

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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Aggies like home court advantage in NCAA playoffs

By Michael Crow
THE BATTALION

There is no place like home for the Texas A&M volleyball team. The Aggies are 10-3

inside the friendly confines of G. Rollie White this season, with their only losses coming against the top-ranked University of Southern California and conference leaders Nebraska and Kansas State.

And, having received its 11th consecutive at-large berth to the NCAA Championship tournament, A&M (21-9, 13-7 Big 12) will have the benefit of playing in College Station for the first two rounds of play. The NCAA selection committee announced Sunday that the Aggies will host the first and second rounds starting Friday night.

"We were definitely excited when we saw College Station, Texas, up on the board," said A&M coach Laurie Corbelli. "Being at G. Rollie means so much to becoming victorious. We are hoping to get a great crowd out there as we go for the Sweet 16 and the Elite Eight."

The Aggies enter the tournament as the No. 16 seed of 64 total teams, the third highest seeding of six Big 12 teams in the bracket. They will play their first match Friday, squaring off

against Nicholls State University (18-14).

The Colonels will be making their first NCAA appearance after winning the Southland Conference tournament.

NSU coach M.J. Engstrom said her team had been anxiously awaiting word on its tournament seeding.

"The girls were excited leading up to the announcement," she said. "(A&M) finished fourth in the Big 12 and are a traditionally strong team. Their strength has always been in the middle. We will have to play a great game, but they are a beatable team."

Nicholls State will likely look for leadership from senior Caley Carter, who was recently named the Southland Conference's Player and Newcomer of the Year. She was only the second athlete in SLC volleyball history to receive both honors in the same season. Carter was one of five Colonels players to record double-digit kills and digs in the conference championship match against regular-season champion Texas State University.

Meanwhile, A&M will depend on some award winners of its own. Melissa Munsch was named to the Big 12 first team for the second straight season. Munsch led the Aggies in multiple statistical categories during conference play, including hitting percentage (.305)

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Aggies enjoy record turnout

Blair thrives in first Reed game

By Rob Phillips
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M women's basketball head coach Gary Blair asked for fan support at Wednesday night's regular season home opener against Arkansas-Little Rock, and the "Reed Rowdies" delivered in record-setting fashion.

The 1,802 fans who attended the Aggies' hard-fought 54-45 win over the Trojans set a Reed Arena record for a women's basketball opening-day game and were the second-largest crowd ever at A&M. The largest-ever women's attendance was 2,534 in 1995.

"I was really pleased with the fans," Blair said. "If I have to go out and walk those neighborhoods every ballgame I'll do it, but eventually if people will come back and stay after the game and meet my kids in a one-on-one situation, then they're going to realize those kids are more than basketball players."

The Aggies won the first of their seven-game home stretch thanks in large part to senior guard Toccarra Williams' near-triple-double of 17 points, nine rebounds and seven assists. In 2001, Williams notched the only triple-double in A&M history and the fourth-ever in the Big 12.

The Aggies held Little Rock freshman guard Heather Morris, the Trojans' leading scorer, to 13 points, including only three in the second half.

"I think a big difference was containing their scorers and we went to the boards pretty tough," Williams said.

A&M's sporadic full-court press forced just 12 turnovers and did little to fluster Little Rock's freshmen backcourt tandem of Morris and Samantha Anglin.

Blair said he utilized the press to take Little Rock out of its offense.

"We tried to take 15 seconds off (the clock each play)," Blair said. "You wear out a motion team (that way). They might not turn the ball over, but we're still controlling them."

The Aggies dominated the glass for the first time all season, out-rebounding the



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Texas A&M senior forward Lynn Classen goes up against Arkansas-Little Rock's Abra Motley in the Aggies 54-45 win Wednesday night. Classen finished the game with a career-high five blocked shots.

Trojans 49 to 32. A&M senior Janae Derrick led the Aggies with 11 boards and reserve forward Tamea Scales added eight.

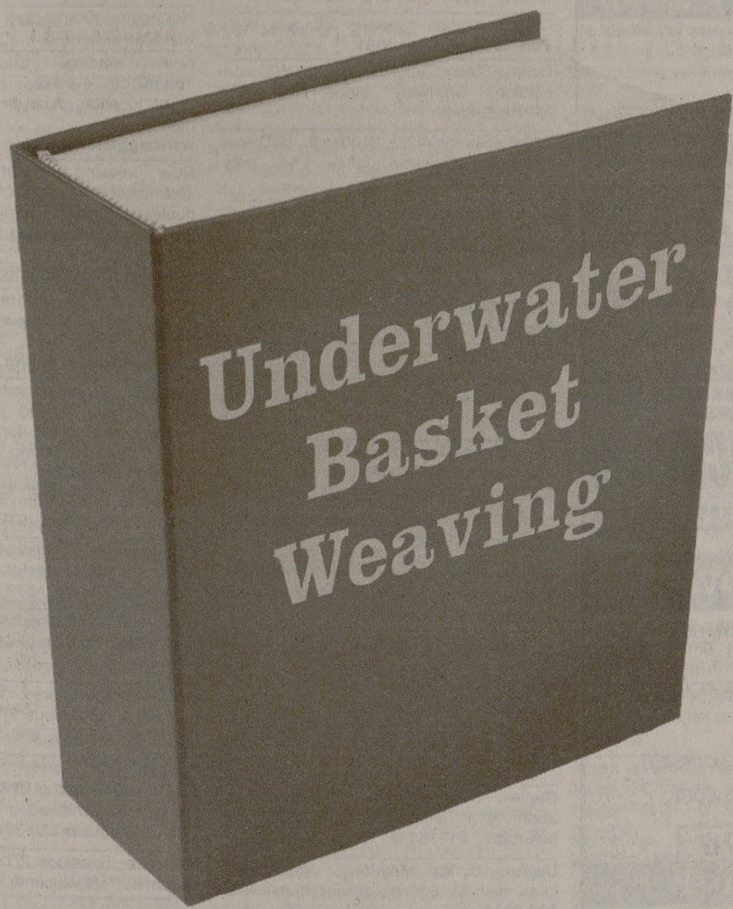
Senior forward Lynn Classen tied a career-high with five blocked shots, moving into second place on A&M's career blocks list with 93.

"It felt pretty good," Classen said. "It seemed like they were showing (the ball) right there before they shot it, so as long as you can get it, go ahead and try."

Both teams entered halftime tied at 28 and shooting under 40 percent from the

field, but Little Rock's 80-percent shooting from three-point range helped it erase an early eight-point deficit.

The Aggies mixed in a zone defense and regained a nine-point advantage midway through the second half before both teams went cold, totaling just three field goals in the last 10 minutes. Little Rock trimmed the lead to 47-42 with 8:52 remaining before going scoreless for almost eight minutes and allowing the Aggies to pull away.



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