

sports

Ross gains experience in Alaska

By DAVID BOGGAN
Battalion Sports Editor

What does Mark Ross have in common with Tom Seaver, Chris Chambliss, Andy Messersmith, and Greg Nettles, other than the fact that all of these men play baseball? Ross, Texas A&M's senior right-hander, is spending his summer in the land of the midnight sun, playing baseball in the Alaska League. Seaver, Chambliss, Messersmith and Nettles, along with many other professional baseball players, also played in the Alaska League before beginning their successful pro careers.

The Alaska League is a non-professional, summer baseball program that brings hundreds of college players to the 49th state for three months of intense and practical playing experience.

And the quality of Alaskan baseball has not digressed one bit since the days of Seaver and the rest, according to Ross, who plays for the Kenai Oilers.

"This is the best competition anywhere," Ross said in a telephone interview Wednesday. "The challenge is just super. Lots of the players up here have already been drafted. We have two All-America third basemen on our team, so one of them has to sit on the bench."

Ross has contributed to the quality of Alaska League baseball, as well as the Oilers' win column. At the present time, he boasts a 5-0 record, including two back-to-back shutouts.

"I've been pretty lucky," said Ross, who had a 11-4 record for the Southwest Conference champion Aggies last season. "I have a good hitting team behind me."

Indeed, Ross does have a good team behind him. The Oilers have a 2½-game lead in the first half of the season, which ends Saturday. The winner of the first half play the winner of the second half in August to decide the champion. The cham-

Champion will then play in a tournament that will include teams from Venezuela and Japan, as well as an American team coached by Texas A&M Coach Tom Chandler.

One of the reasons Alaskan baseball is so successful is because of the support received from the people of Alaska, Ross said.

"The way they support the program is great up here," he said. "Every city really backs their team. And they get after you if you start losing."

"Kenai only has about 5,000 people. There's not much social life; baseball is about all they have to do. But they show a lot of interest. They are really die-hard baseball fans."

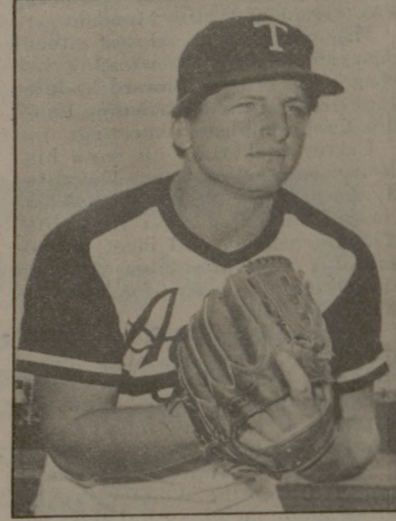
And when Ross says support, he means more than just fans coming to the ballpark for an afternoon of baseball.

"All the players are put up by local families," Ross said. "They feed us and take us to the games."

"I live with the man who's the judge in Kenai. They call me their summer son. They have six kids, so I feel right at home because I have a big family in Houston."

Ross might never be the same in the Texas heat, after he returns to the Lower 48 this fall.

"It gets pretty cold here," the Aggie pitcher said. "The weather in Fairbanks (in central Alaska) is usually in the 70s, but Kenai is on a peninsula (in south central Alaska). The cold wind coming off the water keeps it in the 50s, sometimes in the



Mark Ross

The mountains. That is something else about Alaska that impresses Ross.

"The mountains with snow are great," he said. "The other day we were flying from game to game and when we looked out the window of the plane, we could see Mt. McKinley. We were level with it!"

"There is also a lot of water up here. And there is great fishing. We go fishing in the Kenai River. They pull king salmon out of there that weigh 50 or 60 pounds."

The Oilers play 48 games in 51 days, so baseball keeps Ross busy. But when he is not playing baseball and when he is not out on an occasional fishing trip, Ross is working in the post-pipeline economic world of Alaska.

"I work for a construction company for \$7.50 an hour and that's not much here," Ross said. "The cost of living is real high. For example, on road games we have to buy our own meals and a cheeseburger and fries costs \$2.75."

The Texas Rangers' Jim Umbarger, Jim Sundberg and Bump Wills and the Houston Astros' Floyd Bannister played baseball in the Alaska League before beginning their professional careers. Ross feels that this summer in Alaska will improve his chances of playing pro ball.

"If I can have a good season up here, I'm sure it will help me," he said. "More scouts will be looking at me and I will also have more experience."

And what constitutes a good season? Well, a 5-0 record is certainly a good start.

Evert and Navratilova go to final

United Press International
WIMBLEDON, Eng. Evert dethroned champion Virginia Martina Navratilova Wednesday to reach the singles final in the Wimbledon tennis championships.

Evert, from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., outlasted Wade 87 minutes to avenge a she suffered against the last year's semi. The Dallas-based came from behind to 6-4, 6-4 victory over Evert, who played the last three games on an injured left ankle.

The Evert-Wade victory for Evert's power after a nervous 23-year-old American won the title in 1974.

Both players had holding their early icy wind whipped center court and it was Evert who gave way first with a weak forehand in the game to trail 1-3.

But the American immediately and game with service until the blistering double-fist hand passing shot gave 7-6 lead.

Evert then held her to take the set and gain control in a sequence her win eight of the games.

The other semi results left-handed Navratilova the match and Cawley's path of a packed crowd.

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