

Rocky Mountain High

A&M kicks off season against Utah in the thin Rocky air

By Ryan Irby
THE BATTALION

The buzz around Salt Lake City is that Thursday night's football game will be the biggest in the University of Utah's history. When the Texas A&M Aggies take on the No. 19 Utes at Rice-Eccles Stadium, A&M will be the only expected roadblock between the Utes and a potentially perfect season.

Even A&M head coach Dennis Franchione has high expectations of the Utes, considered by many to be this year's possible Cinderella story.

"They certainly are one of those teams that are thinking about cracking into the BCS," Franchione said. "I think if Utah were in the Big 12, they would be competitive across the board."

Last season, Franchione and the Aggies slipped past the Utes at Kyle Field, surviving a late rally to win 28-26. All that stood between the Utes and victory was a failed two-point conversion with no time left on the board. This season, with junior quarterback Alex Smith leading the Ute offense, A&M is expecting stiffer competition.

"I think the key to their offense is Alex Smith," Franchione said. "He's obviously kind of a special guy."

After starting quarterback Brett Elliott broke his wrist on the last play of the game with the Aggies one year ago, Smith took over and went 9-1 the rest of the way.



JOHN C. LIVAS • THE BATTALION

A&M linebacker Archie McDaniel (41) makes a tackle against Utah wide receiver Bo Nagahi September 6 at Kyle Field. A&M won the game 28-20.

The energetic Utes employ an offensive strategy built around the drop-back pass and the run. Although many expect Utah to air the ball out, the Utes pounded A&M on the ground in the second half of last season's match-up. Utes sophomore

running back Mike Liti has stepped in to replace Brandon Warfield, a tailback who terrorized the Aggie defense in the second half of the 2003 meeting.

Franchione said he doesn't plan on defending against a play-action combination.

	vs.	
Texas A&M		Utah
GAME 1		
DATE: September 2		
TIME: 6:30 p.m.		
SITE: Rice-Eccles Stadium, Salt Lake City, Utah		
LAST MEETING: 28-26 (W) (2003)		
KEY PLAYERS		
Alex Smith		Urban Meyer

GRACE ARENAS • THE BATTALION

Utah head coach and 2003 Mountain West Conference Coach of the Year Urban Meyer said his program still has to take steps to gain more recognition.

"We're a top-25 team (but) we don't have a top-25 program," Meyer said.

See Utah on page 3B

SIDE NOTES

COMING FRIDAY

Complete coverage of Thursday's A&M-Utah football game from Salt Lake City, Utah.

BRIEFLY

Old Southwest Conference rivalries will be renewed next season when the A&M football team meets up against Southern Methodist University. The teams have scheduled two more dates, one in 2011 and another in 2012.

The Houston Astros won their 6th-straight game with a 9-3 win over Cincinnati. Lance Berkman hit a tiebreaking homerun in the fifth inning to give the Astros its 14th win in 17 games.

Tryouts for the walk-on 12th Man team will be held soon. Those interested need to attend a mandatory meeting Sunday, September 5 at 6 p.m. in Burkhardt Auditorium at Kyle Field.

The Boston Red Sox extended their A.L. Wild Card lead over the Anaheim Angels by defeating them 12-7. It was Boston's 8th straight win.

ON THIS DAY

1940 — Byron Nelson wins the PGA by beating Sam Snead 1-up at the Hershey Country Club in Pennsylvania.

2000 — Tennessee wins its 700th football game in a 19-16 win over Southern Mississippi.

2003 — Eric Gagne sets a major league record with his 55th consecutive save in a 4-1 win over the Houston Astros.

Got a burning sports question that's been on your mind? Ask away!

sports@thebattalion.net

Volleyball set for season opening tournament

By Jonathan Wall
THE BATTALION

The fall sports season continues to emerge as the Aggie volleyball team kicks off the season tonight at G. Rollie White Coliseum as the host team for the McDonald's/Texas A&M Invitational.

The Aggies are making another run at a Big 12 championship and NCAA tournament berth. A&M was so impressed with last season's crowd turnouts that it increased this year's tournament to seven teams. A&M will welcome McNeese State, Southern Mississippi, Samford, Georgia Southern and UCLA to College Station for the Thursday through Saturday Invitational.

Bethune-Cookman was also invited to the tournament, but the Daytona Beach based college pulled out due to inclement weather generated by Hurricane Frances.

Southern Mississippi and Samford will come into the season under new head coaches who are hoping to make their mark in the tournament.

Georgia Southern, McNeese State, UCLA and A&M seem to be the headliners for the tournament. Three of the four schools advanced to the NCAA tournament last season and all four are returning key starters from last season's squads.

The Aggies will get a chance to face some tough competition in the tournament, including perennial powerhouse and preseason No. 3 UCLA.

The Bruins are poised to make a run at the NCAA championship with almost their whole roster returning from last season. A trio of seniors including Heather Cullen, Brynn Murphy and Chrissie Zartman look to anchor a Bruin squad that will rely heavily on their talents.

While UCLA looks great on paper, that isn't deterring Aggie play-

ers such as senior middle blocker/outside hitter Melissa Munsch from looking at the game as a great opportunity for the team.

"(UCLA has a) great program," Munsch said. "I think the game will give us a chance to figure out where some of our strengths and weaknesses are. I'm just happy we're getting a chance to compete against them."

Munsch isn't the only one excited about playing UCLA. A&M head coach Laurie Corbelli worked long hours to find a way to keep the Aggies at home for an early season tournament while giving the team a chance to play some quality games.

"I went to the ends of the earth to find teams that could play in this tournament," Corbelli said. "I'm just ready to get this season started and see how our team stacks up against some nationally ranked squads."



Texas A&M / McDonald's
Invitational Volleyball Tournament
Thursday - Saturday
G. Rollie White Coliseum

FRIDAY
#15 Texas A&M vs. Georgia Southern
10:30 a.m.

#15 Texas A&M vs. McNeese State
4:30 p.m.

SATURDAY
#15 Texas A&M vs. #3 UCLA
7 p.m.

Complete schedule available online:
<http://www.aggieathletics.com>

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