

It's rough on the way up, ask Metzger



Houston Astro shortstop Roger Metzger backs up teammate Julio Gonzalez on a close play at second base when the Astros played Texas A&M at Olsen Field last week. Metzger, a native of San Antonio, was very impressed with Olsen Field and with Aggie baseball.

By DERRICK CRUBBS

A high school pitcher goes 15-0 his senior year with a 0.80 ERA. He averages ten strikeouts per game throwing ninety percent fastballs. He has a curve ball that breaks a little just before crossing the plate, but it's enough to fool the batters in his district because most of them don't even know what a real curve looks like.

He is named all-state and everyone tells him how good he is. When a scout from a major league club knocks on his door and tells him how good he is — and waves a hundred-dollar bill in his face just to prove it — it can put the young pitcher to dreaming.

So after probably not enough deliberation, the young man signs the pro contract and in doing so, often signs his life away in the process.

Those that do make it to the big leagues have beaten out several others for a spot on a major league roster but there are only 24 of those to go around for each team.

The rest spend their summers riding a bus from city to city, eating who knows what who knows when and sleeping in hotels where the air conditioning usually doesn't work — if there is air conditioning.

They play in parks where a ground ball hit right at a fielder has a 50-50 chance — it will either hit him on the chest or the face, depending on just how bad the field really is.

Not a pretty picture? Not to the player who cannot use those same dreams that he had the day he signed and see that maybe, if he sticks with it, he'll get a shot at the "big club."

Houston Astros shortstop Roger Metzger leaned against the batting cage at Olsen Field as his teammates took batting practice prior to an exhibition game with the Texas Aggies last Wednesday.

"You know," he said through the bulk of chewing tobacco in his left cheek, "These college players don't know how good they have it. This place doesn't even compare with eighty percent of the ball parks in the minors."

He quickly added that he realized that most college parks are not as lavish as Olsen Field, but the point was still valid.

The seven-year veteran of the National League has twice led the senior loop shortstops in seasonal fielding percentage. He won a Gold

Glove in 1973 and was named the Astros' MVP that year. A broken ankle kept him out of action for nearly two months last season but he was back in the starting lineup on opening day again this year.

Metzger is a Texas product, having played his high school ball in San Antonio and college ball at St. Edward's in Austin. While in college he played at old Kyle Field when the Aggies hosted St. Edward's in a baseball game there over a decade ago.

Metzger made his return trip to College Station last week when the Ags defeated the Astros 1-0 in the exhibition.

After the game, Metzger said he was impressed with the A&M pitching staff, most of which he saw that afternoon as the Aggies used six hurlers in the ten-inning contest.

"When I was in college, I didn't face many pitchers who could throw sliders or curves like A&M's pitchers did," Metzger said. "Those guys really knew what they were doing out there today. They didn't seem intimidated by us at all, and that's a tribute to their coaching. I know Tom Chandler has always done an outstanding job here."

Metzger was posed with a question concerning college baseball and its relationship to the pros. Considering the somewhat discouraging atmosphere surrounding the minor leagues, it has been suggested that the major league franchises subsidize the college programs and use them as more or less of a "farm system."

"It seems like the pros are trying to shorten the playing life of a minor leaguer by drafting him out of college," said Metzger. "I don't believe there is any way the colleges will take the place of the current minor league system. If a player gets a chance to play at the college level I think it's a definite advantage. He gets those three or four years to mature and still faces some pretty good competition, especially if his league plays a brand of ball like the Southwest Conference. Even at some of the small colleges and junior colleges a young player is given a chance to improve his skills before thinking about turning pro."

The minor league system currently has three levels, AAA, AA and A with most teams adding a second A team or a rookie league team for a

total of four or five farm teams. Metzger referred to an article in the April 8 issue of The Sporting News where New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner suggested that the minors eliminate the AA level and contribute some of the savings for each club to college baseball programs, thus increasing the number of baseball prospects emerging from the nation's colleges.

Chances are this, or any other like development, will never see daylight due to the overall conservative attitude of the major league owners.

"There are a lot of advantages and disadvantages to such a change," Metzger said. "Sure, the young player benefits from those years playing in college, but he also has to be exposed to the pressures of professional game if he has thoughts of becoming a major league ballplayer. Also, he needs to be used to playing in front of the called 'growing fan' that has become a traditional part of pro baseball."

He will encounter some "growing fans" in college as well, but there still many other factors for a school player to consider before reaching for that pen.

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Golfers take third place

By KEVIN PYLE

The Texas A&M golf team, paced by sophomore Dave Ogrin, finished in third place in the April Sound Salute to College Golf at the April Sound golf course.

Ogrin, from Waukegan, Ill., shot a 143 with rounds of 69 and 74, for a sixth place finish.

The tournament was won by the University of Houston after they

beat Oregon in a sudden death play-off. The teams had 565 totals in the 36-hole event which was held Saturday & Sunday. A&M had 588 for third followed by Rollins at 596.

Other teams in order of their finish were TCU, Rice, Pan American, Houston Baptist, Texas Tech and Lamar.

The individual title was won by Houston's John Stark.

Individually for A&M it was Ogrin at 143 followed by Biff Alexander with a 145 based on rounds of 73-72. Next, Tim Carlton had 71-76 for a 147 and Doug Ward had 74-77 for a 151. Ward's round on Sunday would have been considerably better had he just parred the last hole which was a par four but he ended up with a horrendous 10. Rounding out the scoring was Jay Kent who had a 153 total on rounds of 79-74.

The tournament was unique in that it offered money in the form of athletic scholarships for the top three teams. Houston won \$1000, Oregon got \$500 and A&M received \$200.

Coach Bob Ellis was fairly pleased with his team's performance saying "We are on the right track", but he noted that he wasn't very pleased in the stroke difference of them and the winner.

A&M's next tournament will be in the All-America Intercollegiate Invitational in Houston at Atascocita Country Club on April 12-15.

Bennett and Dennard return to spring drills

By RENEE PEVOTO

Senior members of the Aggie football squad bid farewell to their shoulder pads on Kyle Field December 3. Mark Dennard and Phil Bennett have returned in coaching shorts.

Dennard and Bennett are helping coach the annual spring training with practices Tuesday through Saturday from about 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.

Dennard is assisting under Coach Dan LaGrasta. He is working with the offensive line, particularly centers. Bennett, under Coach Paul Register, shares his knowledge with the defensive line, keying on defensive ends.

Neither of them is being paid for the job since they are on scholarship, but both agree it is "good experience under a good staff."

Dennard said, "We're coaching a lot younger guys so they don't resent the fact that we're trying to help them. We don't say too much to the older guys."

The players' attitudes are "super," said Bennett. "I help them if I can. I don't try to correct them every down, I just help in their technique."

These two said they are glad not to be going through spring training this year.

"It was so routine for the past three years, I felt like I would still have to go through it, but when spring came, I didn't have to. It's more pleasant to visit Kyle Field in shorts and a T-shirt than to walk through the tunnel in 30 pounds of equipment," said Dennard. Bennett added, "It feels good not to always have to be somewhere. My days don't seem to worry me as much. After the past four years it feels better to be out on Kyle Field in coaching shorts than in pads."

Dennard plans on finishing school in the first summer session. He will be getting his degree in business administration. He is also waiting for the professional football draft,

which will be in May. "Even if I'm drafted I will finish school," said Dennard. He added that he will be getting married on May 27.

Bennett is a P.E. major who will graduate in May. "I want to stick around here for a while after I graduate. I hope to get a job coaching in college eventually."

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