

Baker wants track SWC championship

By PAUL MCGRATH
 For Shifton Baker, only a few more hurdles remain in the way. The Texas A&M senior from Elgin is putting together his best season as his track career at A&M is drawing to a close. After the Baylor Invitational tomorrow, Baker will perhaps don his spikes only a half dozen more times.

The durable and versatile Baker leads the Aggies with 104 1/2 points, already surpassing his team leading 90 points of last year. While primarily a hurdler, he also runs in A&M's sprint and mile relay foursomes and has long jumped on occasion.

He has the Southwest Conference's best time in the 440-yard intermediates with a 51.6 and has run a 50.9 in the 440-meter version. He ranks second in the 120-yard highs with a career best of 13.7 seconds. Only Baylor's Davy Duncan has done better this spring, owning a 13.4 clocking.

Baker says that running track does not appear to be in his future. "I don't have any immediate plans for running anymore. I may join a track club, but that's for city boys. I'm a country boy."

He already has his share of laurels that he could rest upon. Baker attended the Olympic trials last summer at Eugene, Ore., running a 50.6 for a personal best in the intermediates. He won the 60-yard highs at the conference indoor championships earlier this year and has won numerous awards in meets

such as the Drake Relays and was named the Outstanding Performer in this year's Border Olympics.

But, bowing out now would be against his character.

"I'm definitely going to go out kicking," he said. "I run every race like it's going to be my last because it might be."

"I want us to win conference this year. I've been here for nearly four years and we haven't won anything. We have a better chance this year than ever before. If we don't win it this year, it'll be a long time before we do. We're losing a lot of field event people."

The Aggies of Coach Charles Thomas have relied heavily upon the field events to score points, finding a good deal of success. In fact, it was the field events which usually provided the margin of victory earlier this season with Baker about the only one A&M could talk about in the running events.

The early season pressure upon Baker was great as he was often counted upon to win both hurdles events. Perhaps this is one of the reasons his teammates voted him as team captain along with Manfred Kohrs.

The pressure recently has been relieved somewhat by sprinter Ray Brooks, Baker's roommate. Brooks is one of the SWC's top 220 men and anchors A&M's sprint relay team. He ran a 48.2 in the quarter last weekend and may compete in this event, as well as the 100-yard

dash, at the conference meet May 14.

Although Baker admits he is coming along a little slower than last year, he still feels the intermediates is his best race.

"Everybody tells me I'm an intermediate hurdler," he said. "If you look at my statistics I guess I would be more consistent with my times in the intermediates. But I have my streaks in the highs, too. In a big meet or a tough field, I do do better in the intermediates."

The intermediate hurdle is three feet tall and 10 of them are placed in the race, 30 yards apart. The highs are three and one-half feet tall and are placed 10 yards apart.

Baker said he usually uses 15 steps between hurdles in the intermediates, while on good days using 13 or 14. Edwin Moses, the world record holder in the event, uses 13 steps. Nevertheless, the race is very demanding on anyone.

"You can breeze through the highs — that's just speed," Baker said, "but in the intermediates you're going to hurt every time."

There is a great deal of technique involved in the race as well as strategy. Baker leads with his left leg when clearing a hurdle which subtracts as much as 10 yards from his race compared to a hurdler who leads with his right. This is because centrifugal force carries the hurdler in the same direction as the lead leg used, keeping a southpaw in the

more advantageous inside portion of the track.

The stride must be perfected to avoid "chopping" hurdles — getting too close or too far from a hurdle and having to slow down to clear it.

As for strategy, Baker says he always saves a little of his strength for a final kick, the last second effort to reach the tape.

He finished second in the intermediates at the SWC meet last year behind Texas' David Nelson. Nelson and Texas teammate Alex Studstill and Rice hurdlers Curtis Isiah and Jesse James pose as Baker's major competition this season. However, as yet, no SWC hurdler has defeated Baker in the intermediates this year.

"Nelson always comes through in

the big meets and he'll be running in his home town," Baker said. The SWC outdoor meet will be held in Austin.

Baker has won only one race in a championship meet, that being the highs at the conference indoors. So, this being his final season, the upcoming SWC meet holds a special significance to him.

"I sure wouldn't be disappointed if I won," he said.

Baker and the rest of the team will be in Waco tomorrow for the Baylor Invitational to compete against the hosting Bears, Houston and SMU. No team will be kept, but an outdoor team will be designated.

The prelims will begin at 6:30 with the finals starting at 8:00.

Rockets try to recover from shock

United Press International
HOUSTON — The Houston Rockets, having seen what appeared to be a certain victory turned into a series opening loss against the Washington Bullets, must now try to come out of shock.

"This next game is our most important of the season," said Houston coach Tom Nissalke.

Before Tuesday night's game, we said we were going to pass the ball three or four times on every possession before we shot. We did exactly that in the first period. But when we got the big lead, we just couldn't stand prosperity. We

started playing that old one-pass-and-shoot game. We reverted back to our old bad habits."

Washington and Houston face each other Thursday night in the second of their best-of-seven conference semifinal series.

The Bullets, down by as many as 18 points in the early going, came back to down the Rockets, 111-101, in the opening game thanks in part to the play of rookie Mitch Kupchak.

Kupchak scored 32 points and dragged down 16 rebounds to help the Bullets overcome the Rockets' home court advantage.

"We took their best punch and came back at them," said Elvin Hayes. "I think the Rockets felt, 'Hey, we got the big lead. Let's sit back and relax.' But they started relaxing too early."

Washington coach Dick Motta was not doing much relaxing in the early minutes of the game.

"I really thought we were ready to play a great game," said Motta. "Then it started and nothing went right for us. Late in the second quarter, they were tired and we were dragging, too, but I was de-

termined I wasn't going to timeout. They called it, and we went on and tied it before half."

"But early in the game I was saying 'there's no way out of here' got to sit here and take it."

Motta said Kupchak will continue to play a key role throughout the series.

"He — Kupchak — has a confidence," said Motta. "I've gotten better all through the series. He's fast for his size 6-10, strong and plays with great intensity every minute he's out there."

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