

Twig

Little fills big shoes at shortstop

By SEAN PETTY
Battalion Sports Staff

Webster's Dictionary defines twig as a small shoot or branch. Texas A&M baseball coach Tom Chandler names Twig as a hustling shortstop from Charlotte, North Carolina. So is he right?

Don't worry, you can still count on Webster's to have the proper definition and you can also count on Texas A&M's Bryan "Twig" Little to continue coming through on the baseball field for the Aggies this season.

Twig, as he has been called since he was a mere shoot, is doing a good job of filling the big hole left by former Aggie All-America shortstop, Robert Bonner.

"I knew I had some big shoes to fill when I came here," Little said. "From what I've heard, he (Bonner) must be some kind of hero down here."

Little came to A&M by way of Louisiana Junior College in North Carolina where he played baseball and believe it or not, starred on the basketball team at Louisiana.

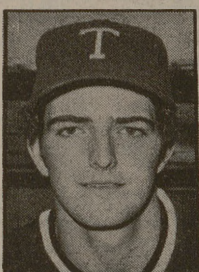
Chandler and the Aggies can thank Mr. and Mrs. Bill Little for the addition of their son to the Aggie lineup. It was a case of Twig not wanting to stray too far from his roots.

"My parents moved here from North Carolina and I just wanted to be closer to home," Little said in his own Southern drawl. "I was drafted by the Los Angeles Dodgers last year and Coach Chandler had heard of me so he asked me if I wanted to play here. I knew Texas A&M had a good baseball team and that I would be close to home so I came on down."

"I would love to play basketball here but the seasons conflict with each other. I really believe I could play basketball at A&M. But I know baseball's my game."

Both the Dodgers and Coach Chandler believe the baseball diamond is the place for Little who has the tough job of being the leadoff batter for the Aggies. So far, Little is hitting .268 and has a .920 fielding percentage.

"I've just been tryin' to do my duty on the field," he said. "I've been tryin' to be a leader ever since



Bryan Little

I got here. I'm the leadoff batter and I should get on base and make things happen."

The right-handed switch hitter acquired his nickname from his brothers when he was eight-years-old.

"They knew I wasn't gonna ever be very big so they called me 'Twig,'" he said. "And then I had 'Twig' on the back of my basketball warmups at Louisiana. So I guess I've just grown up with the name."

Now that Little is transplanted in the Brazos Valley and firmly planted at shortstop for the Aggies, he sees nothing but happy days ahead.

"I love it here," he said. "I just knew the weather would be so good

here and now the rain is wipin' us out. It's really gonna be great next year because I have a buddy coming down from North Carolina. I'm havin' a good time right now though."

"I feel good at shortstop. We're all still gettin' used to each other on the field and the guys are learning how I play and what I can do."

The Aggies haven't had too much time to get used to each other on the field because of the wonderful spring weather in Aggieland.

"If we could just play more we'd be in good shape," Little said. "But the rain has really hurt us. We played a lot of ball in Miami and our bats and pitching we're really coming around. And now we've had all these layoffs where we'll play one game a week and then play three on the weekend. It's just hard on everyone."

While Coach Chandler has been trying to somehow appease the sun god and get the grass of Olsen Field dried up, the Texas Longhorns have been playing games as often as they can on the artificial turf of Disch-Faulk field.

"I like natural turf better than artificial turf and if we just had a tarp for the infield we could play every-

day," Little said. "You can play with a wet outfield but not with a wet infield because that's where most of the plays are made. When we've played here they've put extra dirt on the base paths and it's a lot softer and just makes things awfully difficult out there."

The Aggies have been limited to practicing under the stands at Olsen Field yet Little feels they will still be right in the Southwest Conference race at the end of the season.

"I think we're gonna do a good job," he said. "If we can just get everyone hitting at the same time we'll be great. We've had games where everyone was hitting and other games where we couldn't buy a hit."

"If we get some good weather and games at home we'll be O.K. We just need to go up and take three from TCU this weekend and finish the rest of the season strong."

If everyone has as much optimism as the Twig who wears number one for the Aggies, they probably will be right in the thick of the SWC race in late April. But for now, the Aggies must concentrate on the TCU Horned Frogs this weekend in Fort Worth.



Bryan Little puts the tag on Baylor shortstop Matt Schaper.

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Reds and Giants open '79 season

United Press International CINCINNATI — The National League season opens today when the Cincinnati Reds, minus a quarter-century of experience without Pete Rose and Sparky Anderson, entertain the San Francisco Giants, an improving club that some pick to win the NL West this year.

The 1:30 p.m. (CST) opener is the only National League game scheduled Wednesday. The American League also has only one contest today, a night game between California and Seattle.

For the Reds, the opener means they will begin learning if they are a better or worse ballclub without Rose and Anderson.

For the Giants, the new year is a chance to turn a surprisingly strong 1978 season into something even better — maybe a Western Division title.

Cincinnati, the oldest professional baseball team, is the traditional host of the NL opener.

Umpires figured to boycott the game if there was no last-minute settlement in their contract dispute with the leagues.

The National League has made provisions to have some kind of umpires at the opener, a Reds official said. "Where they're coming from, we just don't know."

Umpires from local amateur leagues figured to be called in.

The game's pitching matchup will be a dandy — San Francisco sending Vida Blue (18-10 last year) against Cincy's Tom Seaver (16-14).

The Giants also have a lineup change for opening day — 26-year-old Mike Ivie has beaten out 41-year-old Willie McCovey for the starting first base job.

Manager Joe Altobelli said the decision really wasn't difficult.

"It had to be Ivie," he said. "He's a potential superstar." Still, McCovey, who says he's willing to accept any role on the team, figures to do a lot of pinch-hitting and some starting on a spot basis.

A UPI preseason survey of 36 baseball experts predicted a tight Giants-Dodgers battle for the NL West title, with the Reds a distant third.

As for Opening Day hoopla, the 59th annual noontime parade through downtown streets is scheduled. And, in a wacky promotional stunt, the baseball that will be used for the ceremonial first pitch is being brought 200 miles by canoe up the Licking River from Morehead, Ky.

The game also will be the first played on new AstroTurf at the stadium.

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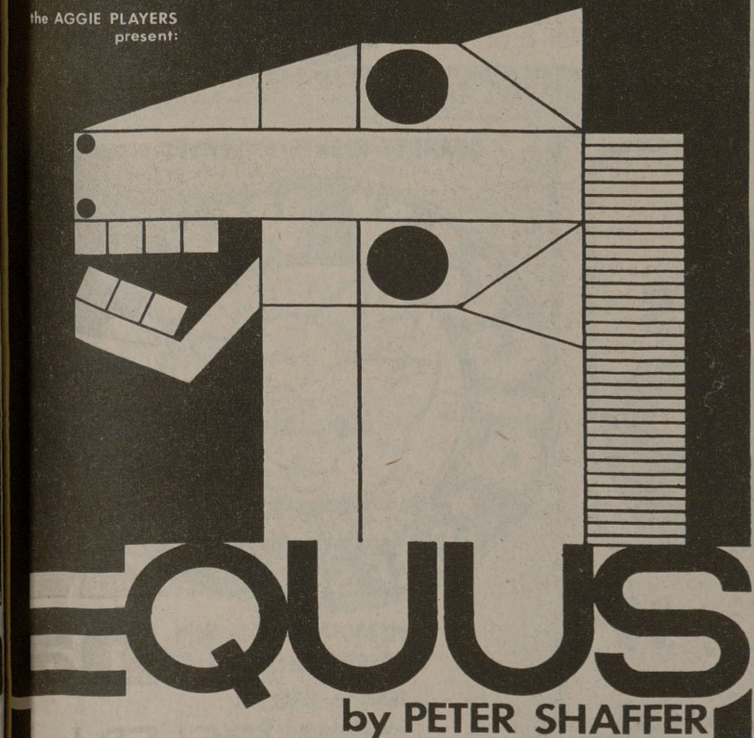


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