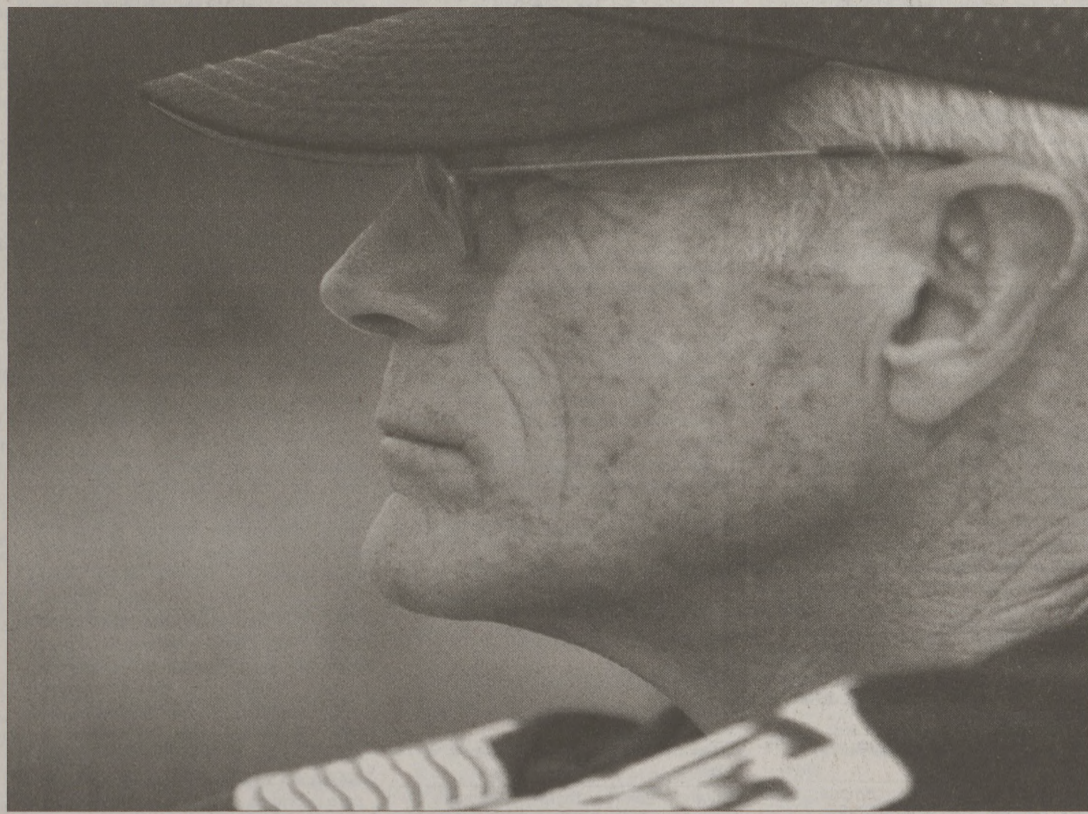


Aggie baseball travels to Kansas for Big 12 showdown

By Jordan Meserole
THE BATTALION



Texas A&M head coach **Mark Johnson** looks on from A&M's dugout during A&M's 4-1 win over Texas Tech on March 27 at Olsen Field. The Aggies will face the University of Kansas in a three-game series in Lawrence, Kan., this weekend.

The No. 15 Texas A&M baseball team will be seeing a mirror reflection of itself this weekend in Lawrence, Kan., when it takes on the University of Kansas. The Aggies (27-8, 4-5 Big 12) and the Jayhawks (22-14-1, 5-5) have similar records, similar overall team stats, key players with similar individual stats and the same aspirations — getting to the College World Series. “It doesn’t matter who your opponent is, you’ve still got to get out there and get a ‘W,’” said A&M head coach Mark Johnson. “Nothing is do or die just yet, but you still can’t give games away.” A&M enters the three-game series after beating Sam Houston State University Tuesday, 8-3. The Aggies will be concerned with bettering their conference record, after losing two out of three games to Oklahoma State University in the first weekend of April, and dropping two of three games to Baylor University in the last weekend of March.

Johnson said the team’s recent struggle to win is coming on the offensive side of the plate. “We’ve got to put our act together and get up there and hit the ball better,” Johnson said. “We’ve seen some better pitching, but we haven’t seen anything unbelievable yet that we shouldn’t be able to hit.” Much like the Aggies, the Jayhawks will be intent on adding wins to their conference record after losing five of six conference games.

“Our competition has been

top quality every game all season long,” said Kansas head coach Ritch Price. “This weekend will be no different. A&M is a solid team all around and we’ll certainly have to battle to get a win.” Kansas is expected to send senior left-hander Ryan Knippschild to the mound Friday for the first game of the series. Knippschild currently is one of Kansas’ top starting pitchers with a 3.58 earned run average, 51 strikeouts and 13 walks.

“A&M’s mirror version of Knippschild, junior left-hander Zach Jackson, is believed to be taking the mound on Friday for the Aggies. Jackson enters the game with a 3.81 E.R.A., 53 strikeouts and has only allowed 12 bases on balls. On the offensive side, the reflection between the two teams becomes a little more obscure. Kansas currently sits atop the Big 12 with a team batting average of .343 and 40 home runs, while A&M is in the middle of its conference rivals with a .310 average and 19 home runs. “You can’t put up 15 runs

every game and shouldn’t have to,” said A&M sophomore first baseman Coby Mavroulis. “You just have to go out there and do whatever it takes to win.”

Price said the team goal for the weekend is to walk away with at least two wins, but he knows just as well as the Aggies do that the task won’t be easy.

“You can go into any Big 12 series thinking that you’re going to get a easy win or sweep,” Price said. “But all you’re doing is setting yourself up for a longer weekend than you could expect.”

A&M women’s tennis heads to Baylor Thursday

By Jon Gilbert
THE BATTALION

The Aggie lady netters have responded to every challenge they have faced this season. Now, head coach Bobby Kleinecke needs to stand up to the challenge that No. 44 Baylor University is going to give his team this Thursday in Waco.

A&M will face Baylor at 6 p.m. at the Baylor Tennis Center. The Bears (8-8, 4-1 Big 12) need a win to claim second place in the Big 12, with their only conference loss coming to University of Texas, 7-0, on March 4. The Aggies (15-6, 7-0) are in a tie with Texas for first place in the Big 12.

A&M has won 11 of its past 12 matches and have four conference matches left, three of which are against teams in the top five in the Big 12, Baylor being one of them.

“Baylor is always a tough opponent for us,” Kleinecke said. “At times they have underachieved, but they are playing well right now. I feel really good about how our team is playing and where we stand right now. The girls are playing with mental toughness, and that has helped this team get to where they are now.”

Mental strength has been key for A&M all season. The team has repeatedly come up strong in the clutch, which is something it will need against Baylor, Kansas State University, Texas and the University of Kansas to

close out the season.

But Kleinecke said the Aggies are taking nothing for granted, focusing on one opponent at a time.

“We’re focused on the next one in front of us,” Kleinecke said. “We can’t afford to look ahead. We need to take them one at a time. When we played Colorado Sunday, that was our biggest match. We have 11 Big 12 matches, and our goal is to win them all.”

Baylor head coach Joey Scrivano said his Bears are confident coming into their match against the Aggies. They have won three straight and find themselves in a groove just in time for the last push of the season.

“We’re playing a lot better right now,” Scrivano said. “We had a tough non-conference schedule and that has made us a stronger team. We were 2-7 and in a hole, but the girls have responded and now we’re .500 again.”

Home court advantage is a commodity to have in Big 12 play, and Baylor will enjoy that edge Thursday. These two teams are a combined 12-1 on their respective home courts this season. Yet, Scrivano downplays the home court advantage.

“Yeah, we hope (home court) does (help),” Scrivano said. “But, if we don’t come out with the right mindset it’s not going to matter. If you have the right mindset you could play on the moon and it wouldn’t really matter.”

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