

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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Aggies hosting national powers at Ag Invitational

By Pete Burks
THE BATTALION

The early part of the swimming season is usually reserved for working out the kinks and shaking off the rust of a long offseason. However, the Aggie men's and women's swimming teams have been the equivalent of Rustoleum in the pool of late.

Both teams have come off the blocks in impressive fashion as each team has gone undefeated in dual meets while both placed second in the Big 12 relays.

This weekend, the men's and women's teams will need to put into practice everything they've learned during the early part of the season as they host the Texas A&M Fall Invitational, starting today at 10 a.m. and extending through Sunday.

It may as well be called the "Swimming Top 30" invitational, as the Aggies will be hosting eight ranked teams out of the top 30 swim teams in the country.

The No. 17 Aggie women's team (4-0, 2-0 Big 12) will host national powers No. 8 SMU, No. 11 UCLA, No. 17 Virginia, No. 19 Notre Dame, No. 20 Florida State and Purdue. Without question, this will be the toughest set of opponents the Aggie women have faced so far this year. But to Aggie women's coach Steve Bultman, words like "apprehensive" do not apply.

"We're very excited about this weekend because we know we've got good competition coming in," Bultman said. "I'm looking forward to see how the girls will swim this weekend because it's a different format, more like the NCAA championships. It will be good to see more people get to swim against good competition because this will really let us see what the girls can do."

Meanwhile, the No. 13 Aggie men's team (3-0, 1-0 Big 12) will get to see its first action in the A&M natatorium this year. Like their female counterparts, the men have been nearly flawless this season, and are fresh off dominating rivals Penn State and Pittsburgh on the road.

"What I think we got out of the Pitt and Penn State duals is a sense of how balanced we are," said A&M men's coach Mel Nash. "Across the board, we're two or three deep, and we have people performing well in all areas."

Needless to say, good competition tends to bring out the best in Nash's team.

"The big thing that we're looking forward to is racing," Nash said. "We will be facing three well-respected, ranked programs (in No. 11 Virginia, No. 23 Florida State and No. 29 SMU). There is going to be really good competition in every

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Soccer team Sweet 16-bound, again

By Troy Miller
THE BATTALION

While the football team is causing moans and groans at Kyle Field, the other Texas A&M "football" team is causing excitement across Wellborn Road at the Aggie Soccer Complex.

The Aggies are making their fifth straight trip to the NCAA Tournament's Sweet 16, traveling to Penn State's host site in State College, Penn.

"It's become an expectation of the people who know our program not to just get a season that's great enough to get you into the NCAA Tournament, but you're going to get in the Sweet 16," said A&M coach G. Guerrieri.

While most will casually gaze upon the Aggies' Sweet 16 berth as an expectation, this season wasn't anywhere close to a sure thing.

Losers of four of their last five games, the No. 16 Aggies were in danger of not even making the tournament for the first time in nine years. After receiving word that they were in, and hosting as well, the players made a deal with each other to put the past behind them and play their best.

"We had a little meeting with just the players," said senior midfielder Kristen Strutz. "We talked about how your record doesn't really matter when you're done with the season. What you're going to remember is the Sweet 16 and the Elite Eight."

For the Aggies to get to the Elite Eight for the third straight season, they will have to go through a tough Penn State team that made the NCAA Final Four a season ago. The No. 5 Nittany Lions have three



Sophomore Aggie midfielder Carrie Berend tries to gain possession of the ball against a defender from Duke earlier this year. The Aggies play Penn State this weekend in the Sweet 16.

players who all have more goals than anyone on the Aggie roster. Penn State's top scorer Tiffany Weimer has 20 goals on the season, equaling A&M's top two scorers combined.

"The two forwards and (Penn State midfielder) Joanna Lohman in behind them are as good of an attacking triangle as there is in the country," Guerrieri said. "The scouting reports that we're getting is that these two forwards are better than (North) Carolina's three-front. That's a

mouthful."

The pressure will be on the Aggie defense that has recorded nine shutouts this season. A large part of that statistics due to the play of sophomore goalkeeper Kati Jo Spisak, arguably the best goalkeeper in the country.

A season ago in the Sweet 16, the Aggies were outshot 20-0 by UCLA, but advanced to the Elite Eight in a penalty

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Volleyball team hopes to finish strong on the road against Kansas in weekend tilt

By Michael Crow
THE BATTALION

On Wednesday, the Texas A&M women's volleyball team earned its 20th win of the season, knocking off Baylor 3-1. With a victory against conference foe Kansas this Saturday,

the Aggies can match the win total of their 2002 campaign, in which they finished 21-10 overall. No. 21 A&M (20-7, 12-5 Big 12) has won consecutive contests since falling to Colorado in Boulder a little more than a week ago.

Against Baylor, the Aggies had a .396 hitting percentage,

setting a school record for a four-game match. Laura Jones had a team-high 18 kills and tied for the team lead with 12 digs. Senior outside hitter Carol Price added 17 kills and posted a blistering .571 hitting percentage.

While facing a few defensive struggles, A&M had four players reach double-digits in

terms of kills.

"I was impressed with our balance, and we played with confidence," said A&M coach Laurie Corbelli. "Our attack intensity picked up in games three and four, but our serving and blocking were not aggressive enough and that made it difficult for us."

Now, the Aggies are hoping to finish strong in conference play to make a competitive run into the postseason.

"I think we just need to stay really focused and work on cleaning up and polishing a few things," Corbelli said.

With Big 12 leader Kansas State only a match away, it is

important for A&M to remain focused on a Jayhawk team that has seen some recent success. Kansas (18-10, 10-7 Big 12) has a four-match winning streak before being swept by Nebraska on Wednesday. The same Nebraska team swept

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