

# New kids' will be the key to Aggs' SWC title hopes



Texas A&M baseball coach Tom Chandler, left, congratulates pitcher Rick Luecken after a victory last season. Luecken and the Aggies returned to the field last week to begin spring workouts before opening the season Feb. 27 against Northeast Louisiana at Pat Olsen Field.

By RICHARD OLIVER  
Sports Editor

Rain may fall and winter may still linger in these here parts, but a taste of sunshine and summer can still be found on the Texas A&M campus.

Across the railroad tracks at Pat Olsen Field, the participants of Summer's Game are waking up from their hibernation, and none too soon.

The Game of course is baseball, and the Texas A&M Aggies began practicing last week for the 1981 season, which begins Feb. 27.

The season brings new faces and new hopes, and for Head Aggie Coach Tom Chandler, his 24th season coaching the Aggies may be one to remember.

Last spring, he watched as his young "Freshman Wonders" — Robert Slavens, David Flores and Rick Luecken — racked up over 25 wins between them in the 52 games played as the Aggies surprised many while exceeding preseason expectations. Texas A&M finished the 1980 season 36-10, only one-half game behind the Texas Longhorns.

In the rain-plagued SWC post-season tournament held in College Station in May, however, the bubble collapsed and the Aggies dropped two straight games to Arkansas, 19-10, and Texas Tech, 6-4.

Texas went on to take that championship.

Despite the loss of team leader Twig Little and fellow Aggies Randy Woodruff, Simon Glenn, Mike Hurdle and Harry Francis, the 1981 season is full of promise.

Little and Francis were drafted by the pros, and Woodruff, Glenn and Hurdle were lost to graduation. Recruiting, though, may have turned up some excellent replacements.

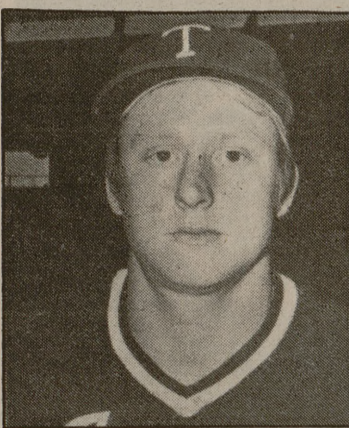
The infield of Woodruff, Francis and Little provided the big plays when needed last year, and those shoes will be hard to fill. That trio plus first baseman Rodney Hodde came within one percentage point of setting a SWC record in fielding percentage last year.

"So far, so good," said Chandler Wednesday. "The weather has been good thus far, so we've gotten a lot of work in. We've worked on conditioning, a batting program, and other things. We'll have a little more speed than in recent years, but we'll lack the power that we've had."

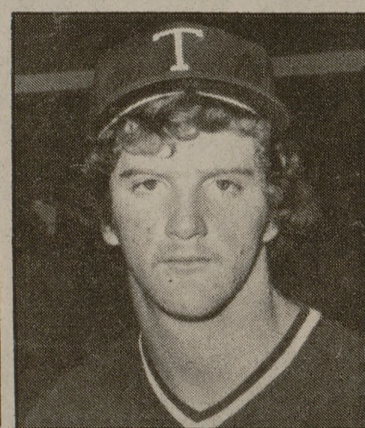
At first base, Hodde's performance will play a large part in the Aggs' championship hopes. Last year he ended the season in a miserable slump before picking up a bit in the post-season tournament. But a stint in an Alaskan summer league has helped him come back stronger, and he will undoubtedly be the team leader.

J.P. Bramhall, a late-season catalyst for the Aggies, returns in left field, and sophomore Joey Szekeley will once again be behind the plate after a season of sharing the duties with since-graduated Doug Teague.

Sophomore Bobby Beach, a consistent line drive hitter from Corpus Christi, will most likely once again



Rodney Hodde



Billy Cannon

see action in the outfield and as designated hitter.

It is the returning experience on the mound that will be the key to the entire 1981 campaign for Texas A&M.

Most of the pressure lies in the hands of 6-8 sophomore Slavens, who posted an amazing 11-0 record last spring while allowing only 2.37 runs a game. The right-hander spent the summer in the Central Illinois Collegiate League, and worked on his delivery and control. After a year

of experience, he may be one of the finest pitchers in the SWC.

Also keying the mound staff will be Leucken, who compiled a 9-3 ledger last season and a mere 2.00 ERA, but ended the season struggling a bit.

Flores was 5-3, but proved to be a stopper when he was needed on the mound, plus he added some depth at first base by spelling Hodde occasionally.

"Our pitching has been impressive so far," said Chandler. "Slavens, Leucken and Flores will be back,

and Perry Swanson's arm is coming along."

Swanson, a highly recruited junior from Las Vegas, was red-shirted last year because of arm troubles, and his return may also be a factor.

"It's all going to depend on how our new kids come along," Chandler stressed.

Those "new kids" include Billy Cannon Jr., Grant Priess, Terry Lawrence and Clint Heard.

Cannon, who played tight end for the 1980 Texas A&M football team, will probably get the starting nod at shortstop, although he and Brad Hisle are scrapping for the job currently.

Priess and Lawrence, both transfers from Blinn Junior College, will also probably get starting nods when the season begins against Northeast Louisiana in a doubleheader Feb. 27 at Olsen Field.

Priess plays third base and Lawrence center field.

"I'm anxious to see what the kids can do," said Chandler. "I'm always anxious for the season to start."

The coach said he expects Arkansas and defending champion Texas to scrap it out once again for the championship, with the Aggies silently trying to recreate a Cinderella story and fight for a berth in the post-season tournament at Texas' Dish-Faulk Field in May.

## Houston crushes Mavs by 48

United Press International  
HOUSTON — Moses Malone and Will Willoughby each scored 21 points and the Houston Rockets held off the Dallas Mavericks to the lowest total of the season enroute to a 136-88 win Wednesday night.

The Mavericks' 68 points eclipsed their previous season low of 73 against Philadelphia while their 11-point output in the third quarter was also a season low in the NBA.

Detroit had previously held Dallas to one point in a quarter.

Malone's 13 points in the third

quarter keyed a 38-8 outburst by the Rockets as they blew the game wide open, taking an 88-47 lead into the fourth quarter.

Willoughby, acquired Nov. 28, from Cleveland, had 12 first half points and added nine more during the Rockets third quarter explosion

for a season-high 21 points.

Rudy Tomjanovich had 16 points, Calvin Murphy added 15 and Robert Reid scored 14 for Houston, which remained in second place in the Western Conference's Midwest Division. They are now 26-29 on the year.

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