

New season for four teams

By DERRICK GRUBBS

The Texas Aggies begin a new season this weekend. After posting a 36-12 record through regular season play, the SWC champs will march into the second annual Southwest Conference post-season tournament hoping to earn a berth as the host team of the South Central NCAA Regional beginning May 19. The Ags have yet to make it to the South Central tournament at Tanger Stadium in Arlington and, for the past three years, have had to settle for an at-large bid to the Midwest Regional. After competing three years in the NCAA playoffs, A&M has not earned a trip to the College World Series.

"We have not fared well in the playoffs the past few years," says Aggie coach Tom Chandler. "This year we have approached it with a somewhat different attitude. Before, we have sandwiched our workouts between taking final exams. This year we have pushed back all our workouts to 4:30 to give our players the chance to concentrate on their exams and on baseball at the same time."

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The emphasis of the pre-tournament workouts this week has been on conditioning. Disch-Falk Park, the home of the Texas Longhorns and site of the tourney, is as humid and usually very humid. Chandler therefore feels it imperative that his players are in top physical shape.

In sizing up the other three tournament teams, Chandler stresses a few dimension surrounding the double-elimination tourney that did not exist during the regular season. When it boils down to winning three games or losing two, "the Aggie coach reasoned, the team that may have the least talent could win if they just get one great game from a pitcher and one or two clutch hits."

In assessing the other teams, I'd like to say that Baylor has the advantage in hitting and power. Arkansas has the most team speed and great player in Tim Lollar, who is double poison as a pitcher and a hitter. Houston has good overall speed and an excellent front-line pitcher in Billy Blum.

The Houston Cougars will be A&M's opponent in the first round of the tournament Friday night at 8 p.m. Houston finished fourth in the



SWC with a 14-10 league record and come into Austin with a 28-19 season mark.

The Cougs took two of the three games from A&M in the first SWC series of the year in 1978. Blum, a senior righthander who was fourth in the SWC in strikeouts, held A&M to just six hits in the opener, as Houston claimed a 6-2 win.

A&M came back to take the second game, 5-0, on a 3-hitter by Mark Thurmond. The Aggie defense broke down in the third game, allowing UH to come away with a 4-3 victory.

Blum will likely start against A&M Friday night in Austin. He is 10-2 on the season with a 2.42 ERA.

The Houston lineup with their 1978 season batting averages, will have junior Mark Alexander (.292) at third base, senior Gary Weiss (.296) at second base, junior Jay Beard (.341) in centerfield, junior Bobby Hollas (.283) at first base, senior Danny Lopez (.250) in rightfield, junior Donnie Randell (.278) in leftfield, freshman Mike Breslin (.258) the designated hitter, junior Jeff Copeland (.230) at catcher, and senior Steve Kovar (.301) at shortstop.

Beard gave A&M trouble in the regular-season series, going 6-for-13 in the three games. The All-SWC candidate leads the team in hitting, RBI's (34) and homeruns (nine), and has also set school records this year in season at-bats, hits, and RBI's. He was fourth in the SWC in hitting this year with a .347 league average.

Kovar, with 85 assists during league play, set a new SWC record. A&M will go with basically the same lineup it has used for the past few weeks, with the possible exception of the lefthanded designated hitter, where either junior Mark Warriner or freshman Rodney Hodde could get the nod.

Chandler has not announced his starting pitcher for Friday's game. It will either be junior lefty Mark

Thurmond (12-0, 1.64) or junior righthander Mark Ross (9-3, 2.67).

Ross started the first game against Houston in the regular season and gave up 6 runs on 11 hits. He has won his last nine decisions, however, and had perhaps his best outing of the year last week against Lubbock Christian when he struck out nine and did not walk a batter.

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Senior shortstop Robert Bonner is still leading the team in hitting at .343 and brings a 12-game hitting streak into the SWC Tournament. Sophomore centerfielder Mike Hurdle, after going 8-for-10 in a

doubleheader against LCC last Friday, moved into the No. 2 spot with a .327 clip.

Junior first baseman Kyle Hawthorne still leads the team in home runs (14), RBI's (48) and total bases (101). He is hitting .323 on the year.

Arkansas will meet Baylor in the other first-round contest Friday at 2 p.m.

The Hogs bring a 31-11 season record into the tournament after finishing second to A&M in the SWC race.

The Porkers boast one of the best pitcher-hitter combinations in the nation in senior Tim Lollar. The big lefthander, having recovered from a bruised shoulder suffered two weeks ago, led the SWC in hitting with a .423 average and was fourth in the SWC in pitching with a 2.28 league ERA.

Lollar will be Arkansas' starting pitcher against the Bears and comes in with a 9-2 season record. He also leads the team in homers with six and will serve as the DH when he's not on the mound.

The Razorbacks also have a strong All-SWC candidate in second baseman Johnny Ray, who hit .347 in SWC play to tie with Jay Beard for fourth. He also led the conference in hits with 34.

Baylor brings a 26-17-2 season record into the tournament. The Bears finished third in the SWC with 15-9 league record, and led the conference in eight offensive categories. Among those are team batting average (.307), homeruns (34, which set a new SWC record), runs (195), hits (242), doubles (49), total bases (405), and RBI's (166).

Burl Coker will be Baylor's starting pitcher against Arkansas. The senior lefty is 8-2 on the season with a 1.98 ERA. He is also one of the Bears' top hitters, finishing fifth in the SWC with a .346 average. Coker also broke or tied five SWC records during the 1978 campaign.

Junior Shane Nolen is another Bear who doubles as a pitcher and strong-hitting outfielder. He placed third in the SWC hitting race with a .374 average and tied for the conference lead in homers with six.

Baylor leftfielder Mike Johanson led the league in ab-bats (100), total bases (61), RBI's (34) and doubles (10, which also tied a SWC record).

In all, the 1978 Baylor Bears

broke or tied 10 team and individual SWC marks. They are also the defending tournament champions after winning it in its initial year last season.

The losers of the first two games of the SWC tournament will play Saturday at 2 p.m. while the winners in those contests will meet at 8 p.m. Saturday.

This year's Midwest will be at Johnson Stadium on the campus of Oral Roberts in Tulsa, Oklahoma. That regional is set for May 26-29.

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