

# sports

## Baseball team opens season at LSU

By DERRICK GRUBBS

The weather might not indicate it, but the 1978 baseball season begins when they travel to Baton Rouge to take on LSU in a pair of doubleheaders Friday and Saturday.

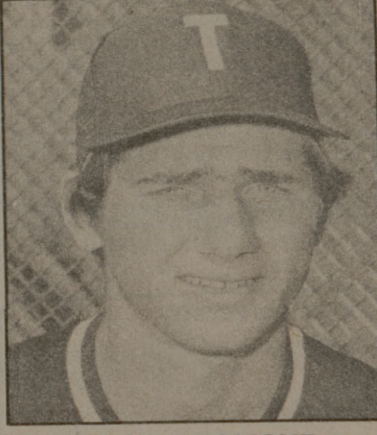
The series was originally scheduled to be played at Olsen Field, A&M's new \$1.5 million baseball facility, but bad weather has delayed construction so the series was moved to the Bengals' home ground.

"Our primary concern right now is conditioning," says Aggie coach Tom Chandler. "We've only had three days of outdoor workouts until this week because of the weather. Our pitchers aren't in top shape, but we've got a veteran staff so it shouldn't take long for their arms to get loose."

The Aggies return seven starters from last year's lineup, including the top four starting pitchers from the 1977 staff. The Ags finished 37-16 last season and copped the Southwest Conference championship with an 18-4 league mark.

"We're returning a good nucleus from last year's championship team," says Chandler. "I know we will be picked high nationally in the pre-season rankings, but our players know that it's where we end up that counts. We can't rest on last year's record."

In 1977, A&M set a team record for home runs with 41 and led the SWC with a .306 team average. Six of their top eight hitters return in '78.



MARK THURMOND

The entire starting outfield is back, including sophomore center fielder Mike Hurdle, who paced the Ags with a .349 average last year as a freshman, and also broke the school record for total bases in a season with 99. Senior left fielder Robert Verde returns, having sat out the first half of the '77 season with a knee injury.

Verde came through with several clutch hits for the Ags during the stretch drive for the SWC title last year and was voted the team captain at the end of the season. Junior Shelton McMath is back in right field after hitting .270 as a starter last year.

Most of the starting infield from a year ago is back, with senior three-letterman Robert Bonner anchoring the shortstop position. Bonner led the Aggies in seven offensive categories last year and was an all-SWC selection. In the major league draft last summer, he was picked in the ninth round by the Kansas City

Royals, but decided to stay at Aggie-land for his senior year. Bonner hit .293 in '77 and holds or shares eight school records.

At first base will be junior Kyle Hawthorne, who hit .328 and led the team in RBI's last year with 41. He also tied Hurdle for the team lead in home runs with eight. Freshman Rodney Hodde, an all-Stater from Burton, will also see duty at first base.

Second base is the big question mark for Chandler right now. At least four players are currently battling for the starting position left vacant by senior Buddy Grobe last year. The frontrunner at present is JC transfer Steve Robinson. Backing him up are junior Tom Larsen and sophomores Randy Woodruff and Harry Francis. Larsen will also do time as a substitute at shortstop and third base.

Third is another position vacated by a graduating senior, Winston Whiddon. The heir apparent is JC transfer Mark "Pop" Warriner, who comes to A&M after two years at San Jacinto JC. Ruben Coronado, another transfer from Paris JC, is currently backing up Warriner.

The catching is solid as junior Buster Turner returns after a .280 year which included seven home runs. Hawthorne will also do some catching when he's not playing first base.

The designated hitter looks to be senior Tim Feickert, who was used extensively in that role last year and hit .281.

As already stated, the nucleus of the pitching staff returns, led by all-SWC juniors Mark Thurmond and Mark Ross. Thurmond was also an all-American pick and pitched for the United States in the USA-Japan

College All-Star Series last summer. Thurmond was the SWC's top hurler in '77 with a 0.64 ERA and finished the season with a 10-2 record. He also led the staff in strikeouts with 76.

Ross saw the most action last year in finishing 11-3 with a 2.41 ERA over 112 innings on the mound.

Thurmond, a lefthander, possesses a good curve and is described by Chandler as "sneaky fast," while Ross, a righthander, is noted for his sharp sinker.

The other returning pitchers are senior righthander David Pieczynski and senior lefty Jim McWilliams. Pieczynski was 6-2 last year as a starter and has a good fast ball and hard curve. Perhaps the most improved player on the Aggie staff, McWilliams was 4-2 as a part-time

starter in '77. He was plagued by control problems for a short time last year, but Chandler says he looked good through fall workouts and will battle Pieczynski for the third spot in the starting rotation.

The Ags also return their ace reliever in junior John Pockrus, who turned in seven saves for A&M in 1977.

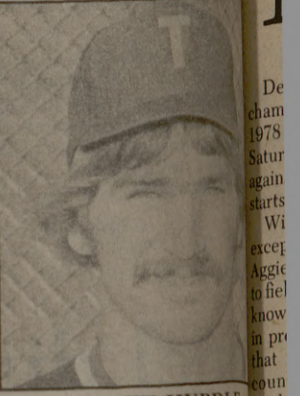
Freshman Perry Swanson from Las Vegas is another name to remember. A lefty, Swanson was drafted in the seventh round by the Chicago White Sox this past summer, but instead took the scholarship offered him by A&M. Although he lacks experience, Chandler says he is just turning the corner to becoming a "pitcher" rather than a "thrower."

There are a number of other new faces that will likely get in some early-season playing time. Wayne Meason, a transfer from Paris JC, will see duty at first base. Gary Bryant, another transfer from Panola JC, had a good fall and will work some in the outfield, as could Bryan freshman Ronnie Greinert. Bryant will also share DH duties with Feickert.

Two pitchers who will get a shot are junior Alan Buonasera, who had a good fall, and freshman Randy McDonald, an all-District hurler at Fort Worth Western Hills.

Chandler, who begins his 20th year as head baseball coach at A&M, believes this year's SWC race will be the best in many years.

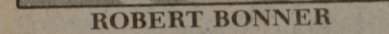
"The title is up for grabs and there will be a genuine battle be-



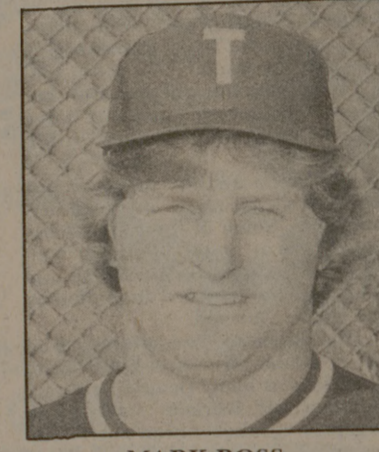
MIKE HURDLE

tween several teams. I believe our team that finishes ahead of LSU can win the championship. LSU doesn't have the veteran players they have had in the past. LSU has just about everybody in play and will be tough, as will Baylor.

The Aggies will leave Baton Rouge on Friday morning for Baton Rouge and will be broadcast live on KAGC (1510 AM) station KAGC (1510 AM).



ROBERT BONNER



MARK ROSS

## Ags host hot Horned Frogs

By MARK PATTERSON

Battalion Sports Staff  
One of the many teams that beat the Aggies in the first half of the Southwest Conference season is coming to G. Rollie White Coliseum tonight.

The TCU Horned Frogs, once the joke of the conference, are coming into tonight's game fresh off of a 57-54 victory over the Rice Owls Monday night for their second conference victory of the season. And they're looking for number three tonight.

"I'm scared to death with them coming in here," said coach Shelby Metcalf about TCU's visit to A&M. "If they beat us, they'll be in a tie with us for seventh place in the conference."

"The main thing they have going for them is that they think they can beat us. They did it once already."

TCU is going to a great expense in their quest for the seventh position. Breaking their usual routine, the Horned Frogs flew in to College Station Tuesday and held a workout in G. Rollie White last night.

"They want to give their boys all the rest they need for a victory," said Metcalf on the Frogs' early arrival. "We only travel a day early for a game when we're in contention for the title."

"But I think it will help them get mentally ready for their game with us. And it sure can't hurt their enthusiasm."

In their last meeting in Fort Worth, TCU broke out to a 12-0 lead over the Aggies and held on to the lead throughout the contest. But coach Metcalf has a different plan for tonight's game.

"If TCU gets a lead on you, they

go into their stall game and put the ball," said Metcalf. "If you get off to a fast start on the home team, you'll create a whole lot of trouble for ourselves against them."

And problems seem to have plagued the Aggies this season. Even though A&M lost to Texas Tech last night, the Red Raiders filed a protest with the league today because Kent Williams, the Tech forward, had his name on the Tech roster.

"I've never heard of someone filing an official protest when they won the game," said Metcalf. "But if they would like to play the game over again, we'll do it."

"But I can't believe there's a protest. I've seen an Arkansas player killed in a game and there was no protest filed. And there's one for a broken jaw. But I really can't make any comment on the subject. We'll see the blow on our film, so we'll see the play. Gerald (Tom Meyers) has a videotape of it to the league office."

"I never condone violence on the basketball court. I talked (Williams) after the game and I'm happy to see that he'll be able to play the rest of the season."

But the season is winding for the conference schools. Aggies have only one more game (Tuesday at Rice) after tonight's test against TCU. And both of the post-season tournaments will decide A&M's position in the standings.

"This is a real big game," said Metcalf about the TCU contest. "Our last two games were where we open up in the first of the post-season tournament. That's a pretty important game. Just hope that our boys have the sense to realize it."

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