

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

Page 5 • Monday, April 5, 2004

The life of a walk-on

A day in the life of A&M men's basketball senior Dylan Leal

By Brad Bennett
THE BATTALION

SPORTS IN BRIEF

A&M baseball avoids sweep with 9-7 win Sunday

After dropping the first two games of a three-game series to Oklahoma State University, the No. 9 Texas A&M baseball team avoided the sweep with a 9-7 win Sunday in Stillwater, Okla.

With a 9-4 lead heading into the bottom of the eighth inning, the Cowboys (20-11, 3-3 Big 12) scored three runs, prompting A&M head coach Mark Johnson to move sophomore shortstop Cliff Pennington to the mound with two outs.

Pennington began his pitching stint by walking OSU freshman center fielder Keanon Simon to load the bases. Pennington then got OSU senior right fielder Rod Allen to ground to second base to end the Cowboy threat.

Pennington earned his second save of the season, and also went three-for-four at the plate with two RBIs.

The win pulls A&M (26-8, 4-5) into a fifth-place tie with Baylor University in the Big 12 standings.

The Aggies will host Sam Houston State University Tuesday at 6 p.m. at Olsen Field before resuming Big 12 play in Lawrence, Kan., Friday with a three-game series with the University of Kansas.

Aggie softball sweeps Iowa State in Ames

The Texas A&M softball team completed its second consecutive weekend sweep Sunday as it beat Iowa State University, 3-0, in Ames, Iowa.

The Aggies (22-16, 4-1 Big 12) didn't allow a run in the two-game series.

"I was really pleased that our pitchers came and gave us a chance to win," said A&M head coach Jo Evans. "We struggled a bit offensively this weekend, and when your pitchers keep you in the game as long as ours did, it gives you an opportunity to get comfortable at the plate and score some runs."

A&M sophomore shortstop Adrian Gregory broke a scoreless tie in the top of seventh inning with a lead off home run. Iowa State (9-18, 1-3) allowed the Aggies to score twice more in the bottom half on the inning.

Kapchinski, who earned the win in both games on the weekend, threw two scoreless innings in relief Sunday, striking out four batters.

The Aggies will next face the University of Texas Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. at McCombs Field in Austin.

A&M women's tennis remains unbeaten in Big 12

The Texas A&M women's tennis team remained undefeated in the Big 12 by knocking off the No. 63 University of Colorado Sunday, 6-1.

Fresh off a 6-0 win over Texas Tech University on Friday, the No. 14 Aggies came out and set the tone by winning all three doubles matches to take the doubles point. Then, A&M (14-6, 6-0 Big 12) took five of six singles matches to secure the win, its fifth consecutive victory. The Aggies have now won 11 of their last 12 matches.

Senior Jessica Roland, junior Helga Vieira, junior Lauren Walker, sophomore Nicki Mechem and freshman Anna Lubinsky all earned wins in singles against Colorado (9-6, 2-4).

The Aggies face another difficult road test when they travel to No. 45 Baylor University Thursday.

Texas A&M senior guard Dylan Leal likes basketball so much it's criminal. Literally. In high school, he was arrested for breaking into the gym on a Saturday night to shoot hoops.

The charges were later reduced to a curfew violation when the coach told police he had given Leal the key to the gym.

"I told my mom not to buy me video games for my birthday because it was time I needed to spend shooting," Leal said. "I was all about basketball."

Leal's dedication paid off in the form of scholarship offers from several schools such as Holy Cross and Lehigh College, both schools known for academics with strong athletics. Leal said the scholarships were tempting but he wanted to stay in Texas, close to his two younger brothers. A&M already had given away all of the scholarships it had that year but after a conversation with former A&M assistant coach Tom Billiter, Leal decided to come as a non-scholarship athlete.

Leal brought his dedication with him to A&M, earning playing time his freshman year. As a senior, Leal was voted captain by his teammates, said A&M assistant coach Bobby Kummer.

"No one thinks of him as a walk-on," Kummer said. "He never complained; that was one of the great things about him."

Leal said many of his teammates didn't even know he was a non-scholarship athlete.

"Many of the guys would ask me when we were getting our scholarship checks, and I didn't know," Leal said. "Nobody treated me any different than anybody else."

Leal said his hard work earned him playing time his freshman year, but after his time dropped in his second season, he thought of transferring with his best friend Nolan Butterfrass to nearby Sam Houston State University in Huntsville.

"We would talk about it," Butterfrass said.

Leal said, with advice from Kummer and his teammates, that he decided to stay at A&M despite never earning a scholarship.

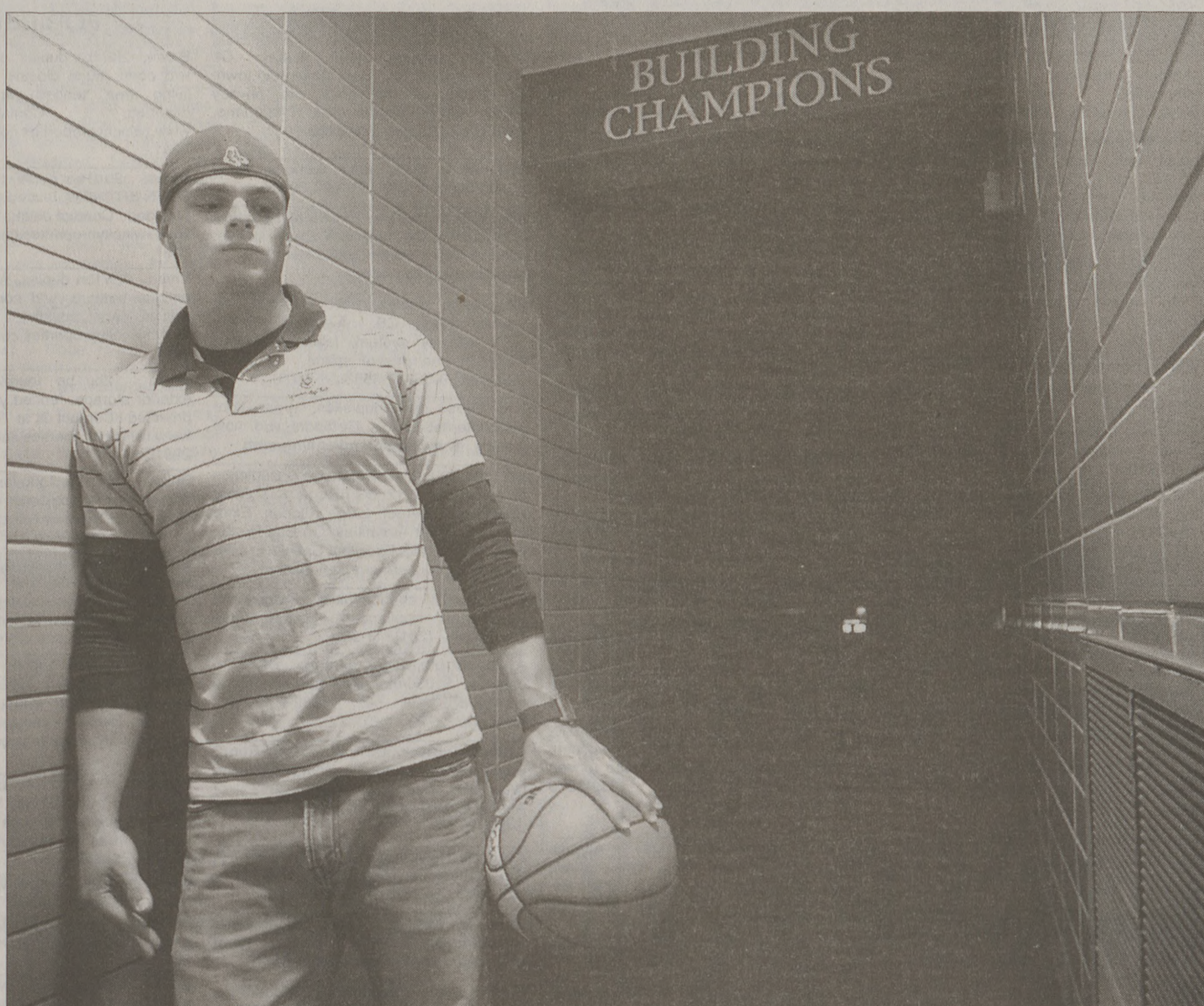
"I decided to stick it out, and I am glad I did," Leal said.

Now, with no more eligibility and a year left before graduating, he said he has no regrets and is enjoying having time to work on his Ford Bronco and relaxing during the week.

"We got Sundays off so that leaves Saturday nights for socializing," Leal said.

Leal said that before last Saturday he was busy preparing for Chilifest.

"We spent all (Thursday) out in Snook getting ready," he said from a booth at his



Texas A&M senior guard Dylan Leal is a non-scholarship athlete for the men's basketball team and was voted captain prior to the 2003-04 season, Leal's final year with the team.

JOHN C. LIVAS • THE BATTALION

usual Thursday destination, the Tap.

He said that last year he was on a team at Chilifest, but his daily routine usually consists of more business than pleasure. He said that, like most athletes, he would wake up early for morning classes, eat with the team, lift weights and then go to practice throughout the afternoon.

Even though his classes may be harder, Leal said most of the rest of college life was spent as a normal student. He lived in Cain Hall his freshman year, playing practical jokes on other freshmen including his former teammates Bernard King and Jamaal Gilchrist.

"We filled a 50 gallon trash can full of water and leaned it on their door. We

knocked and ran off and when they opened the door water went everywhere," Leal said. "They got us back by taking (Butterfrass') underwear and putting it on the door."

Leal said that after graduation he plans to stay in basketball by coaching on the college level. He said he hopes to begin his career with a position as a graduate assistant at A&M. He said he has met new head coach Billy Gillespie and wishes he could be a part of the new regime.

Even though he said he now rarely picks up a ball, coaching may not be able to completely fill the void left by not playing. Leal may not miss the early classes but he said he definitely misses the team.

"I wish I had another year," Leal said.

Countdown to Student-Athlete Day	
APRIL 6	
A day in the life of...	
MON.	Lester Cook Tennis
TUES.	Jennifer Jones Equestrian
WED.	Jana James Softball
THURS.	Jamie Riojas Track & Field
FRI.	Justin Moore Baseball
MON.	Dylan Leal Basketball
TUES.	Terrence Murphy Football

Aggie tennis falls to Baylor

By Staff and Wire
THE BATTALION

For the past four years, the winner of the annual match between the Texas A&M and Baylor University men's tennis teams has gone on to win the Big 12 regular season championship.

All signs point to the Bears winning their third straight title, with No. 2 Baylor defeating No. 25 A&M, 5-2, at the George P. Mitchell Tennis Center Saturday.

"I saw two teams playing very hard out there," said A&M head coach Tim Cass. "There was no rivalry in this sport between Texas A&M and Baylor four years ago, but you could see the passion in the kids' eyes out there today."

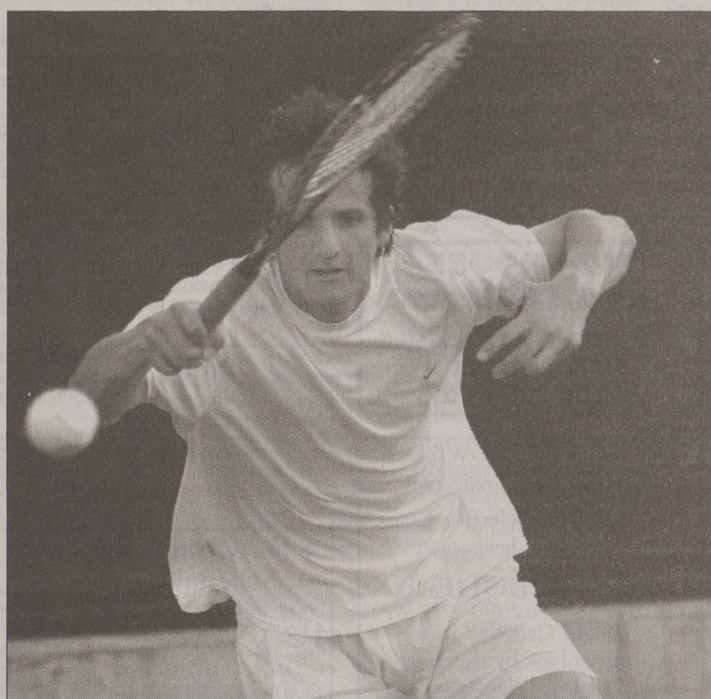
The Aggies (16-7, 3-1 Big 12) started off well at doubles when juniors Lester Cook and Ante Majitevic, the No. 1 doubles team in the country, beat Baylor junior Benedikt Dorsch and freshman Matije Zgaga, 9-8 (2).

"We competed well with the No. 1 team in the country (Cook and Majitevic) at one and lost the tiebreaker," said Baylor head coach Matt Knoll. "Doubles is huge when you are playing on the road against a good team."

Despite losing the first doubles match, Baylor (19-2, 4-0) won the other two doubles matches to capture the doubles point, giving the Bears an early 1-0 lead.

"Doubles has been disappointing this year," Cass said. "We have enough players to be able to find combinations to win. It's a momentum point in our sport, but I don't think our guys panicked."

In singles, Baylor kept the momentum from swinging to the Aggies as the Bears won the first three matches that finished in



EVAN O'CONNELL • THE BATTALION

Texas A&M junior Ante Majitevic returns a serve during his doubles match Saturday at the George P. Mitchell Tennis Center. Despite winning his match with partner junior Lester Cook, the Aggies lost the doubles point and the match, 5-2, to Baylor University.

straight sets to clinch the victory.

Dorsch avenged his earlier doubles loss by defeating Cook, 6-3, 6-2.

Baylor junior Benjamin Becker, the No. 13 singles player in the country, defeated Majitevic, 6-3, 6-4.

"It was the best match I've played this season," Becker said. "I'm still a little inconsistent, but I'm improving."

Despite being down 4-0 with just three matches left, the Aggies rallied to push all three matches to a deciding tiebreaker.

A&M freshman Brett Joelson defeated Zgaga, 6-4,

4-6, 6-4, while A&M senior Khaled El Dorry won over Baylor senior Reinor Neurohr, 6-2, 5-7, 1-0 (10-4).

A&M senior Mohamed Dakki was unable to close out Baylor senior Matias Marin, as Marin won, 4-6, 6-3, 1-0 (12-10).

Despite the loss, Cass said he was pleased that A&M did not give up after Baylor had already clinched the win.

"You realize in this business that so much comes down to heart," Cass said. "I think it's a test of a young man's character to finish when the match is already decided."

NCAA title game: Centers of attention

By Jim O'Connell
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN ANTONIO — There's no mistaking Emeka Okafor. He's the All-America center from Connecticut, the sure lottery pick in the NBA draft.

There's also no mistaking Luke Schenscher. He's the 7-foot-1 Australian with the shaggy red hair who plays center for Georgia Tech.

The gap has closed considerably between the two since Okafor was selected consensus national preseason player of the year and Schenscher was an anonymous player in the ACC.

They'll see a lot of each other in Monday night's national championship game, a battle in the middle that could decide whether Connecticut wins its second national title or Georgia Tech wins its first.

College basketball hasn't had many prominent center matchups lately, and the national title game hasn't had one between real big men since Patrick Ewing of Georgetown and Hakeem Olajuwon of Houston hooked up 20 years ago.

"We don't like to call them centers, we like to call them power players. It's kind of the upgraded word for center," Connecticut coach Jim Calhoun said. "It's one of the few games where you're going to have legitimate guys who can both put 20 on the board, double-figure rebound, both affect the

other team's offense by being a defensive presence inside."

Okafor is quicker, smoother and NBA ready. Schenscher still is a work in progress, showing flashes at times while trying to overcome occasional awkwardness.

Okafor, a unanimous selection to The Associated Press' All-America team and the runner-up to Jameer Nelson of Saint Joseph's as player of the year, easily wins the numbers game.

He averages 17.5 points, 11.4 rebounds and a nation-leading 4.1 blocked shots while shooting 59.9 percent from the field. He led the country with 23 double-doubles this season.

Schenscher is averaging 9.2 points and 6.5 rebounds while shooting 56 percent from the field. His numbers have improved all season, and two of his most impressive games are among his last seven — 17 points and 17 rebounds in a win over North Carolina and 19 points and 12 rebounds in the 67-65 victory over Oklahoma State on Saturday.

Okafor also had the statistical advantage when the teams met in the Preseason NIT semifinal in November, a 77-61 Georgia Tech victory. Okafor, bothered for the first time that game by back spasms that lingered into March, had nine points and 13 rebounds, while Schenscher had two points and three rebounds.

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