

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

AGGIE SOFTBALL
TUESDAY
6:30 p.m.
vs. Texas State
Aggie Softball Complex

Page 5 • Tuesday, March 2, 2004

Blair looks for someone to follow Williams

By Brad Bennett
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M senior point guard Toccara Williams is the undisputed heavyweight champ of A&M women's basketball. She led the Aggies in points 12 out of the last 16 games, is the Big 12 all-time leader in steals and has had an endless number of accolades.

"When we started out, I thought I had one of the best point guards in the Big 12," said A&M head coach Gary Blair. "Now I say I have one of the best point guards in the country."

But like all Aggie student experiences, Williams' time in Aggieland is coming to an end. Her final Big 12 home game is Wednesday against Missouri.

Williams, set to graduate next December, said she plans to finish school while playing professional basketball.

"Hopefully (next year) I will be playing in a league somewhere and then be back to graduate in December," Williams said.

Blair said in his 20 years of coaching, he has seen several women go to the next level and that Williams will continue to play.

Williams is the all-around player the Aggies were lucky to have. Her defensive prowess was a perfect fit with Blair's aggressive game plan, and she set Big 12 records while on a team with a losing record, which brought attention to A&M basketball.

But with Williams leaving at season's end, the stage is set for a new leader to emerge.

"I don't know (who will lead next year)," Blair said. "Leadership is imperative. Whether you are doing it from the bench or doing it from off the court or doing it by outstanding plays."

The two A&M juniors this season, guards Charlette Castile and Mindy Garrison, have had impressive showings recently.

Garrison hit two three-pointers in the final minutes of the Aggies' 69-63 win against the University of Kansas

on Feb. 21. Castile led the team in scoring against Baylor University in the loss on Saturday.

"It will be good to be a senior next year, and maybe I can take after (Williams and senior forwards Lynn Classen and Janae Derrick)," Garrison said.

Garrison said she likes to keep an aggressive outlook on offense.

"I keep shooting no matter what," Garrison said. "You have to keep shooting."

Blair said that with only two seniors returning, that he may look elsewhere on the team for leadership.

"Your leadership does not need to come from your senior class," Blair said. "It can come from the bench; sometimes it can come from freshman or (junior college transfers). It takes that right person."

Sophomore forward Tamea Scales, who came off the bench during Big 12 play to become a starter, is a likely and willing person to fill the void.

Scales leads the team in shooting by shooting 47 percent from the field.

"I am going to see if I can be up at the top," Scales said. "It's going to be one of my (goals) to play that leadership role on the team."

Blair said he wanted to start her to see what she is made of. Scales answered by leading the team in rebounds seven of the last 11 games.

What is most impressive about Scales is her size. She is six feet tall and skinny, not the typical build for a dominant force in the paint.

While no player will look too far into the future, Scales is confident about her place with the team.

"I had to work my way up to this level," Scales said. "Next year I'm taking it to 'em."

Williams said there may not be a single leader on the team next year, nor does there need to be only one.

"Everybody is contributing in different ways," Williams said. "(Garrison) can lead from the guard and (Scales) can lead from the center."



JP BEATO III • THE BATTALION

Texas A&M senior guard Toccara Williams brings the ball up the court during A&M's 72-62 win over North Texas on Dec. 6. Williams owns the Big 12 all-time steals record and leads the Aggies in scoring, assists and steals.

Aggie softball takes on Texas State in midweek game

By Ryan Irby
THE BATTALION

The No. 23 Texas A&M softball team will wrap up a two-week, 12-game homestand Tuesday when it hosts the Texas State University Bobcats at the Aggie Softball Complex.

A&M (11-8) is coming off a successful, yet rain-shortened Aggie Invitational II in which it defeated Penn State twice, Southern Mississippi and dropped one game to No. 17 Oregon. Sunday's game with Southern Mississippi was halted due to standing water deposited by storms that swept through early Sunday morning.

Texas State (15-5, 3-0 Southland) completed a three-game sweep of Southland Conference rival Nicholls State over the weekend. The Bobcats will bring Southland Conference Co-Hitter of the Week Kristin Zaleski to College Station in hopes of coming away with a win. Zaleski hit .600 for the series with Nicholls State, including a game-winning home run in the seventh inning of the finale to give the Bobcats a 4-2 victory.

A&M head coach Jo Evans said she hopes her offensive scheme on the base paths will contain the surging Bobcats.

"I love this ball club because of the balance we have and the speed we have," Evans said. "We

are given opportunities where we can steal a base instead of giving up an out."

Evans' tactics are built around the blistering speed of freshman centerfielder Sharonda McDonald. She leads the team in stolen bases with 14 on 15 attempts and has conquered batting from the left side of the plate under Evans' guidance after hitting from the right side during her career at Dobie High School in Houston. Her blazing speed is more effective from the batter's box closest to first base.

"This is my first year to be on the left side of the plate," McDonald said. "I am getting a lot more comfortable with that."

McDonald has earned the dangerous reputation of being able to beat out ground balls in the infield. However, McDonald's "slap" style of hitting aggravates foes on a smaller scale; of the 21 hits she has this season, all have been singles.

A&M, which leads the series with the Bobcats, 50-8, will bring a modified lineup into the game as freshman outfielder Joy Davis was lost for the season after injuring an elbow. Evans said her team will march on.

"You can see us trying to settle in and get comfortable with a lineup," Evans said.

Senior Sherah Atkins has moved to second base from the outfield to replace Davis, allowing



JP BEATO III • THE BATTALION

Texas A&M sophomore outfielder Rocky Spencer slides behind the tag of Penn State senior catcher Kate Gentile Saturday in A&M's 8-0 win during the St. Joseph Aggie Invitational II.

sophomore outfielder Rocky Spencer to enter the lineup in right.

McDonald explained that attitude is key. "It's about our attitude," McDonald said.

"We go up to the plate thinking that no one is going to get us out."

First pitch is set for 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Aggies Softball Complex.

Campbell Custom Homes Presents...

GARY BLAIR APPRECIATION NIGHT

THIS WEDNESDAY AT REED ARENA

"We applaud the hard work that Coach Blair, his staff, and the women's basketball team are doing to build a strong foundation for the future of Aggie Basketball.

To help show our support, Campbell Custom Homes is buying YOUR TICKET to the final home game of the season. That's right - it's totally FREE and there will be 50¢ Slovacek Sausages available while supplies last.

Join us this Wednesday at Reed Arena in a show of support and appreciation for Coach Blair, the women's basketball program, and the future of Aggie hoops!"

- Olivia Campbell
co-owner Campbell Custom Homes
(979) 828-5177

AggieAthletics.com

FREE!

Courtesy of Campbell Custom Homes

Wednesday - 7 p.m.

TM VS. MISSOURI

Campbell CUSTOM HOMES

Senior Recognition Night -and- 50¢ Slovacek Sausages (while Supplies Last - 10,000 Qty.)