

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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By Jeremy Osborne
THE BATTALION



SPIKED

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL TEAM BUMPS, SETS AND SPIKES THEIR WAY OVER THE COMPETITION

While other Texas A&M teams receive loads of attention for mediocre seasons, the two men's club volleyball teams consistently rank as two of the nation's best without many people on campus even knowing they exist.

For 18 years, the teams have competed with other across the country in the surprisingly rough sport.

"If you've never seen men's volleyball, it's a completely different game than women's," said Andy Fuselier, club social coordinator and senior mechanical engineering major. "It's a complete power game. There's usually no more than two hits per side because it's so aggressive."

The teams' success is somewhat unusual in this region. Most competitive men's volleyball teams come from the midwest and west coast where there are established men's volleyball programs in high schools, said Brett Swendig, club president and senior sports management major.

"If you like volleyball, this is the place to go for in Texas," Fuselier said.

Team two was ranked as the No. 1 team in 2003, and team one has been ranked in the top 10 several years.

Team one was ranked as high as No. 9 in the nation this year, but this season was a little disappointing because the team is going through a transition, Swendig said.

"Most of the guys on the first team have been fifth-year seniors or graduate students," Fuselier said. "So we've lost a number of players off our roster for the last two years."

The turnover left the team out of the top 10 this season.

"We had a lot of young players this year, so it should be really helpful for the next year and the year after that," he said.

The teams practice and play year-round, with conference games in the spring, Swendig said.

"We practice two to three times a week for two and a half hours," he said. "As far as the spring goes, every weekend we have a tournament somewhere."

They also play for fun on Sunday and Wednesday

nights at the Student Recreation Center.

Along the way, they are coached by Mike Popp, a graduate student and former player. Popp is a multiple-year All-American and was invited to try out for the College National team.

"He's one of the best players to come through A&M," Fuselier said.

Currently, there are 22 team members. More than 20 players either received all-conference awards or were named All-American players or conference all-stars in the last three years.

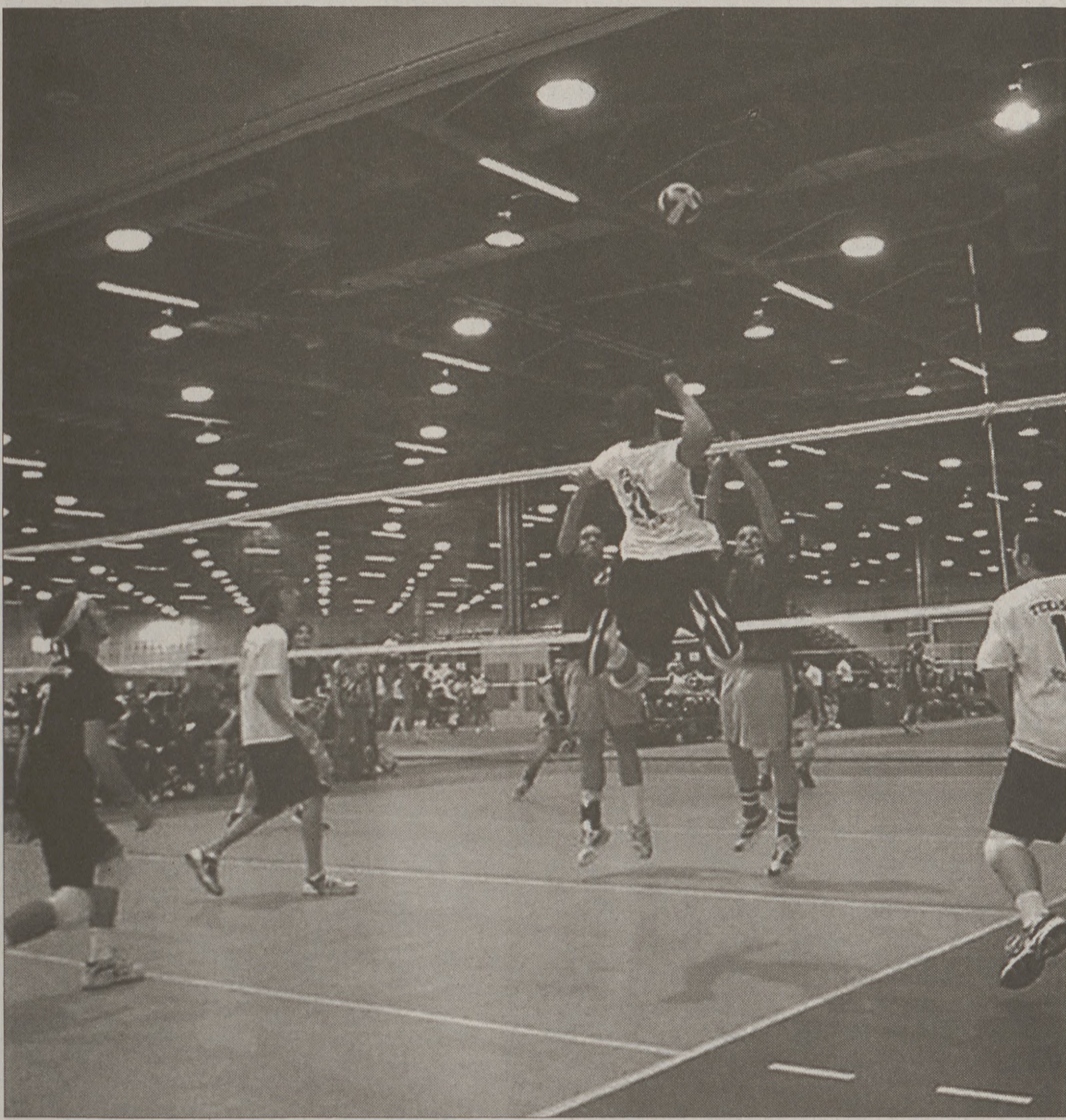
"Some of the best players go to Europe after college. Europe has professional leagues and you can go and get on one of those teams and travel around for a while," Fuselier said. "Other guys will convert over and play the beach tour, the two-man outdoor circuit."

Since only a small portion of the club's budget is funded through the University, team members do extensive fund raising every year, Swendig said.

"We do this thing called Big Clean-Up where we clean up Reed Arena after a basketball game," said Anthony Duenas, team two member and junior sports management major. "Also we hosted tournaments, had a letter writing campaign and hosted alumni week."

Because of their fund-raising efforts, the teams are able to compete in nationwide competitions.

"The best part about it is we are able to do a lot of traveling," Fuselier said. "I've gotten to go to Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Indiana, California - all without paying for it myself."



COURTESY OF • BRETT SWENDIG

The Texas A&M men's volleyball team is consistently ranked in the top 10 every year. This year, one of the teams was ranked No. 1.

Tryouts for the teams are held on the second or third week of the fall semester in the Reed Building on the third floor. Anyone is welcome to try out. About 50 or more people try out each year, Swendig said.

"Usually, about half of the guys (who try out) have previous experience, but the other half don't," Fuselier said.

Neither Fuselier nor Swendig had formal volleyball experience before joining the team.

"We (Fuselier and Swendig) were just at the

Rec Center, and a couple of guys on the team saw us, thought we were athletic and asked to try out," Fuselier said.

Duenas said he had roommates on the team, and that they encouraged him to try out.

For two weeks prior to tryouts, the teams have "open gyms." Interested students are able to see the team in action and current team members and the coach are able to see the talent



Ben Stiller

Jack Black

Success didn't go to his head, it went to his neighbor.

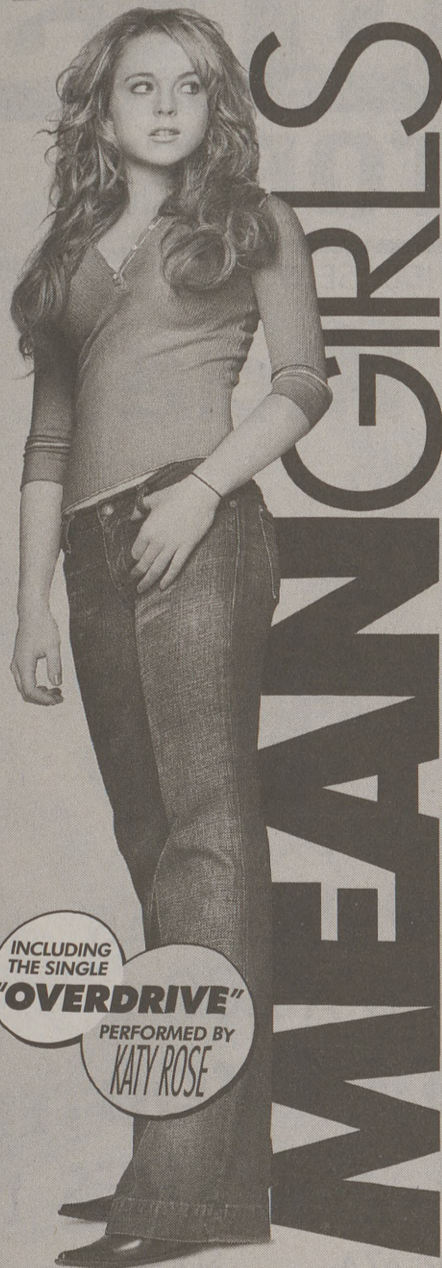
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