

A&M baseball team in second place

By DERRICK CRUBBS
The battle-scarred Texas A&M baseball team limped its way into a tie for second place in the SWC standings this past weekend by sweeping a three-game series from the Rice Owls at Olsen Field.

The Aggies won their first game in the new stadium Friday with an 8-3 victory, and came back Saturday behind the shutout pitching of Mark Thurmond and David Pieczynski to take both ends of a doubleheader 4-0 and 5-0.

A&M did not come through the series unscathed, however, as they now have five key players hampered by injuries. The most serious is rightfielder Shelton McMath, who could very likely be out for the remainder of the season.

The Houston Westbury junior had been playing all season with a sore left knee that he injured during the fall. As he was bending down to field a grounder in pre-game warm-ups Friday, the knee buckled in and McMath had to be taken out of the lineup. Early examinations indicate a possible torn cartilage, but McMath was to be checked by the A&M team physician today to be sure.

Also injured was centerfielder Mike Hurdle who pulled a hamstring. Hurdle started every game against Rice this weekend, but had to be taken out of the lineup twice.

Also on the red cross list is third baseman Mark Warriner, who is still being slowed by a hyperextended knee suffered in the Houston series earlier this month.

Shortstop Robert Bonner is playing with a very sore left shoulder

which was bruised against Texas two weekends ago.

Also, catcher Buster Turner played all weekend with a sore elbow that he injured in a game earlier in the week.

But despite all the physical handicaps, the Aggies still were able to put down Rice and wind up a half game out of first place in the SWC standings.

In Friday's game, righthander Mark Ross had only one bad inning in pitching his first complete game of the season.

Other than a three-run rally in the fourth, the Owls could do nothing against Ross, advancing only two baserunners as far as second base through his eight other innings on the mound.

A&M scored first with a five-run outburst in the third. After Turner singled and stole second, Bonner reached on an error by the Rice shortstop. Third baseman Robert Verde then singled, scoring Turner, followed by another single by rightfielder Gary Bryant that scored Bonner.

After first baseman Kyle Hawthorne reached on a fielder's choice that allowed Verde to score, designated hitter Rodney Hodde walked to load the bases.

Leftfielder Tim Feickert, who was inserted into the starting lineup after McMath went down with the knee injury, then lined a two-run single that put A&M ahead by a 5-0 count.

A walk, two singles and a double allowed Rice to narrow the margin to 5-3 the next inning, but Ross retired the next three batters to get out of the jam.

While the Mt. Carmel junior held the Owls scoreless the rest of the way, A&M scored single markers in

the fifth, sixth and seventh frames to come away with the 8-3 win.

Ross allowed only five hits and struck out seven in picking up his third win of the year against three losses.

The Aggies collected nine hits, led by Feickert who was 2-for-3 with three RBIs. Bryant and second baseman Randy Woodruff also had a pair of hits for A&M.

The losing pitcher for Rice was Doug Watson, who dropped to 3-3 on the year.

In the first game of Saturday's doubleheader, Thurmond and Owl pitching ace Allan Ramirez were locked in a scoreless pitching duel until the fifth when A&M scored all four of its runs.

It began when Feickert walked and was safe at second on an error by the Owl second baseman. Woodruff then loaded the bases when he reached on a bunt attempt that was popped up but fell just beyond Ramirez' outstretched glove for a base hit.

Bonner then lined a single to left to score Feickert, followed by a two-run double by Verde that fell behind the Rice rightfielder as he lost the ball in the sun. A bloop single over second base scored Bonner to give Thurmond a 4-0 cushion.

The crafty lefthander allowed only two Owls to advance as far as second base and completed the game to notch his sixth win of the year without a loss.

Thurmond scattered only three hits in reording his sixth career shutout. The win also marked his eighth consecutive complete-game victory in SWC play. It was Thurmond's 17th straight regular-season win without a loss and leaves him still unscored upon through SWC play this year.

Ramirez, although victimized by poor fielding on the part of his teammates, was pegged with his fourth loss of the season to go with

two wins. The 5-0 victory for A&M in the nightcap proved to be a major milestone for two Aggies in particular. It was senior David Pieczynski's first complete-game win and Kyle Hawthorne broke one of the oldest individual records in the A&M books.

Pieczynski allowed only six hits in registering his second shutout as an Aggie and boosting his season record to 3-3. Although he had to work his way out of trouble on a number of occasions, five times he was successful in getting the final two outs of the inning after Owl runners had reached base. He was also aided by three double plays behind him.

A&M scored two runs in the first on a pair of singles by Bonner and Hawthorne and an error by the Rice third baseman. They added another unearned run in the fourth without the benefit of a base hit, and rounded out the scoring in the eighth when Hawthorne blasted his way into the A&M record books with his tenth home run of the season.

After Bryant walked with two out, Hawthorne belted a 3-2 pitch 60 feet beyond the left field fence to break the 16 year-old homerun record of nine held by Byron Barber.

"I knew it would come sooner or later," said the Beaumont junior. "I'm glad I could hit it here at Olsen Field in a game that means so much as far as the SWC race is concerned." Hawthorne was also the game's leading hitter, going 3-for-3 with four RBIs.

The losing pitcher for Rice was Matt Williams, who drops to 1-4.

The Aggies are now 19-10 on the season and 6-3 in SWC play. They are currently tied with Arkansas who is scheduled to begin a rain-delayed series with TCU today in Fayetteville.

Rice drops to 10-16 on the year and are now the conference cellar-dwellers at 3-9.

The next action for A&M will come this weekend when they travel to Waco to take on league-leading Baylor in a three-game set. Their next home game is April 5 when they host the Houston Astros in a 1:0 p.m. exhibition game at Olsen Field.



Rice catcher Jimmy Michalek grounds out in the first game of the three-game series. A&M first baseman Kyle Hawthorne catches the Robert Bonner-thrown ball. Hawthorne broke

the homerun record this weekend, hitting tenth of the year. A&M defeated the Owls all three games. Battalion photo by Pat O'Neil

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