

TANK McNAMARA

by Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds



Dynasties take time to build

By KURT ALLEN
Battalion Staff

It may be a bit premature to start talking about building a dynasty, but the Texas Aggie basketball team is certainly well on its way to laying the groundwork for one.

There's no doubt that Texas A&M is overdue to dominate in one Southwest Conference sport or another. That seems logical for no other reason than the fact that Aggies for years earned their spurs while the Texas Longhorns, as the big brothers of the conference, pretty much had their way.

But that was before Texas A&M grew up and matured into its present form. No longer does the University of

it should be at this early point of the season. After a shaky start against Maine, the players have improved slowly with each game. Now 3-0 on the season, the Aggies own the only undefeated mark in the conference and are ranked 12th and 14th in the nation by AP and UPI respectively.

Based on last year's 26-8 record (14-2 in SWC play) and 1979's 24-9 mark (11-5 in SWC play), some freshmen and sophomores might be given the mistaken impression that Texas A&M has always been a self-perpetuating victory machine. But that's hardly the case.

Rather, today's well-balanced Aggie basketball attack owes its existence to a rebuilding program begun in 1977-78 after the team's talent and success bottomed out following the championship years of 1975 and 1976.

Only those who suffered through the drought seasons of 1976-77 and 1977-78 can appreciate the magic that Metcalf has shown in transforming a mediocre squad into a nationally-ranked power inside of two years.

To accomplish the transformation, Metcalf first started in 1977 with a good crop of recruits which included Wright and Smith. As the year wore on, Wright and Smith established themselves as the wave of the future with surprisingly consistent play for freshmen.

Building on those two young forwards in 1978, Metcalf next captured one of the most sought after players in the country in Bryan center Rudy Woods. He also brought in guard David Britton from West Virginia's Potomac State Junior College to go along with junior Dave Goff at that position.

The combination of these five players proved to be unexpectedly electric. Before they could stop and realize what they had done, the Aggies had gone 24-9 on the season, including some memorable tournament upsets early in the year. That performance earned the Aggies a trip to the National Invitational Tournament.

Using the same starting lineup last year, Metcalf supplemented the roster by adding Crockett postman Claude Riley and guard Jay McHugh for depth. This enabled Metcalf to shuttle players in and out. The team responded with a record 26 wins while suffering 8 defeats.

The point of this whole discussion is that it takes time to build a winner, no matter what the sport. In Metcalf's case, building a winner has become a cyclical thing. After each conference championship, the Aggies have fallen apart and bottomed out, then regained their form in time for the next championship.

Metcalf's success in rebuilding can be partially traced to the fact that he has had a free hand in developing his team.

Comment

Texas exert unchallenged power and influence in the conference (some would argue that it ever did).

The fact is that Aggie athletics have become a big-time program. At the same time, Southwest Conference basketball has also hit the big time. Happily, the two events have coincided to the benefit of Texas A&M.

Perhaps never before has any group of Aggie cagers possessed the wealth of talent that this year's team does. Oh, there have been occasional bursts of brilliance, as in 1964, '69, '75 and '76. But never has a Texas A&M team been blessed with such awesome personnel on a scale which is steadily increasing.

One only has to look at the current roster to realize the depth of the Aggie program. In the persons of Rynn Wright, Vernon Smith, Rudy Woods and Claude Riley, Head Coach Shelby Metcalf has four big men whose collective shooting and ball-handling abilities are unmatched by any other school in the conference. Together, the four starters comprise the Aggie "Wall."

A fine pair of guards is developing in Tyrone Ladson and Reggie Roberts. Ladson is showing improved play and new-found enthusiasm in his new role as the senior starting point guard who directs the Wall.

Meanwhile, the freshman Roberts has already come on strong following a phenomenal career at McKinney High School. Metcalf uses him either to rest Ladson or as part of a two-guard attack when the Wall occasionally falters.

Completing the picture is a bench which shows more depth than in recent years and features several experienced lettermen. This is opposed to years past when the complaint heard most often about Aggie teams was no bench depth to back up a good starting five.

So far, the team seems to be right on target for where

Baseball winter meetings continue

Cubs shuttle Sutter to Cardinals

United Press International
DALLAS — Lots of teams came to baseball's winter meetings determined to wheel and deal all week, but thus far only one has.

The St. Louis Cardinals did it again Tuesday and they may do it again today. And in the process they have reshaped their ball club.

They have reshaped it so much that Chicago Cubs general manager Bob Kennedy, whose club took part in the Cardinals' latest swap, thinks St. Louis is now the team to beat in the National League East next season.

"With Bruce Sutter they can win the pennant," said Kennedy. "With Sutter alone we didn't think we were going to be in the pennant race."

Sutter, the National League's Cy Young Award winner in 1979, was dealt to the Cardinals Tuesday in exchange for outfielder-first baseman Leon Durham, third baseman Ken Reitz and a player to be named later.

That bit of business gives St. Louis two of the best-known relief pitchers

in baseball — Sutter and Rollie Fingers, acquired in an 11-player deal with San Diego on Monday.

But Fingers might not be around St. Louis long enough to try on a uniform. The Cardinals appeared ready to send him off to the Oakland A's for Steve McCatty, one of the crew of hurlers that carried the surprising Athletics into second place in the American League West last season.

"I've heard a lot of talk that I might be moved," said Fingers, who was in town to accept an award in conjunction with the winter meetings. "But as far as I'm concerned I'm going to be in St. Louis next season."

"When I was with Oakland we had three relievers who got into 60 games. I'm sure there would be enough work for both Bruce and myself."

"I've never had a top relief pitcher since I've been a manager," said St. Louis general manager-manager Whitey Herzog. "Now I have two. It

makes it easier to do the things I want to do as a manager."

"If I can make a few more deals this week I will have done my job as general manager. Then if the manager doesn't mess up we'll be all right."

Fingers has only one year remaining on a contract he originally signed with Oakland and he said he wants to negotiate a new contract of three or four years.

"I think I can pitch effectively until I am 37 or 38 years old," said Fingers, who celebrated his 34th birthday in August.

Other than the St. Louis-Chicago trade, Tuesday's activity was highlighted by the surprise firing by the San Francisco Giants of manager Dave Bristol and the signing of free agent power hitter Lee May to a one-year contract by the Kansas City Royals.

"I am happy we are getting Lee

May," said Royals manager Frey. "I was with him for 10 years at Baltimore and he's a great RBI man and club leader. His role will be to back up the designated hitter and hit."

May, 37, has a lifetime .266 and has hit 331 runs in his 15 years in the majors. Bristol's firing came as a surprise and apparently stemmed from public statements that he had made a mistake last year in signing Rennie Stennett.

It was the fourth time Bristol has been dismissed from a job. Bristol was told he was going to be fired by Giants' owner Bob Lurie at a meeting between the two on Tuesday.

"He was very upset when I had given out," said Bristol. "I had asked him, 'Bob, are you firing me?' And he said, 'I would be best to bring you

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