

Slavens 'rookie of the year' for Aggs



Six-foot, eight-inch Aggie freshman pitcher Robert Slavens, presents an imposing sight on the mound. He has racked up 11 wins against no defeats this season while only allowing slightly more than two runs per game.

Staff photo by Lee Roy Leschper Jr.

by JON HEIDTKE
Sports Staff

What a difference a year makes. At this time last year, Texas A&M University pitchers Robert Slavens and Rick Luecken were on opposite sides when Westbury High School faced Spring Woods High School in bi-district action.

Slavens and Luecken, who now are roommates, anchor the pitching chores along with another freshman, David Flores, as the Aggies prepare for the Southwest Conference Tournament to be held at Olsen Field May 16-18.

Last year, Luecken was highly recruited by everybody and was the 18th player chosen in the June draft by San Francisco before he signed with Texas A&M.

Slavens was also drafted, but not until the Cincinnati Reds picked him in the 26th round, and even the Reds organization wanted him to go to college. Even high school teammate Charlie Guinn, who also signed with the Aggies, was more highly touted than Slavens.

Luecken has done everything expected of him, compiling a 9-3 record and posting a team-leading ERA of 2.00, but Slavens has been the big story.

The tall, lanky right-hander has a team-leading 11 victories against a team-low no losses. He leads the Aggies in innings pitched with 87 2/3 and has an ERA of 2.37.

"He has been a very pleasant surprise for us," said head coach Tom Chandler. "When I gave him the scholarship, I projected him to help us as a sophomore, but he has picked up a lot of experience in a hurry."

Even Slavens, who is 6-8 and weighs 185 pounds, is surprised about his excellent start.

"There is so much difference between pitching in high school and in college," he said, "that I anticipated my freshman year to be a learning experience. Coming in, I hoped to get a chance to pitch, but everything worked out and I started winning early and coach Chandler stuck with me."

"He had a good fall practice," said Chandler about Slavens, "and we didn't have many returning pitchers. He showed a lot of control and poise and really put it together in a hurry."

Slavens, who grew 10 inches between 9th and 12th grades, said he has had his best control this year.

"I finally stopped growing and I am now beginning to put on some

weight," he said. He has been working on the weights this year and said he has gotten much stronger. His fastball, which was timed at 83 mph in high school, was clocked at 87 mph this fall.

Slavens, who was all-district in both baseball and basketball at Westbury, said he felt no added pressure being a freshman with an unblemished pitching record. Commenting on his spotless won-loss record he said, "It is a day-to-day thing. I will lose sooner or later, but I always take the mound with the idea that I'm going to win."

On being a freshman and proving himself to the team, he said, "If you are good enough to make it this far along, they (team) expect you to be good. But I believe I really proved myself to the team when I made my first conference start and beat Baylor."

The highlight of the season for Slavens, who had a 7-0 record in SWC action, came when he threw a shutout against SMU.

"I felt real good against SMU, but then I felt good against Rice and they got five runs off me," he said.

A big reason for Slavens' success this year has been what Chandler calls an "outstanding curveball."

"He gets it over the plate when he is behind the hitters, and not many college players are good breaking ball hitters," he said.

Slavens attributes his success to Chandler, catcher Joey Szekeley and the infield, especially the double-play combination of shortstop Twig Little and second baseman Randy Woodruff, which he calls the best in the conference.

"I can't say enough about coach Chandler," he said. "His confidence and moral support have been a big plus in my development."

Slavens also had nothing but praise for Szekeley, who was catcher in 10 of the 11 games he won.

"He can read my mind," he said, "which makes my job easier." The battery has been a winning combination and Chandler plans to stick with it.

"Slavens is one of the top pitchers at A&M right now," said Chandler, "and he can't get anything but better."

Injury will keep Staub out of action

United Press International
DETROIT—Texas Ranger designated hitter Rusty Staub fractured his index finger Wednesday in a game against the Detroit Tigers, the Rangers disclose Thursday.

Staub, currently fourth in the American League in batting, is expected to be out for at least four weeks.

The Rangers have thus far split in two games with the Tigers to remain in fourth place in the American League Western Division.

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Morgan homers again for Astros as Niekro six-hits Cincinnati, 9-3

United Press International
CINCINNATI—Errors by Junior Kennedy and Dave Concepcion enabled the Houston Astros to score five unearned runs in the sixth inning Thursday night and coast to a 9-3 victory and a three-game sweep of the Cincinnati Reds.

Joe Morgan drove in three runs with a homer and a single to pace a hit attack for the Astros. Joe Niekro, 3-1, surrendered six hits and four walks and struck out six in his third complete-game victory of the season.

Morgan's two-run homer in the fifth off starter and loser Mike Laskos, 3-2, tied the score 3-3. The

Astros blew the game open in the sixth when Enos Cabell led off with a walk, Cesar Cedeno doubled and Kennedy dropped Luis Pujols' line drive.

After a sacrifice by Niekro and an intentional walk to Terry Puhl filled the bases, Concepcion let a Craig Reynolds roller slip through his legs for a two-run error. Dennis Walling and Morgan followed with RBI singles.

The Reds scored their three runs with two out in the third when Niekro, in a fit of wildness, walked Ken Griffey, Cesar Geronimo and Concepcion before a three-run double by Ray Knight.

The Houston victory increased their lead over the Reds in the National League Western Division to 1 1/2 games. Entering the three-game series, the Astros trailed Cincinnati by 1/2-game.

Banquet set for Saturday

The women athletes of Texas A&M University will be honored Saturday at 7 p.m. at the Women's All-Sports Banquet at the Memorial Student Center.

The banquet will honor athletes from all nine varsity sports, with each team coach giving a synopsis of the team's season and honoring seniors and four-year players.

The banquet will feature a buffet, and athletes may bring their parents, dates or spouses.

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