

## National Champ Brea Garrett's journey to the record books

# A FACE ON A BANNER

By Seth Stroupe

**B**rea Garrett first came to Texas A&M on a recruiting visit. It was a standard trip, with one exception — she wasn't the target of the Aggies' affection that day. She was only 12 at the time, tagging along with her older brother, a highly sought-after basketball prospect.

Her brother wound up choosing Boston College over A&M, but the Aggies didn't walk away empty handed. They hooked a big recruit that day. They just didn't know it yet.

"I remember being asleep when we pulled up and opening my eyes to see Kyle Field," Garrett said. "Immediately I thought to myself, 'This place is awesome.' I was pretty young at the time and I don't know what it was, but something about this place resonated in my soul. I was always drawn to Texas A&M. I just knew it was where I wanted to be."

Garrett's stellar high school athletic career soon made that interest mutual. Garrett had her hand in just about everything at Martin High School in Arlington, Texas. She won three individual state championships in track for 5A Martin — two in the shot put and another in the 100-meter hurdles. She set the school records for both events and also competed in the long jump, where she set a personal best mark of 19 feet, 3 inches.

Off the track, she lettered in basketball, cheer and gymnastics and even dabbled in tennis on the side for fun. All of this grabbed the attention of Texas A&M and it wasn't

long before Garrett found herself on her own recruiting visit, standing in front of the wall displaying A&M's school record holders.

"[Assistant track coach] Vince Anderson walked me in and said, 'You're going to be on this board someday,'" Garrett said. "I laughed at him. I knew I was pretty good, but things don't happen just because someone tells you that they will. I just laughed it off."

That was over four years ago. Anderson's divination has since come to fruition and Brea Garrett's likeness now sits inside Gilliam Indoor Track Stadium on a banner next to her school record mark of 74 feet, 4.5 inches in the weight toss.

"Seeing my face up there was a real coming of age moment for me," Garrett said. "When you start to fulfill your destiny and accomplish what people have laid out for you, that's when you start to realize that maybe they weren't just saying those things. They really believed them. When I saw my face up there, I burst into tears. It really reaffirmed to me that I am more than I think I am."

To Garrett, the banner represents more than just a record. It represents her entire college journey. It reminds her of how far she's come and how much farther she can go. The Brea Garrett of today is very different than the one who started her career here four years ago, and she'll be the first one to say it.

"My attitude has changed so much since I got here," Garrett said. "I used to be very standoffish and protective of myself because I didn't surround myself with the best people

in the past. When my attitude changed, it completely changed the way I approach everything I do — athletically and in my personal life. When you're a child, you act like a child, you think like a child and you do childish things. In college, no one's there to wait at your beck and call and you have to figure it out for yourself. You have to better yourself and change the way you handle people."

Garrett's transformation has not been lost on those around her. Far from standoffish, the Garrett today is gregarious and polite. Her personality, which used to keep people at a distance, now draws them in. Garrett says her change has been a 180-degree turnaround. When asked about her attitude, her coach expressed a similar sentiment.

"I didn't like it when she first got here," joked head track coach Pat Henry. "I'm kidding, but she's changed. She really has. She's a very outgoing person now. If my grandchildren come up here, the first person they ask to see is Brea. She's so great with kids and she's a fun girl to have on this team."

Garrett's change in approach has been coupled with her development as an athlete. At Texas A&M, she's been able to focus all her athletic talents and strength on two events — the weight toss and shot put. Just months after setting the school record in the weight toss at last year's Aggie Invitational, Garrett won the individual national championship in the event at the 2014 NCAA Indoor Championships.

What should be even more frightening to

her competition, however, is her continued improvement in the sport. Garrett has won the weight toss in five consecutive meets this season, improving her distance each time. Last week, she won the Tyson Invitational with a toss that eclipsed 73 feet en route to being named the SEC Field Athlete of the Week.

"Brea is a tremendous athlete," Henry said. "She's very talented and she's beginning to use all of those talents in throwing the weight. She's an explosive person, but she's never been able to use all of the natural explosion that she has. Now, she's really starting to figure it out."

This is the final year of competition for Garrett. In May, she'll graduate with a degree in psychology and sociology, which she plans on using to help improve the lives of children in the educational setting. This final semester is a bittersweet one for her, as she's torn between looking forward to what's to come and trying to enjoy everything she's been able to experience here at Texas A&M.

Still, Garrett knows she won't fully be able to grasp it all until long after she's gone.

"It still hasn't hit me yet," Garrett said. "I have the trophy. I have the gear. I have all that stuff. I see it all the time. I even say it. I'll say, 'Yeah, I'm a national champion.' But it still has not hit me that I actually did that. I'm fixing to leave here and go and in two years or so, I'm probably just going to sit back one day and say, 'Wow, I can't believe I actually accomplished all that.' It's still very surreal. It's like a dream and I'm waiting to wake up, but if I don't, then that's cool too."



Cody Franklin — THE BATTALION

## As track teams enter championships, coach Henry says 'it's all about depth'

By Seth Stroupe

► The Texas A&M track and field team has enjoyed a level of success this season that has become synonymous with the program in recent years, but head coach Pat Henry knows that everything up to this point is relatively meaningless in comparison to this weekend's SEC Indoor Championships in Lexington, Kentucky.

"The mental aspect is the most important aspect of our sport," Henry said. "You have got to be a person who is mentally capable of getting everything out of yourself at that time. We don't keep a cumulative record. It's all about that one performance. If you do well enough, then you get to move on. All the meets we've done to this point are rehearsal. Now you have to use everything you have on this, the first of the season's major championships. Our goal is to have as many people do as well as they're capable of doing on the same day. That's it."

The Aggies (men No. 4, women No. 7) would be favorites in just about every other conference in the nation, but the SEC is a different beast. Five of the nation's top eight teams in either gender call the SEC their home.

"This conference championship lines up like most of the conference championships in our sport," Henry said. "You've got 10 of the top 16 schools in the United States are SEC right now on both genders. It doesn't get any better than that in any sport. The conference meet is a meet that's all about depth. You have to have high end performances, but you also have to have people who are getting those 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th place finishes too. One point can become a huge factor in a meet like this."

The Texas A&M track team is no stranger to the grand stage. The Aggies are top heavy with experience and talent, but the battle for mid-level, single-point finishes could easily decide how they finish in Lexington. Henry said depth is crucial for success in running the conference gauntlet and that's a bit of a question mark for this team going into the weekend.

"This team is coming off of one of the most

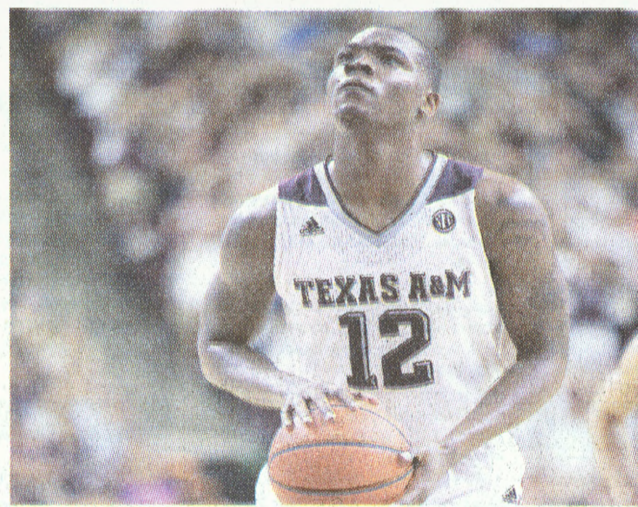


Cody Franklin — THE BATTALION

The No. 4 men's track team will compete this weekend at the SEC championships.

dominating performances we've ever seen at last year's SEC Outdoors, specifically the men's team," Henry said. "I've been in this league a long time and I've never seen a school win the 100, 200, 400, short hurdles, long hurdles and both relays. That's never, ever happened. This group has been there before and they understand the quality of competition. We have a good number of those who are returning this year, but I'm a little concerned about our depth, and I'm a little concerned about our younger ones."

The SEC Championships start at 3 p.m. Friday and will be streamed live on SEC Network Plus.



Junior forward Jalen Jones is second on the team in scoring behind Danuel House's 15.4 points per game.

Vanessa Pena — THE BATTALION

## Men's hoops targets Auburn for SEC rebound after loss

By Carter Karels

► Texas A&M will try its best Saturday to recapture its momentum and keep the NCAA Tournament selection committee happy.

A&M (19-8, 10-5 SEC) will host Auburn in Reed Arena, and a loss would mark its first defeat to a squad that ranks outside the RPI top 100.

The Aggies are coming off one of their biggest games of the year against Arkansas, an 81-75 loss in Fayetteville. A&M trailed by as many as 24 points, but a 28-point effort from Danuel House and a double-double from Jalen Jones brought them within striking distance. However, the No. 18 Razorbacks were able to ice the game at the foul line and with defensive execution.

The Tigers (12-16, 4-11 SEC) are doing the best they can to stay away from the bottom of the barrel. After losing four out of its last five, Auburn sits tied for second-to-last place.

Perhaps the Aggies most impressive

streak, however, came after their first two SEC losses, which brought six consecutive wins. In that span, A&M defeated Auburn 71-61 away from Reed on Jan. 27. In that game, the Aggies shot 50 percent from the field (28-56), and House led in scoring with 22 points, shooting 6-for-7 from three.

He averages the most points for the Aggies (15.4) and in the past six contests, he has accumulated four 20-plus-point performances. As A&M approaches the end of its most successful SEC season, House has only had one single-digit outing.

The Aggies have already played each of their last three opponents, with a 2-1 record. However, there's no room for error against the Tigers, as A&M still lingers in the bubble in most March Madness projections. The team is tied for third in the SEC, and only the top four receive a double-bye in the SEC tournament.

Tipoff is set for 7:30 p.m.