

Baseball team taking on Santa Clara at home

By Jordan Meserole
THE BATTALION

Spring break will be nonexistent for the No. 12 Texas A&M baseball team this weekend when it faces unranked Santa Clara University.

The Aggies (15-2) will look to continue their strong start and add a few more wins before conference play begins, but will have to do so against the Broncos (11-8) who have recently been winning.

A&M will bring some momentum into the series after coming off an impressive come-from-behind win against University of Houston Tuesday night. The Aggies trailed the Cougars 7-4 entering the eighth inning, but produced enough runs to capture the lead. Houston put some runners on base in the ninth, endangering the A&M lead, but strong A&M pitching closed any hope the Cougars had of winning the game.

"We're finding ways to win, and that's all that counts," said A&M sophomore infielder Cliff Pennington. "When you're winning, you're winning."

Santa Clara is looking to climb back into the win column after a disappointing 8-6 loss Wednesday to Sacramento State University. After a slow start to their season, the Broncos slowly started finding ways to win games, winning six of their last nine. Santa Clara's offense has led the team to the wins, collecting 102 total hits and 57 runs in the nine-game span.

Offensively, the two teams are similar. Both teams have four starting players with batting averages above .325, three players with 25 hits or more, three players with more than 15 runs batted in or more and three players with slugging percentages of .500 or better. Santa Clara has 34 total doubles, and A&M is not far behind with 32. Santa Clara has an impressive .442 team hitting percentage barely outdone by A&M's .447 percentage.

"I've never played an offensively weak team from California in my time," said A&M head coach Mark Johnson. "Our pitchers and defense will definitely be challenged this weekend."

A&M senior outfielder Cory Patton said he



Texas A&M freshman third baseman Austin Boggs tags Arkansas junior first baseman Clay Goodwin Friday Feb. 27 at Olsen Field. The Aggies won the game.

isn't intimidated by Santa Clara's strong offense. "I think we're a better hitting ballclub than them," Patton said. "If it comes down to a slugfest, we'll just find a way to put more runs up than they do."

Pitching is the category that separates the two teams. A&M has a team ERA of 3.50 and has allowed only 66 runs; Santa Clara's team ERA is

at 5.77 and has allowed 122 runs. Every A&M starting pitcher has a winning record, with the largest ERA only 4.74. The Broncos have only one starting pitcher with a winning record and the lowest ERA is 4.36.

A&M junior lefty pitcher Zach Jackson, who will start Saturday's game, said he doesn't compare statistics much, if at all.

"It doesn't matter what the stats read," Jackson said. "If we play our game right and stick to the plan, we usually can't go wrong."

As far as spring break goes, Johnson said he welcomes the week.

"Sometimes it's a better week," Johnson said. "Some girlfriends are gone and classes are out, the guys have better concentration on baseball."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Aggies ousted from basketball tourney

The Texas A&M men's basketball team (7-21, 0-16 Big 12) lost to the University of Missouri Thursday night, 74-68, in the first round of the Big 12 Tournament at the American Airlines Center in Dallas.

The defeat was the last game for A&M head coach Melvin Watkins who announced his resignation last Wednesday, to go into effect after A&M was knocked out of the tournament.

Missouri (16-12, 9-7) will go on to play University of Kansas (20-7, 12-4) in the next of four total rounds.

The Aggies shot only 37.7 percent compared to Missouri's 60 percent.

Missouri also hit three more three-pointers than the Aggies, with eight of 18 compared to A&M's five of 21.

The Aggies led on defense and outrebounded the Tigers 40 to 26. Senior forward Nick Anderson led A&M on rebounds with 14.

A&M sophomore forward Antoine Wright led the Aggie offense with 22 points. Wright shot eight of 15 from the floor, three of five free throws and three three-pointers.

Guard Jimmy McKinney led the Tigers offense, hitting five of six free throws and five of six three-pointers for 20 points.

This is the second time the Tigers have beat the Aggies this year defeating them 77-82 on Jan. 10 in Columbia, Mo.

Men's tennis in slump going into home stand

By Kyle Davoust
THE BATTALION

Frustration, anger and disappointment are words that have rarely been spoken in connection with Tim Cass during his tenure as Texas A&M men's tennis coach. But these words sum up Cass' mood following his team's latest setback, a 5-2 loss to Louisiana State University Wednesday afternoon.

"Our matches, in essence, are an exam," Cass said. "We practice a lot of things in order to perform them in the correct fashion, and when you don't do that, there's a level of frustration that sets in."

The loss dropped No. 13 A&M's road record to 1-5 against top-25 opponents and will almost certainly drop them out of the top-15 for the first time in more than four years.

"I don't know if we've been outside the top-15 in four years, and we're going to fall out of the top-15, and to me that's disappointing," Cass said. "I had a lot of pride that our teams are pretty much consistently in the top-15 for four years, and this team is certainly at that level. This team, in my opinion, can play with anybody."

To add to their frustration, the Aggies' only road win against a top-25 opponent came on a neutral court to a team that has since fallen out of the top-25: the No. 29 University of California-Berkeley Golden Bears.

The Aggies will once again face the Golden Bears on Saturday, as part of a two-match day at the George P. Mitchell Tennis Center, which will also include an evening match against Abilene Christian University.

Tough times have followed the Golden Bears since their 4-0 loss to

A&M at the ITA Indoor National Championships in February. Their 3-6 record, however, shouldn't be taken lightly, as they too know the pains of a tough early-season schedule. Many of their losses have come against top teams such as No. 5 Stanford University, No. 15 Vanderbilt University, No. 20 Pepperdine University and No. 25 University of Arizona.

A visibly distraught Cass said he is not sure how his team will respond Saturday, even after dominating the Golden Bears earlier this season.

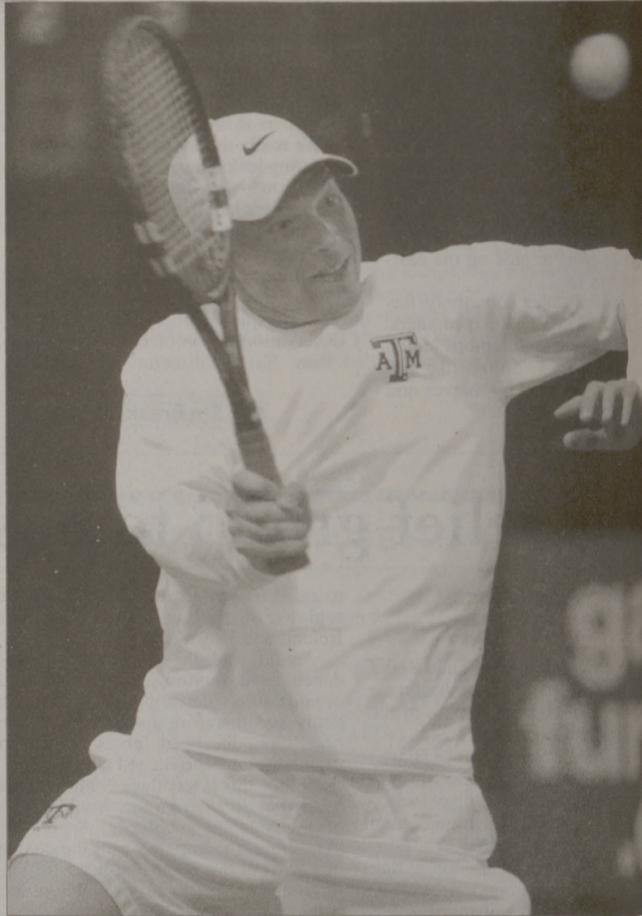
"I don't know how to judge this match on Saturday," Cass said. "As a coach, I would sure like to think that we're not too happy right now and that someone is going to have to pay for that. But I'm not the one out there getting to hit the ball around and control my own match."

After the match against California, the Aggies will have a short break before facing Abilene Christian at 6 p.m.

The match will mark the end of a marathon for the Wildcats, as they are slated to face five teams between Thursday and Saturday. In fact, their first match on Saturday won't even be in College Station. They are set to play in New Braunfels that morning before traveling to College Station.

Fatigue will obviously be a factor. "I sure hope they're a little bit tired. That would help us a little bit," said A&M senior captain Khaled El Dorry. "But they'll be excited to play. We play them every year, and they always play well and put up a good fight. We're not going to take anybody lightly."

There has been no place like home for the Aggies, where they have compiled a perfect record against modest competition. A strong home stand could go a long way toward raising their spirits.



Sophomore Matt Loucks returns a volley at the Aggies' last home meet on Friday Feb. 13 against Southeastern Louisiana University. The Aggies defeated the Lions 7-0.



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