

# SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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## Fran in familiar situation

By Troy Miller  
THE BATTALION

The Dennis Franchione era has always started with a rough road no matter which football program he has taken over.

With a 2-3 record and a 59-28 drubbing at the hands of Texas Tech, Texas A&M doesn't seem to be any different.

"I'm not a good loser," Franchione said. "If I was I probably wouldn't be sitting here today, but I've done this for 30 years. I know how to handle the situation; I've been through this many times."

Indeed Franchione has been through rough times before.

In his first season with New Mexico, Franchione's team went 3-8. At TCU in 1998, the Horned Frogs were 7-5 in Franchione's first year at the helm. A 7-5 season also awaited Franchione his first year at Alabama.

At TCU and Alabama, the sophomore seasons of the two Franchione Eras saw 10 win seasons and renewed hope in those football programs. For TCU it was an arrival to the national spotlight. For Alabama, it was a return to national prominence.

In both instances, the teams grew together under their new coaching staffs, and once they hit their stride they began leaving opponents in their wake.

The Aggies have to find that point.

At Alabama in 2001, the Crimson Tide faithful were expecting big things from their first-year coach they hired away from TCU, but a 3-5 record through the first eight games was much less than expected. Then came a showdown with 2-5 Mississippi State in Tuscaloosa, Ala., in which the Crimson Tide won 24-17, beginning a four-game win streak to finish the season 7-5 with an Independence Bowl victory.

That 2001 season put the building blocks in place for a 10-3 first-place 2002 campaign despite numerous NCAA sanctions on the Alabama program, preventing them from playing in a bowl game and the SEC Championship.

"I think the main thing is you look where you start and where you finish," said defensive coordinator Carl Torbush, who was with Franchione for both seasons in



John C. Livas • THE BATTALION  
Texas A&M sophomore safety Jaxson Appel runs back an interception against Utah.

Alabama. "Right now we have to build on the foundation that the future is based on, and that's hard work, that's discipline, that's doing things right, and we're going to get better as a football team."

To make this A&M team turn around like Alabama did in 2001 might be a lot to ask for when looking at the Aggies' schedule and the strength of the Big 12 Conference. The Aggies have young talent, but inexperience, especially on defense, is their Achilles' heel.

So far the defense, which starts just one senior, has been a gate teetering on its hinges, allowing opposing offenses to come and go as they please.

There is no doubt that talent is on the rise for the Aggie defense, but its inexperience

far outweighs its potential.

"I think that's part of being a coach, figuring out what you can do and who you can do it with," Torbush said. "Whatever we do we need to do it well, and we need to do it better than we have the past few weeks."

Despite the three-straight losses and the dissatisfied Aggie fans, Franchione knows that a turning point is just around the corner for A&M, and the players feel it too.

"(Our psyche) is in a fragile state," said senior offensive lineman Alan Reuber. "If we don't pick it up and leaders don't step up and point this team in the right direction things could get worse, but I have confidence that we're going to get focused in on Baylor this week and move forward and put (Texas Tech) behind us."

## Volleyball team hopes to rebound against Tech

By Jeff Allen  
THE BATTALION

Losing three of its first five Big 12 games wasn't on the preseason goals sheet for the Texas A&M volleyball team. It would rather be standing near the top of the league, but after dropping consecutive matches to the University of Texas and Kansas State, the Aggies find themselves in a hole as they prepare to face a struggling Texas Tech team tonight at G. Rollie White Coliseum.

This year has been an expanding list of near misses for the No. 24 Aggies.

Of the three losses in conference play, two have gone to a fifth game, both road matches at Nebraska and Texas, and the other was last Saturday's home loss against Kansas State, where the Aggies fell behind early with consecutive 30-28 losses.

"We just try to keep on finishing," said sophomore libero Holly Clay. "We have a problem pushing through to the end, we're right there with them. We need to focus on finishing, our big thing is being consistent (throughout the match)."

But sophomore middle blocker Jayna Baker said starting strong is just as important.

"When we start out we give them a couple of points there and they aren't noticed," Baker said. "If we started out like we did toward the end they wouldn't have the couple of points we lost by."

It's clear who the leaders for the Aggies are on the stat sheet. Much of the on-court action has revolved around the trio of outside hitters sophomore Laura Jones, senior Beth Skypala and junior Melissa Munsch. The three hold the top spots on the team in kills, aces and digs, while Munsch also leads the squad in blocks.

However, the Aggies are still looking for the less tangible sort of leadership to step forward.

"We don't have someone who can wrap their arms around the team," said A&M volleyball coach Laurie Corbelli. "We've had people attempt it, but it hasn't necessarily been consistent and I think its affecting our consistency in games."

The lack of consistency does not indicate a lack of qualified candidates. Corbelli pointed to the work of senior Carol Price as a spark, while junior Lexy Beers has also tried to step up and be a calming influence on the court. Corbelli said Munsch is another veteran poised to step into a leadership role.

"People tend to follow a leader who is hot," Corbelli said. "We still have to establish the personality of a leader fully whether their game is on or off to be consistent ... I think we're getting close."

Texas Tech is coming to College Station with some problems of its own, namely winning. The Red Raiders (8-7, 0-6) have dropped seven straight matches, including their first six stabs at Big 12 opponents. Their last attempt at netting a Big 12 victory fell short on Saturday as they lost to Kansas at home. The loss came on the heels of another disappointing home loss to Iowa State which has won a total of six Big 12 games since 1997.

The Red Raiders are being led this season by junior outside hitter Kelly Johnson. Johnson leads Tech in both kills and digs on the 2003 season.

The Raiders won the last meeting between the two squads last November in Lubbock in four games. Before that match the Aggies had won three in a row. Tech has not won at G. Rollie White since 1998.

The match begins tonight at 7 p.m.

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