

Sports

Aggie softball team impressive in play, spirit



Frank L. Christlieb

I've never seen anything like it before. The Texas A&M University women's softball team was playing Baylor Bears Friday night at Bryan's Travis Park, the Aggies' new home field. It was the team's second game in the Texas A&M Fall Invitational tournament, and the Aggies held a 2-1 lead over the Bears in the fourth inning.

Although the game was only Texas A&M's fourth of the 1991 season, the Aggies played as if they were in the AIAW College World Series. After all, the team has grown accustomed to attending the annual event, where it placed third in 1980 and fourth the past spring.

When the Aggies scored two runs in the fourth to take a 4-1 lead, their eagerness really impressed me. The amazing part is that the team doesn't save its spirit for scoring rallies or fine defensive plays.

Whether the cheering comes from the Texas A&M dugout or from the nine Aggie athletes on the field, there's never a shortage of inspiring chatter among the members of this team. This softball squad does more to advance the athletic qualities of competitiveness, sportsmanship and spirit

than any women's athletic team I've seen.

The Aggies had lost earlier Friday 2-1 to the University of Texas at Arlington, and defeat is a fruit the team doesn't taste often. With a 74-10 record in 1980-81, and 11-0, 2-1 victories in the first two games of this season, the Aggies' success may have gone to their heads.

But if it did, it was only for a moment. Texas A&M defeated the Bears that night, then beat four more teams Saturday on its way to the tourney championship. The team's record stands at 7-1, and several aspects of the squad show that talent, although a major factor, isn't its only strong point.

During the game with the Bears, the team's enthusiasm showed that the Aggies take great pride in every activity they engage in during their games. It's not often that spectators see on-the-field spirit such as that displayed by the Aggie softball team.

For instance, during the Baylor game several of the team's actions showed an attitude not seen in most athletic groups. Not only do the Aggies do Texas A&M yells between innings, but they constantly cheer their teammates' defensive plays and at-bats as well. However, the cheering isn't of the well-known "go team, variety." The players talk among themselves in an effort to build as much

spirit as possible, and even when the spectators are quiet, the Aggies' enthusiasm filters through every part of the field.

The most impressive aspect of this Aggie team is the extra effort it makes on the field at all times. Although Texas A&M played four games Saturday, it retained enough strength to defeat Sam Houston State University, that night for the championship.

It's simple: the Aggies' energy has no limit.

First-year coach Bob Brock, who spent the past two years coaching the Baylor women's softball team, has found that transition won't be a problem. After leaving a successful Division II program with the Bears, Brock has picked up where former Texas A&M coach Bill Calloway left off. Calloway now coaches Louisiana Tech University.

Brock's squad contains five freshmen who have played with more finesse during the first week than most first-year players. Freshman outfielders Jose Carter and Tex Jackson have performed well at the plate and in the field, while Freshman catcher Gay McNeill has started every game and made several fine plays.

The best overall play among the newcomers has been that of Lisa Martinez, who has pitched and hit her way into the Aggies' starting pitching rotation. Martinez has won four of the Aggies' first eight games, joining a pitching staff that has consisted of two members during the past two years: Lori Stoll and Shan McDonald.

In Texas A&M's tournament championship win over SHSU, Martinez moved the potential winning run to third base in the 14th inning, giving fellow freshman Carter a two-out chance for the game-winning RBI.

Carter's following single gave the Aggies and Martinez a shut-out, their fifth in eight games. Although Brock before the season cited his main worry as the team's lack of hitting, the Aggies have outscored their opponents 34-6 so far.

Martinez' pitching statistics through four games include a 1.44 ERA and 43 strikeouts in 25 innings. She's allowed only eight hits in those games, and already has a no-hitter and four complete games.

Junior pitcher Shan McDonald

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Oilers' Gray wants to negotiate contract now; hopes to receive 'what he's worth'

United Press International
HOUSTON—The last time all-pro offensive tackle Leon Gray began the final year of a contract with an NFL team, he refused to play for the New England Patriots in a demand for more money.

This season, as Gray plays out the final year of his contract with the Houston Oilers, he's happy with his pay, check but having to make even more difficult contract decisions than he did during his highly publicized 1977 holdout along with Patriots' all-pro guard John Hannah.

The toughest question is — should he sign a contract extension with a bonus now or wait until after this season when the National Football League Players Association renegotiates its pact with the league? He may find himself with more freedom and bargaining power if he waits.

He prefers to get it settled now, however, and apparently so does Oilers' General Manager Ladd Herzog.

Gray said, "He's indicated to me that he wanted to get the situation resolved before the season is over. It's not something I want on my mind during the season."

He hoped the league contract, and the possibility of a players' strike before next season would provide him leverage. NFL players have less movement and bargaining power between clubs than do Major League Baseball or NBA players.

"Maybe me with the kind of contract that you can't refuse so that I won't wait. With the signing of a new league contract, my money won't go down," he said. "The only thing is I might lose freedom to talk to other clubs."

Gray, 29, still lives in Westwood, Mass., outside Boston, and it was in a Boston University medical facility that he spent much of his writer and spring rehabilitating from Achilles' tendon

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