

Roland-led Aggies host Texas for Big 12 title

By Jon Gilbert
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M women's tennis head coach Bobby Kleinecke said there have not been many players, if any, who have come through the A&M tennis program and done what senior Jessica Roland has done in her four years at A&M. Kleinecke and the team just hope there is more to come.

Roland, from Hollywood, Calif., is the team leader of the No. 16 Aggies. On Tuesday, the team will attempt to repeat as Big 12 champions for the first time ever as it hosts No. 12 University of Texas Tuesday night. Roland said winning the conference title is the team's No. 1 goal.

"We want to win the Big 12," Roland said. "That's our top goal, and once we do that we'd like to go to the Sweet 16. We know that it's a goal that is very attainable. Once we get there, who knows what will happen."

Roland has played in the No. 1 spot all four years in Aggieland. She has compiled a 71-46 dual record in singles while playing each match against the opposing team's best player.

"Playing No. 1 brings a certain responsibility," Roland said. "Everyone looks up to me and there is a certain amount of leadership that I have to be aware of. You have to be willing to show good work ethic because everyone feeds off you."

There is not much that Roland has not accomplished during her career at A&M. She has been an All-Big 12 selection three consecutive years and has competed in two NCAA Championships, one in singles and one in doubles.

In her sophomore year, she and teammate Ashley Hedberg were ranked as high as No. 14 in doubles and competed in the NCAA Championships. This past year, Roland competed in the NCAA Championships in singles and advanced to the second round before falling to Stanford's



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Texas A&M senior Jessica Roland returns a volley during her doubles match against Kansas State during A&M's 7-0 win Saturday at the George P. Mitchell Tennis Center.

Amber Liu, the eventual national champion. Roland is also the all-time career leader for A&M in doubles' wins with 95.

"What she's done here has been phenomenal," Kleinecke said. "The progress she's made these past years has inspired me. I watched her come into her own as she got older and become the player she is. She has made such a great mark on this program."

Roland agrees that she has improved her last two years, but she said it hasn't been easy.

"I've gotten to the level I'm at now because of the hard work

I've put in the last two years," Roland said. "My freshman and sophomore years I wasn't really coming into my own. But, junior and senior year I've put in the work and the hiring of Alison (Ojeda) has really helped. She has made a difference in my game and has helped the team in our work ethic."

Roland said that Ojeda has made the biggest impact on her athletic career.

"She's helped out so much in our approach to the game and how we go into matches,"

Roland said. "She has made us excited about playing tennis, and every day she encourages us and gets us ready to play."

This is Roland's last chance to lead the Aggies into the Sweet 16. They fell short last year as the University of California eliminated them in the second round.

"We work great together," Roland said. "We're one of the most determined teams in the nation. We may not be playing our best tennis, but we compete and fight to the end and that sets us apart from others."

A&M, Texas battle for Big 12 championship

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This is the match the No. 16 Texas A&M women's tennis team has been waiting for the entire season. The University of Texas will be in College Station Tuesday to take on A&M at the George P. Mitchell Tennis Center at 6 p.m. The winner clinches a share of the Big 12 regular season championship.

A&M 17-6, 9-0 Big 12 will have the honor of hosting the championship match and will be attempting to repeat as conference champs. No. 12 Texas (17-4, 8-0) will be shooting for its seventh Big 12 championship since the conference was formed in 1996.

"This is it," said A&M women's tennis head coach Bobby Kleinecke. "We couldn't have asked for a more ideal situation. We're playing Texas, our rivals, at home for the championship under the lights. We're undefeated; they're undefeated. It doesn't get any better than that."

Kleinecke said he and the A&M team want to see the George P. Mitchell Center packed full of loud and rowdy fans Tuesday night.

"We're really expecting a huge crowd," Kleinecke said. "This is a great opportunity, and it's going to be great tennis being played between two great programs. It's going to be fun to watch. We really want the student body to be here. We want them to come ready to cheer and to get rowdy. These girls have

worked hard for this and they deserve to have good support."

Meanwhile, the Aggies continue to waltz through conference play. They defeated Kansas State University Saturday for their eighth straight win. They are getting solid play and the team said it knows it will take that type of play to beat Texas.

"It's a huge match," said A&M senior Jessica Roland.

"We don't have an underdog mentality. We feel we should beat Texas. We're going to go in with the mentality that we should beat them. We beat them twice last year and know we can do it again."

The Longhorns have been on a similar journey as the Aggies in

conference play, but have lost two non-conference matches to Duke University and Tulane University recently. Through the years, they have consistently beat A&M. But last year, the Aggies changed that by beating the Longhorns once during the season and once in the conference tournament.

"This is even ground and whoever plays better will win it," Kleinecke said. "Our girls are playing against an excellent team."

A&M men's tennis head coach Tim Cass spoke to the girls last week about what is at stake.

"He basically came and told us about how awesome this opportunity is," said sophomore Nicki Mechem. "He told us that every other A&M athlete would die to be in our shoes — playing Texas for the championship."

"We couldn't have asked for a more ideal situation."

— Bobby Kleinecke
Texas A&M women's tennis head coach

Saddle up.

If you still need a science credit, get it done during Summer I in Principles of Geology (101). Take the road less traveled.

This event is a 5K run & 3K walk around the Texas A&M University campus in which all of the proceeds and donations go to testicular cancer research.

Date of the Race: April 24, 2004
Pre-Registration is from April 5-23
Race Day Registration starts @ 7:15 am
Time: Race starts @ 8:00 am

Entry Fees:
Before April 24: \$12
Day Of The Race: \$15

Registration forms for the race can be:
1) Picked up from the Health Education office, Room 008, in the basement of the A.P. Beutel Health Center.
2) Printed off of the Health Education webpage @ <http://healthed.tamu.edu>

For more information, please call 847-8910

The CannonBALL Run is hosted by Texas A&M University Student Health Services, Health Education and Kappa Alpha Psi.

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