

sports

# Chandler discusses memories, Ags

by KATHLEEN McELROY  
Battalion Staff

College Station isn't Cooperstown, and Olsen Field can't rival Yankee Stadium, but resident Texas A&M University baseball expert Tom Chandler isn't complaining.

Chandler, head coach of the Aggie baseball team, is proud to have coached at Texas A&M for 23 years, prouder even than his three years of professional baseball in the Pittsburgh Pirate organization in the late 40's.

"I played three years at catcher and first base, not at the same time though," he said, laughing. "I had more experience at catcher."  
He never went to the big leagues, but he said he doesn't regret he didn't make it.

"No, I had my chance to make in the major leagues, but that curve ball sent me into college coaching," he said.  
College players should be happy — he's been there ever since, helping develop some talented players. From the summers of 1950 through 1958, he was a player-field manager-general manager of that semi-professional baseball power, the Alpine (Texas) Cowboys.

"We had the cream of the crop of college players while they were still in college," he said. "We had college players from all over the country, and they were the best."  
Chandler coached some future major leaguers there, including one lanky kid who now pitches for the Texas Rangers — Gaylord Perry.

"He was just a kid, 19 years old," Chandler remembered. "He was 6-5 and could really throw." He said he could already recognize Perry's potential at that time.

Recognizing and coaching young talented players is Chandler's favorite occupation.  
"That's why I like college baseball because it's a teaching experience," he said. "And it's very gratifying to see these young men improve in their game. It's so pleasing then to know that your players go on."

"It's not our primary objective to develop players for the major leagues," he added, "but the two do work hand in hand."  
Chandler said baseball, particularly the college game, has changed in the years he's been coaching — but it's all been for the better.

"It's improved simply because facilities are so much better," he said. "Uniforms are better, equipment is better." He also praised the

aluminum bat, which is used in college, but not in professional baseball.

Another improvement is the length of the season, giving the athletes more time to improve in the course of the year.

"The kids play more games," he said. "When I first came to A&M we only played 25 games. Now we play about 55 games."  
"We were afraid of taking a youngster out of class. A few years ago we went to school on Saturday and the academic people frowned upon too much playing. Now we're on a five-day schedule, and we can play on Saturday."

And in all his 23 years, who's been the best Texas A&M player he's coached?  
"It's a pretty hard question, probably the best athlete I ever coached was Davey Johnson, who played with the Atlanta Braves and the Baltimore Orioles," Chandler said.

What was special about Johnson, who played shortstop for the Aggies in the early 60's?  
"Great dedication," he said. "I've never had a youngster work any harder." Chandler also coached Doug Rau, a pitcher with the Los Angeles Dodgers and Dave Elmendorf, now a strong safety with the NFL Los Angeles Rams.

He's currently coaching someone who may not become an all-star baseball player, but he's still close to him — his 20-year-old son Tom Dean Chandler, a reserve outfielder on the Aggie team. He said his son was destined to play baseball.

"When you coach baseball well you get indoctrinated at home with baseball three meals a day, eight hours a day and seldom does the conversation shy away from baseball," Chandler said.

So his son never got a chance not to play ball, Chandler said.



Tom Chandler, in his 23rd year as coach of the Texas A&M University baseball team, advises Rick Luecken (44) how to handle a tough situation in action earlier this season. Chandler and the Ags will participate in the Southwest Conference post-season tournament in College Station May 16-18.

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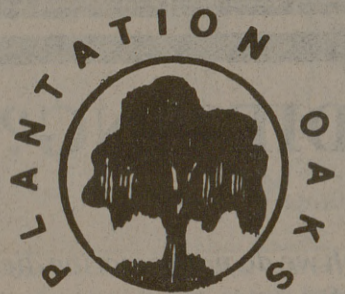
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