

# SPORTS

THE BATTALION

Page 1B • Tuesday, January 27, 2004

## Women's basketball gets new attitude

*Blair's style and flair have made A&M's women's basketball the toast of campus*



TROY MILLER

Since Texas A&M Athletic Director Bill Byrne arrived in College Station a little more than a year ago, he has upgraded A&M athletics to provide a product that will not only compete at the national level in every sport, but also entertain Aggie fans.

One only has to look at his first and only coaching hire to understand what Byrne is trying to bring to A&M athletics.

On March 31, 2003, Byrne hired Gary Blair to replace the recently ousted Peggie Gillom to take over as head coach of A&M women's basketball. Blair was hired away from the University of Arkansas where he posted a 198-120 record over 10 seasons, becoming Arkansas' all-time winningest head coach.

"At this point in my career, I wasn't looking for a job, but sometimes a great job comes looking for you," Blair said when he was hired. "There are not a lot of coaches that would leave a program they've built into the top 25, but I had a lot of reasons. Texas is my home state, and I've been familiar with Texas A&M for a long time. I know what kind of program A&M can be, and I

want to be the architect to get it done."

If Blair wants to build A&M into a national power, he has a lot of work ahead of him. The Aggies have not placed higher than ninth in the Big 12 conference since its inception in 1996.

But Blair's energy is already being felt in Aggieland, even if the team has a losing record and has gone winless in conference play through six games.

Blair has gone all out in trying to get fans to attend games. He has devised a way to get corporations to sponsor games where fans get in free. Blair has been accommodating to the media, speaking to them at any time of the day. He has even gone so far as walking door-to-door through Bryan and College Station handing out tickets so people will come see his team.

And for a sport where many Aggies would have had to be paid to attend games in seasons past, Blair's magic seems to be working.

Aggie students and fans have come out in droves, at least by A&M women's basketball standards, to see the women play. A year ago, 72 fans were counted on the south side of Reed Arena when the Aggies faced Texas. This Sunday when the Aggies welcomed the No. 3 Longhorns back to Reed for their 2004 showdown, 4,336 fans came to watch.

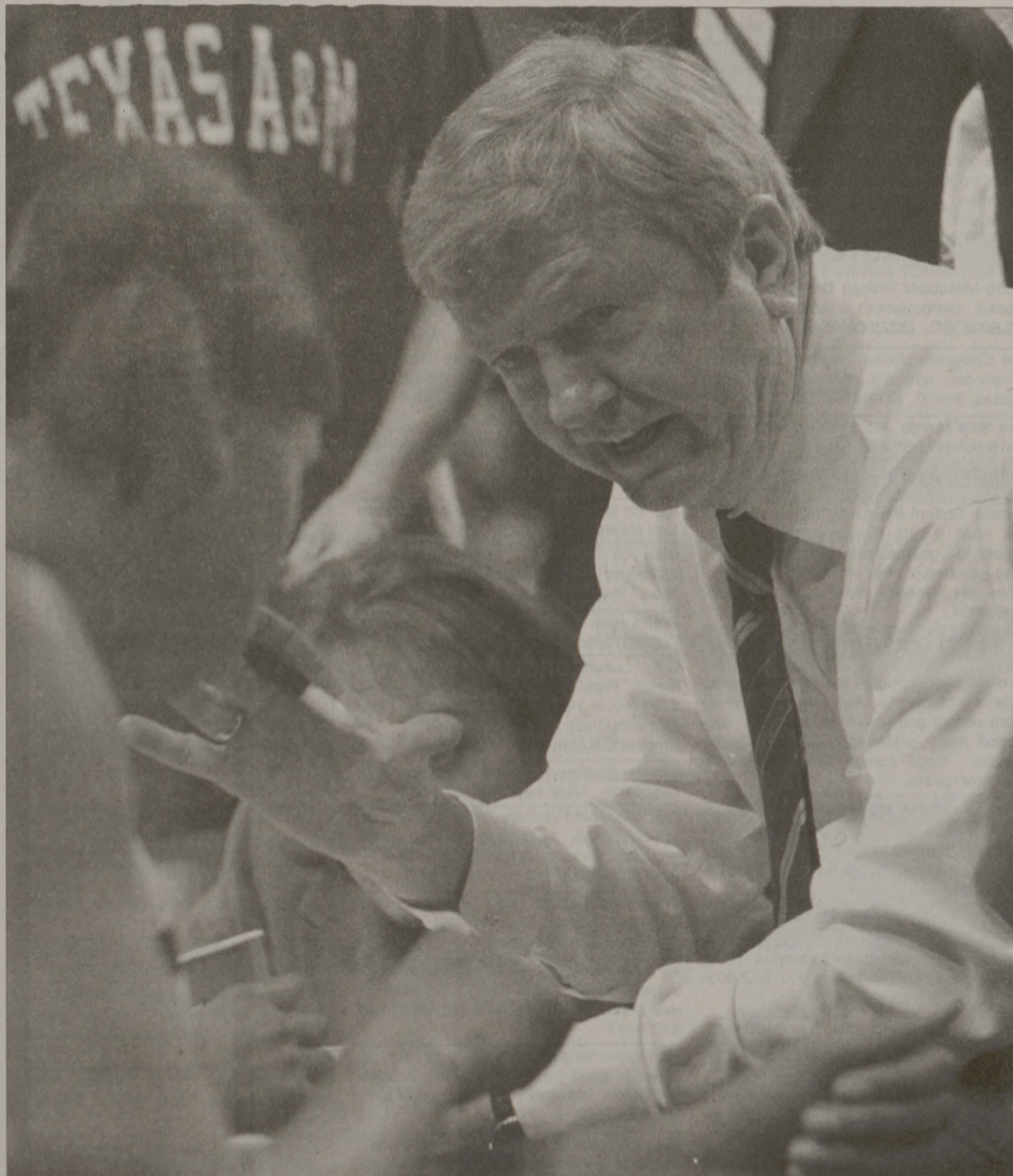
Twice the Aggies have broken single-game home attendance records, and they will most likely set a new season home attendance mark as well.

Now that Blair has reached the community, he can start working on the product he puts on the floor. So far, he is doing a superb job there, too.

Sure, Blair's troops are winless in conference, but nobody expected this team to win games, or even be competitive. Instead, the Aggies have put up a fight in all of their ballgames. Only in their loss to Nebraska were the Aggies outscored by more than 10 points.

No. 16 Baylor had to come back from a 16 point halftime deficit to beat the Aggies, and Texas barely escaped Reed Arena with a two-point victory.

There is no doubt that the Aggies are out-matched just about every time they step on the



ART WRIGHT • THE BATTALION

A&M head coach Gary Blair instructs his team during a timeout Sunday in the Aggies' 64-62 loss to No. 3 Texas.

See Blair on page 4B

**GARY BLAIR BIO**

**1974 - 1980**  
**Head coach:**  
 South Oak Cliff High School  
 • Record: 239-18  
 • 3 Texas Class 4A state titles

**1980 - 1985**  
**Asst. coach:**  
 Louisiana Tech University  
 • 2 NCAA National Championships

**1985 - 1993**  
**Head coach:**  
 Stephen F. Austin University  
 • Record: 210 - 43  
 • 7 Southland Conference Championships

**1993 - 2003**  
**Head coach:**  
 University of Arkansas  
 • Record: 198-120  
 • 1997 - 98 Final Four

**2003 -**  
**Head coach:**  
 Texas A&M University

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### The Buck Weirus Spirit Award

honors 52 students who demonstrate high INVOLVEMENT, create positive EXPERIENCES throughout the Aggie community, IMPACT student life at Texas A&M and help enhance the Aggie SPIRIT. Unlike other awards, the Buck Weirus Spirit Award recognizes those students who make contributions to the university by participating in student organizations, Aggie traditions and university events. Email spiritaward@AggieNetwork.com for more information.

#### Applications Now Available:

On-line at  
[www.AggieNetwork.com/events/buckweirus.aspx](http://www.AggieNetwork.com/events/buckweirus.aspx)

- And...
- Clayton W. Williams, Jr. Alumni Center Reception Desk
  - Office of the President, 8th Floor Rudder
  - Vice Pres. for Student Affairs Office, 10th Floor Rudder
  - Office of the Dean of each College
  - Office of Graduate Studies
  - Department of Student Activities, Suite 125 Koldus
  - Department of Multicultural Services, Suite 137 MSC
  - Office of the Commandant, 102 Military Sciences
  - MSC Student Programs Office, 216 & 223 MSC
  - International Center, Bush Library
  - International Programs Office
  - Student Life, Sbis Location
  - North Side Area Office, Residence Life
  - South Side Area Office, Residence Life

**Applications due by 5:00 pm on February 6, 2004**

to The Clayton Williams, Jr. Alumni Center Desk

#### Application Workshops

**Tuesday, January 27**  
 5:30-6:30 pm  
 Koldus Building  
 Room 146

**Thursday, January 29**  
 6:00-7:00 pm  
 The Association of Former Students  
 Lecture A

**Monday, February 2**  
 7:00-8:00 pm  
 Rudder Tower  
 Room 404

**Wednesday, February 4**  
 7:30-8:30 pm  
 The Association of Former Students  
 Lecture A



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