

Aggies sweep Cougars in SWC opener

By MARK PATTERSON
Battalion Sports Staff

After the first weekend of baseball in the Southwest Conference the Texas A&M Aggies sit alone atop the standings with a perfect 3-0 record. The Aggies opened conference play with a three-game sweep over the Cougars of the University of Houston.

The series, pushed back a day to Saturday and Sunday because of weather conditions, had a little bit of everything for Aggie baseball fans: hitting, pitching and suspense. The Aggies won the initial game 7-2. Texas A&M clubbed out 19 hits off five Houston pitchers, with every player in the lineup collecting at least one hit in the game. Shelton McMath, Rodney Hodde, Gary Bryant and Randy Woodruff each had three hits for the Aggies.

Cougar pitcher Tom Lukish was felled in the second inning and Jimmy Cherry came on to shut down the Aggie uprising. But the day was only temporary.

The Aggie bats were silenced until the sixth when Woodruff reached base on an error. Following two quick outs, Cherry gave up successive walks to Mark Warriner, Kyle Hawthorne and Buster Turner. McMath lined a double to score two runs and give the Aggies a 1-1 lead. Hodde followed with a double to plate McMath.

Mark Ross got the win for the Aggies, pitching eight innings and allowing six hits and two runs in collecting his second win of the season. "The wind blowing out really helps my pitching," Ross said about

the elements he had to contend with. "My ball sinks more with the wind blowing out. It takes away from my slider and curve but helps me with my sinker."

"But I'm pretty happy with my performance. I still need to work on my control (three hit batters), but it takes a while to get my rhythm down."

The second game of the series matched Aggie Mark Thurmond against Cougar John Shannon. The two hooked up for four innings without allowing a run until the Aggies finally broke through for six runs in the top of the fifth inning.

Sending 12 men to the plate, the Aggies collected seven hits off of three Houston pitchers in the frame. McMath again supplied the big blow as the right fielder hit his second home run of the series, a three-run shot that drove in his eighth, ninth and tenth RBIs of the year.

Thurmond went the distance for the Aggies, collecting his second win of the season in as many starts and allowing only two Houston hits. The victory was his ninth lifetime shutout, his eighth SWC shutout, his 26th win, his 25th regular-season victory in a row and the 14th complete SWC game he's pitched.

"I've waited 10 months for this game," Thurmond said. "Houston was the only game I lost last year (in the SWC post-season tournament). It was nice today."

The third game of the series proved to be the most exciting of the set. The Aggies jumped off to an early 2-0 lead, only to be caught by

the Cougars in the bottom of the third. The teams were tied 4-4 going into the ninth when, again, the Aggie bats came to life.

Texas A&M scored four times in the last inning, working the bases full and Rodney Hodde at the plate. Hodde, pitching for the Aggies in relief of starter John Pockrus, hit a base-clearing double to drive in three runs. The Aggies added another run to give Hodde a four-run cushion going into the bottom of the ninth.

In the ninth the Cougars loaded the bases and with two out Randy Watson worked Hodde for a walk to narrow the Aggie lead to three, 8-5. Alvin Ruben came on to pinch-hit for U of H, representing the winning run at the plate.

Rubin popped a ball in front of the plate that catcher Buster Turner fielded and threw to first baseman Kyle Hawthorne for the out to end the Cougar threat and give the Aggies an 8-5 victory. The final out gave Hodde his first victory as an Aggie and extended Texas A&M's season record to 7-1.

The Aggies next travel to Coral Gables, Fla., to participate in the Hurricane Invitational Tournament March 10-17. The Aggies play 10 games in eight days before returning home to face the University of Arizona in a double-header March 20.

land. WP-Ross (2-0). LPLucas (2-1). HR-Hawthorne (A&M) 1st, one on; McMath (A&M) 2nd, none on; Beard (Houston) 4th, none on; Bryant (A&M) 8th, two on.

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Thurmond and Turner; Shannon, Lukish (5), Mimiely (5) and Copeland. WP—Thurmond

(2-0). LP—Shannon (1-1). HR—McMath, A&M, 5th, 2 on.

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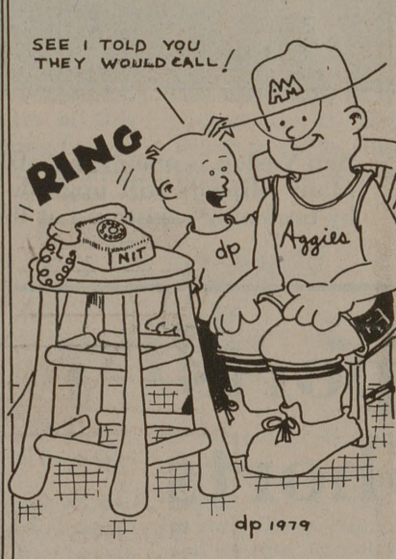
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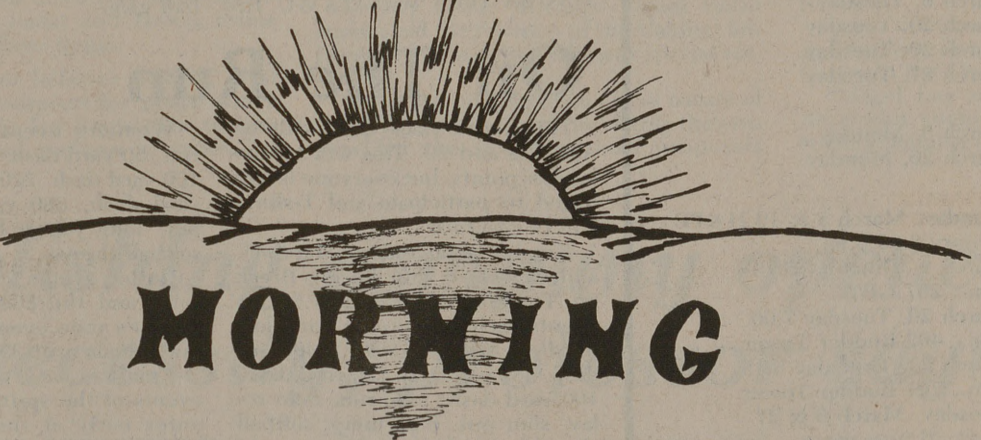




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