

the sports

Gustafson's 'Horns ham it up in SWC

About this time every year there's one thing that is as consistent as ham dinner on Easter — the Texas Longhorns sitting atop the Southwest Conference baseball standings.

As Dad was carving Sunday, the Longhorns were enjoying the holiday by celebrating their latest series sweep. The 'Horns took three games from the TCU Horned Frogs to maintain their 1½ game lead over the Arkansas Razorbacks. The Longhorns are 14-1 in conference action with Arkansas second at 14-4. The Razorbacks handed the Longhorns their only conference loss of the year, a 2-0 setback in their first conference game of the year. The loss to the Razorbacks also marked the first loss of the year for Texas. The Longhorns now stand 23-5 for the season, with three losses to the University of Arizona and a loss to the University of Minnesota.

But how are the Longhorns able to consistently challenge for the conference title each season? One reason is the pitching talent head coach Cliff Gustafson recruits year after year. Such names as Jim Gideon and Bert Hooton have climbed the mound for Longhorns the past few seasons.

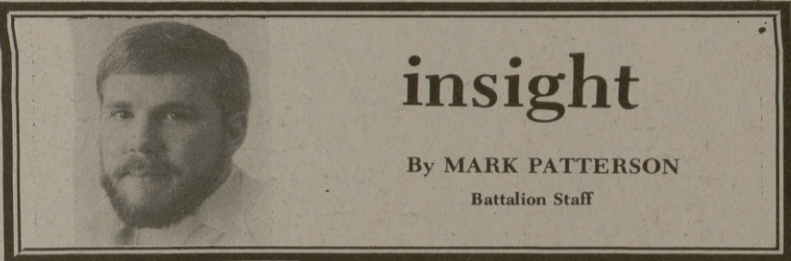
The talent that Gustafson has recruited in his 12 years at Texas has led the Longhorns to 10 conference championships.

This year's pitching corps is living up to the reputation set by its predecessors. Led by Jerry Gleaton's record and 1.24 ERA (3-0 in conference with a 0.39, allowing one run in three innings pitched), the staff has a combined ERA of 3.00 on the season and a 1.64 ERA in conference play.

Keith Creel leads the staff in victories, collecting eight while losing one this season (4-0 in conference). Kem Wright is 4-0 in conference, 7-1 on the year, while his younger brother Ricky is 7-2.

"I expected to have good pitching this season," Gustafson said. "Last year, because of injuries, I was forced to start two or three freshmen pitchers each series. They got the experience they needed."

Injuries to shortstop Ronnie Gardenhire and the Wright brothers sent the Longhorns tumbling to a 12-12 conference mark and as spectators to the conference tourney.



insight

By MARK PATTERSON
Battalion Staff

But this season the team is playing to its potential.

"We're getting consistently good pitching this season," Gustafson said. "So much so, I don't know who I'd start if we had to win a game. It so happens that two of our pitchers are also two of the top hitters on the club."

"I've been starting Ricky Wright on Friday so he is available to play in the outfield on Saturday. Gleaton has been starting the first game on Saturday and starting as DH in the second game. Creel has been pitching the third game for us in the last few series."

With SMU, Texas Tech and Texas A&M left on their schedule, the Longhorns feel assured of collecting

another conference championship. But this year's challenge has been a different one for the team.

"I don't want to count our chickens, but I'm pretty happy with where we are now," Gustafson said. "This season has been as exciting, personally, as any good season I've been through. We're winning this year with the same nucleus of people we had last year. That makes it all the more satisfying."

Keith Walker leads the team in hitting, carrying a .359 average into this weekend's series with SMU. Sophomore first baseman Terry Salazar leads the Longhorn batters in most other offensive categories, batting .358 with five doubles, four triples, nine home runs and 46

RBI's. As a team, the Longhorns are batting .306 on the year.

"Our hitting has been a pleasant development this season," Gustafson said. "Our team average has dropped down to .279 in conference games (compared to a .359 average in non-conference games), but the hits these guys are getting seem to come when we need them."

A first-place finish for the Longhorns would match them against the conference's fourth-place finisher, either the Baylor Bears or the Houston Cougars, in the first round of the post-season tournament. The double-elimination tournament, May 10-13 in Austin, matches the second-place finisher against the third-place team. The losers of the first-round games meet Friday to eliminate one team from the tournament.

The two winners from Thursday's games meet Friday to determine

which club faces the survivor of Friday's knockout game Saturday morning. The winner of the Saturday morning contest faces the undefeated team in the tournament. A win Saturday afternoon by the morning survivor would force a Sunday playoff to determine the NCAA representative from the SWC.

"The tournament is a pretty long way off, but I expect Arkansas to lose two or three more games before it starts," Gustafson said. "They have to play Houston this weekend and the Cougars are playing some good baseball. They lost their first six (to Texas and Texas A&M) but have won 11 of their last 15 games. After the Houston series they have to go down and play the Aggies."

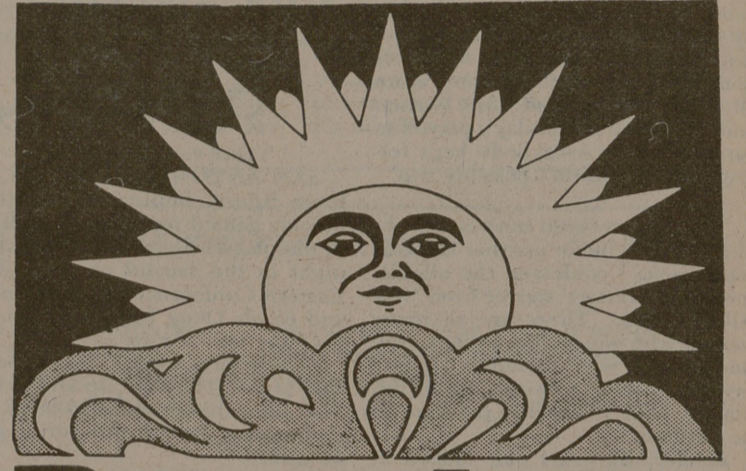
And I sure hope A&M losses a couple of games before we come there to play them (May 4-5). It could easily boil down to that last

series to decide who finishes where this season.

"It's not over yet, but I would be foolish if I wasn't happy with the position we're in now. After we lost that first one to Arkansas, we've won

our last 14 (conference) games. There's no way I could have projected us to be in the position we're in now. After 15 games, I would have been happy being 10-5."

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