

Two wins away from a championship

Aggies battle for conference crown

By DERRICK GRUBBS

When Arkansas defeated Texas on the final day of the regular season last year to officially make Texas A&M the SWC champions, some observers said the Aggies "backed" into the league title.

No such situation exists this season as A&M and Arkansas will be battling head-on for the SWC crown this weekend in Fayetteville. Whichever team wins two of the three games will be the champion.

It's that simple. Arkansas, ranked sixth nationally, brings a 30-5 season record into the series after taking an 8-6 win over Tulsa in 12 innings Tuesday.

The Aggies come in with a 30-11 season slate and are deadlocked with the Porkers for first place in the SWC standings, both with 17-4 league records.

The top gun for the Razorbacks is senior Tim Lollar, who not only leads the SWC in hitting with a .423 league average, but is also 9-0 on

the year as the ace of the Hog pitching staff.

A lefthander, Lollar has belted six home runs this season which leads the Arkansas team. In the major league draft last June, he was picked in the fifth round by the Cleveland Indians, but opted to play out his eligibility at Arkansas.

The Hogs are a good hitting team as five of the nine starters are above the .300 clip.

"I'm not surprised that the season has come down to this series," said

Aggie coach Tom Chandler. "Arkansas has a veteran ballclub with seven starters returning from last year. They have a deep pitching staff and the best team speed we will have faced all year. Lollar is double poison. Seldom do you find a great pitcher who is also a great hitter."

The Razorback lineup will have junior Johnny Ray (.325) at second base, senior Shaun Lacey (.321) at third base, senior Jeff Hemm (.330) at catcher, Lollar (.355) the designated hitter, senior Arvis Harper (.305) in centerfield, junior Marc Brumble (.259) in leftfield, junior Mike Martin (.246) in rightfield, sophomore Ed Wallace (.230) at first base and senior Jeff Spence (.229) at shortstop.

Senior outfielder Hank Thompson, bothered by a pulled groin, may start in rightfield in place of Martin if healthy. Also slated to see action at shortstop is sophomore Rob Kauffman.

Harper leads the Hogs in RBI's with 24 and triples with six. Lacey has already set an Arkansas school record for stolen bases this year with 22.

The pitching rotation the Porkers will likely use will have senior righthander David Rhodes (5-0, 1.37 ERA) starting Friday's 3 p.m. game with Lollar (9-0, 2.01) and freshman righthander Jeff Huddleston (5-1, 3.31) working the Saturday twinbill which will begin at 1 p.m.

The first game of that doubleheader shapes up to be a classic pitching duel with Lollar going against Aggie ace Mark Thurmond in a battle of undefeated lefthanders.

Thurmond, 10-0 with a 1.78 ERA, has recorded 12 complete-game victories in 12 starts in his two years of SWC pitching. He currently leads the SWC in pitching with a 1.10 league ERA.

The rest of the Aggie rotation will have Mark Ross (7-3, 3.04) working the Friday game opposite Rhodes, and David Pieczynski (4-4, 3.13) starting the third game of the series opposing Huddleston.

The A&M lineup will basically remain unaltered from the past three weeks. The Ags are currently ranked among the top ten teams in the nation in pitching and fielding.

Senior shortstop Robert Bonner leads the team in hitting at .342 and is just six hits away from the 200th hit of his Aggie career.

The rest of the A&M team has been in an on-and-off hitting slump as there are no other players besides Bonner hitting above .300 in SWC play.

The two brightest spots for the Aggies have been pitching and defense.

A&M is closing in on a SWC record for team fielding percentage as they are currently at .974. The conference record is .975 set by Texas in 1970.

The Ags have already set a school record with 49 double plays this season.

Strong pitching has also kept A&M in the pennant race down the stretch. Ross has won his last seven decisions after starting out the season 0-3. Thurmond has been a steady performer all year, highlighted by the no-hitter he pitched against Texas Tech last weekend. Pieczynski, plagued by control problems earlier in the season, seems to have found the groove and has looked strong in his last two starts against SMU and Tech. Although he didn't get the decision in the 2-1 win over the Red Raiders in the third game of the series, Pieczynski allowed just one hit through eight innings before being relieved in the ninth.

John Poekrus has been the Aggies' No. 1 reliever through the title stretch. He has come in with the tying run on base in several games and has recorded five saves this season.

The Ags have enjoyed a good deal of success against Arkansas in recent years. They currently hold a nine-game winning streak over the Porkers over the past three years. Since Arkansas entered the SWC in 1974, the series record stands 12-1 in favor of A&M.

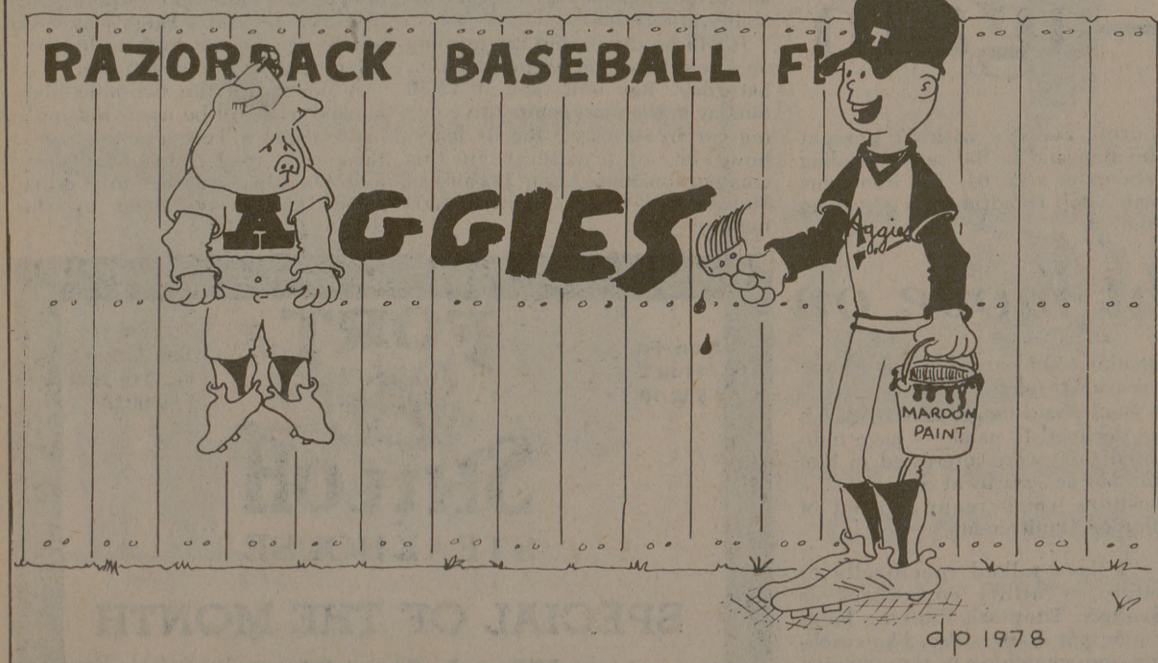
The A&M-Arkansas series this weekend will be broadcast live on Bryan radio station KAGC, 1510-AM.

Three teams, A&M, Arkansas and Houston, have sewn up places in the SWC Tournament May 12-15, but the fourth spot will be decided this weekend. Baylor, 12-9 in league play, is at TCU, while Texas, 10-11, is at Texas Tech. The Bears need only to win two of their games to clinch the spot whereas the Longhorns must sweep Tech to make the final four. Should there be a tie for fourth place, a coin toss will determine who goes to the tournament.



Robert Bonner, Texas A&M's shortstop and leading hitter, is expected to be instrumental in the Aggies' efforts to win their second consecutive SWC baseball championship in Arkansas this weekend. The Aggies and the Razorbacks have identical records (17-4). The team that wins two games this weekend will be the 1978 champions. Battalion photo by David Baggett

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Kyle Field gets face lift

Fifty-year-old Kyle Field is getting a face-lift.

Approximately 65,000 linear feet of fiberglass is being replaced with heavy gauge aluminum seating. The width of each seat will be reduced from 18 inches to 16 inches to add 4,020 seats for the 1978 season, bringing total permanent seating to 53,861.

Last year the Aggies' five home games averaged 54,000 persons. Folding chairs were required on the track to handle the overflow.

The university has awarded a \$219,000 contract to Alenco of Bryan to dismantle, fabricate and install the seating, said Herb Gersbach, Texas A&M purchasing

agent. Some 75 tons of aluminum seats will be fabricated by sections in Alenco's Bryan plant, Gersbach said, with the first shipment due July 7 and completion scheduled for Sept. 15.

All but the top eight rows of fiberglass seats on the pressbox side will be replaced, noted Wally Groff, assistant athletic director.

Expansion of Kyle Field to three decks, scheduled to begin after the 1978 season, will bring total seating to 70,000, Groff said. The 4,020 additional seats next fall will generate, if a game is a sell-out, \$32,160 in revenue to be divided equally between Texas A&M and the visiting

team. One problem the planners faced was what to do with the 12.5 miles of fiberglass. Eugene Ray, Texas A&M's grounds maintenance director, decided the almost impervious fiberglass could be reused for various landscaping needs, rather than disposing of it as a landfill material.

Some of the plans Ray is considering include greenhouse benches, storage bins for soil and planting materials, retainer walls, a Spanish-looking roofing surface for storage sheds and possibly a retainer for a new jogging track scheduled to be built from red brick chips this summer.

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- ★ Yet Briscoe has spent more than \$2 million in this campaign — including \$900,000 his supporters borrowed from 13 banks — to get 10 years in office.
- ★ Property taxes have increased by 1 BILLION DOLLARS since Briscoe was elected; so far, he has done nothing to provide property tax relief.
- ★ Welfare costs have more than doubled under Briscoe, without a fair increase in benefits for those people who really deserve them. The reason is waste. The worst example is Briscoe's own Office of Migrant Affairs, which spends \$8,000 for each person it helps find a new job.
- ★ Utility rates have skyrocketed while Briscoe has been governor, without a single sign of concern by the Governor.

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