young and inexperienced team this year with only freshman and sopho-



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mores. Our goal has been to concentrate more on our doubles play to make sure we can compete to win the doubles point, which has been a struggle all year long." If anything can be gleaned from their schedule, with 14 non-conference matches against top competition such as the No. 29 Aggies, SHSU will arrive ready to play. Predictably enough, the Bearkats are led by freshman Tara Shelander, who carries the load for the Bearkats at No. 1 singles.

When the Aggies square off against Texas Tech in a doubleheader nightcap,

however, there will be much more at stake than just interstate pride.

With Big 12 implications on the line, A&M (11-7, 5-2 Big 12) finds itself eager to defend its No. 2 spot in the conference, while Tech (2-9, 2-6 Big 12) is loitering near the bottom of the standings in 10th place and is in need of a victory.

The Lady Red Raiders depend on their Russian-born prodigy, junior Irina Tereschenko, to set the tone in both their doubles and singles matches. Tereschenko teams up with senior Beverly Dawson to form a solid one-two punch at No. 1 doubles.

"I feel that against Tech the doubles point is going to be extremely important because when we last met in the fall tournament, we lost two doubles matches

against them," Kleinecke said. "They are going to come in with a lot of confidence, and we need to establish ourselves there and get the doubles point."

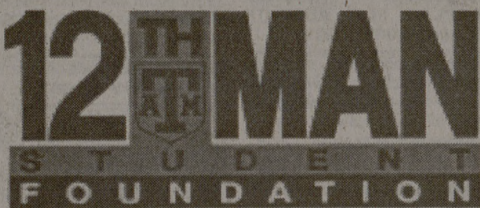
The Aggies will continue to look to the No. 38 doubles team in the nation, juniors Jessica Roland and Roberta Spencer, to up the ante and flex their muscles in tandem yet again.

However, the Aggies' time at home is nearing its end. Only three games remain in this lengthy seven-match home stand that is completed Sunday.

After a week of practice, the A&M Tennis Center will finally see competitive play this Friday as the Aggies face the Bearkats at noon, followed by their evening bout against the Red Raiders at 6 p.m.

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