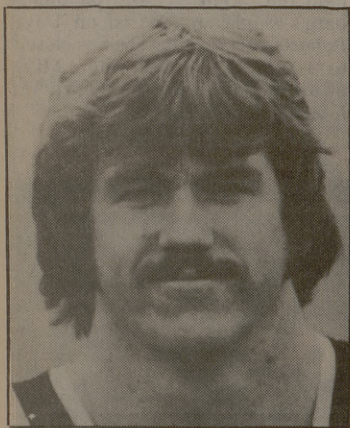
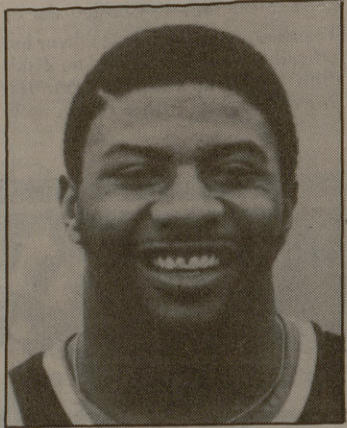


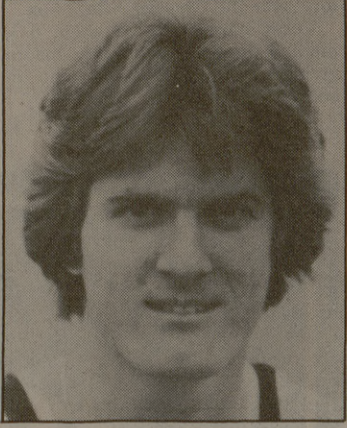
Ag men's track team reaches pinnacle of great year



Tim Scott



Curtis Dickey



Jimmy Howard



Leslie Kerr

by MIKE BURRICHTER
Battalion Staff

While football, basketball, and baseball seem to appeal to the average collegiate athletics fan, track and field has taken a back seat. At Texas A&M University, however, that trend may change somewhat, as Coach Charlie Thomas and assistant Ted Nelson proved during the 1980 season.

The Aggies, who finished 10th in the nation last year and 11th the year before, completed a sensational season in Waco by winning the Southwest Conference Outdoor Championship. A&M compiled 138 points, 31 points higher than second place Houston. The school also qualified a record 11 participants for the NCAA's 59th Annual Track Championship, currently being held through Saturday at Memorial Stadium in Austin.

Thomas' strategy this season was simple: keep the team healthy until the season's zenith, the outdoor league championship.

"We got half-way through the conference meet before we had any injuries this season," Thomas chuckled. "Steve Willis hurt his leg in the 200, and that hurt our relay teams, but we had enough depth to win."

Thomas had more than enough depth, as the loss of Willis, one quarter of two of the nation's best relay teams, didn't seem to slow down the Aggie juggernaut. In fact, when James Washington hurt himself in the triple jump, the Ags had only half a mile relay team, and three-quarters of a quarter mile relay team.

However, Thomas dug into his bag of reserves, pulled out Billy Busch and Karle Figgs, and the Ags secured third place in both events.

"We had more quality athletes this year than ever before," Thomas said. "Overall, this team is stronger than the 1978 (SWC champion) team. Our 400- and 1600-meter relay teams set school records and we had several good individuals."

Thomas thoughts are echoed, if not magnified, by Assistant Coach Ted Nelson.

Says Nelson, who started coaching in 1967, "This has been the best year's performance we've had since I've been here. You don't expect a team to perform every week like we did this year. We won, week in and week out. We've never had this many good athletes. There are six or seven world class athletes on this team."

"We could possibly have six NCAA champions on this team; Curtis (Dickey) in the 100-meters, (Leslie) Kerr in the 400, (Jim) Howard in the high jump, (Tim) Scott in the discus, and both (400- and 1600-meter) relays."

The other five Aggies going to Austin this weekend are hurdlers Busch and Mike Gaspie, high jumper Chuck Perry, and relay men Vernon Pittman and Washington.

Thomas calls this year one of the best he's ever had. "It's one of the most enjoyable years I've ever coached," he said. "We won almost every meet we've been in. We only lost the meet to Texas by one point."

The outdoor track season was preceded by the indoor season, held in January, February and March. Thomas doesn't care much for indoor track, and this feeling is shared by many SWC coaches. In fact, the only indoor track in the SWC is in Ft. Worth, and the Ags entered the indoor season this year without an indoor championship.

Not that Thomas cared. He said he didn't want to burn his team out by the outdoor season by pushing them too hard during the indoor campaign. Surprisingly, the lackadaisical Aggie team went to Ft. Worth, and came back with the school's first indoor crown. The team ended up finishing sixth in the nation.

Curtis Dickey won his third consecutive 60-yard dash at the NCAA Indoor Championship in Detroit.

"The indoor championship really started the ball rolling," Nelson said. "From there on, we just kept winning."

Another plus for the team, accord-

ing to Nelson, was the presence of Curtis Dickey.

"Curtis really picked this team up emotionally," Nelson said. "He didn't have to show up for the conference meet. He knew he wasn't 100 percent. He knew he wasn't ready or in shape to run. He'd just been through four days at the Baltimore Colts' training camp and his leg was hurt. He did a heck of a job. Just being there did a lot for the team emotionally."

As for Dickey's loss in the 100 meters in Waco, Thomas blamed it

on lack of preparation as well as a slight injury.

"When your measure of success is determined in hundredths of seconds, a hangnail is crucial," Thomas said. "He went to that meet not feeling 100 percent and consequently didn't win." Dickey finished third in that event, behind Carl Lewis and Greg Illoison of UH.

"He was there out of loyalty to Texas A&M and I admire him for that," Nelson said.

The team's success has created what Nelson calls a "self-imposed

pressure" on the coaches, but Nelson said he's willing to put up with it.

"When you have a good team, more emphasis is put on the sport," Nelson said. "But we're not going to fold if we don't win the NCAA's. A good season does help you get ready for another one though."

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