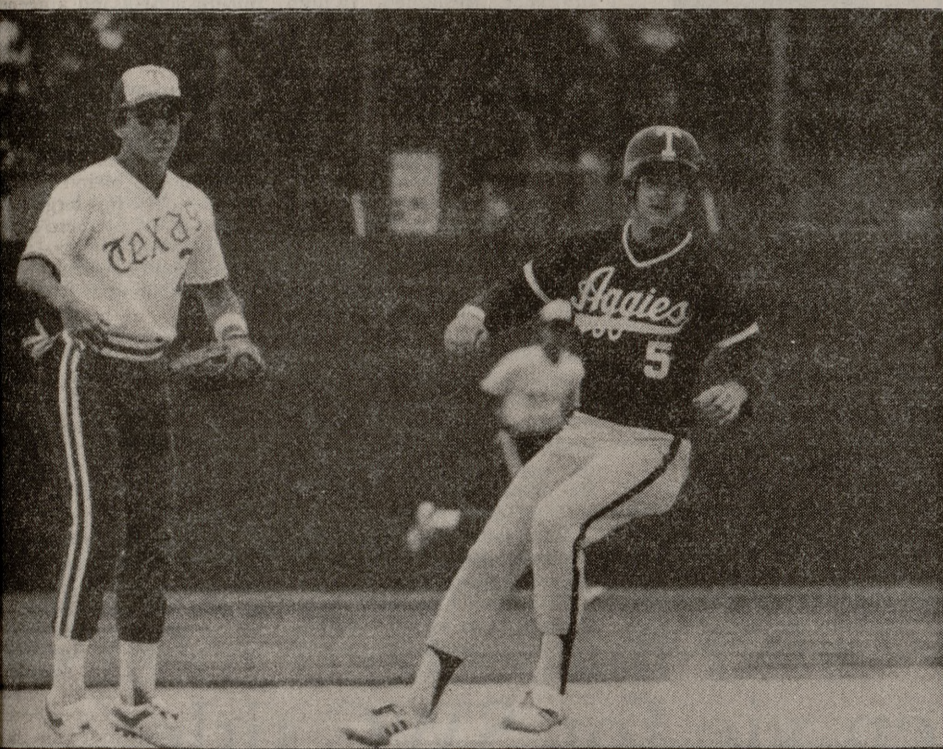


# The Battalion Sports

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## Confident catcher

### Aggies' Szekely eager about '82 season, prospects for future



Catcher Joe Szekely of the Texas A&M baseball team pulls into second base during the Aggies' series with the Longhorns last season, while Longhorn shortstop Spike Owen watches for a throw. Szekely returns as one of the top players on Coach Tom Chandler's 1982 roster.

by Frank L. Christlieb  
Sports Editor

Joe Szekely has a dream that he hopes will come true.

"One of my first presents when I was a kid was a bat and ball," said Szekely, the starting catcher for the Texas A&M baseball team. "I've always wanted to play professional baseball — that was kind of a dream."

Like several other juniors on the Aggie squad, the physical education major becomes eligible for the major league baseball draft after the 1982 season. And confidence may be a factor determining whether Szekely begins a professional career after this season.

"If I have a good year ... I'd like to sign," Szekely said. "I've talked to some scouts and I'm pretty sure I'm going to be drafted, but the better year I have, the better chance I'll have of being drafted."

Szekely, who has lived in Paris, Texas, his entire life, had hopes of being drafted out of high school, where he played football and baseball. However, the draft surpassed him and he chose Texas A&M over several junior colleges, Baylor, Texas Tech and Northeast Louisiana.

"It was tough coming out of a small town because you don't get nearly as much recruiting as at the big schools," Szekely said. "Paris High School is getting a lot more recognition now that they've established a winning program."

"I just wanted to wait and see. I thought there was a good chance that I might get drafted out of high school. But coming here really helped me because I've played against better competition, and it's going to help me in case there's a chance I'm drafted after this season."

But Szekely has only the 1982 season on his mind now. Many predictions have tabbed Texas A&M as the team to beat in the Southwest Conference, and Szekely said he thinks that those forecasts are correct.

"Last year, we knew we had a good team, but at first we just weren't getting the breaks," Szekely said. "Finally, at the end, we realized we could do it and we did it."

In reference to last year's season-ending string of 17 victories in 20 games, Szekely said he and his teammates plan to begin 1982 with the same performance that brought them from near the bottom of the SWC to only half a game out of the final conference tourney spot.

"This year, we know we can do it, and everybody has a positive attitude," Szekely said. "The streak helped everybody tremendously, because we finally got the breaks, and it brought everybody closer. It really helped because when you win, everybody's happy, and when you lose, everybody tends to get their heads down."

"I'm really expecting to win the conference. You say that every year, but I've seen what it takes to win, and I think we've got what it takes. Coach Chandler knows and has said many times that we have an excellent ballclub. We've been working harder this year than in the past."

Szekely's baseball career includes stints with American Legion, Little League and collegiate-sponsored teams. After his senior year, the 6-1, 190-pound catcher played for a Dallas team comprised solely of college baseball players. The only high school player on the team,

Szekely said the experience gained while playing for that team contributed a great deal to his career.

"It was a good experience for me, because I got to see a lot of college pitching, and that helped me a lot," Szekely said.

Last summer, Szekely played for a team in Fairbanks, Alaska, and finished the three-month season with a .322 average, 30 RBI and 49 hits in 38 games.

"That's where I really thought I helped my confidence, because the ball played up there is excellent quality baseball," Szekely said. "I led the team in hitting and that was against good pitching. It was also a chance for the professional scouts to see me."

Since Szekely has had a chance to talk to several scouts, he said he knows what they'll be looking for when they pick prospects they hope to draft.

"They talk to you and they want to find out if you want to play ball, because they're not going to waste a draft choice on you if you don't," Szekely said. "They can't say anything definite to you, but you kind of get a feeling of a hint (that they're interested)."

Szekely said two people have played key roles in keeping alive his desire to play baseball. Szekely's father, Joe Szekely Sr., played for the Cincinnati Reds for two years during the 1950s, while Cincinnati catcher-

turned-first baseman Johnny Bench provides inspiration from a poster on the wall of Szekely's Cain Hall dorm room.

"My dad has been my biggest critic and fan," Szekely said. "He's helped me more than anybody. I was always ahead of the other youngsters, because he taught me more than most others could."

"Johnny Bench has always been my idol, and I guess I've always been partial to the Reds because of those two people."

Szekely hit .279, had 42 RBI, six home runs and 82 total bases during the 1981 season. He set a team record with seven triples, and his RBI and total base figures were second behind first baseman Rodney Hodde, who graduated last year.

While Hodde finished with a .715 slugging percentage, Szekely's .558 percentage was second on the team. Szekely hit .309 against right-handed pitchers, but hit only .125 against left-handers.

"Last year, I had a good year, but I think I could have had a better one," Szekely said. "I wish I had a higher average and had hit more home runs."

## Texas, A&M must win Saturday to keep pace

The Texas A&M men's basketball team, tied for third place with Houston in the Southwest Conference, plays Houston Saturday at 2 p.m. (NBC-TV) in the G. Rolie White Coliseum.

The Aggies have a record of 15-8 for the season and a conference record of 8-5, while the Longhorns have slipped to 16-7 and 6-7 in the SWC. The Cougars' records are 17-6 and 8-5.

The Aggies are coming off a 92-75 loss to the first-place Arkansas Razorbacks, who are half a game ahead of the second-place Baylor Bears. The Bears have slowly crept from near the bottom of the standings to their

compile their 16-8, 9-5 records.

The Aggies and Cougars are one game behind Arkansas, while the TCU Horned Frogs are only half a game behind at 8-6.

Jan. 30 in Austin, Texas A&M defeated the Longhorns 71-69 in overtime. Last year's game between the two teams in the coliseum ended in a 67-63 Texas overtime victory.

While the Aggies are led by forward Claude Riley, averaging 15 points and 10.2 rebounds a game, the Longhorns are led by center LaSalle Thompson's 18.6 points and 11.5 rebounds a game.

Probable starters for the Aggies are Riley, center Rudy Woods and guards Reggie Roberts, Tyren Naualls and Milton Woodley. Starting for Texas will be Thompson, forwards Virdell Howland and James Booker, and guards Denard Holmes and Jack Worthington.

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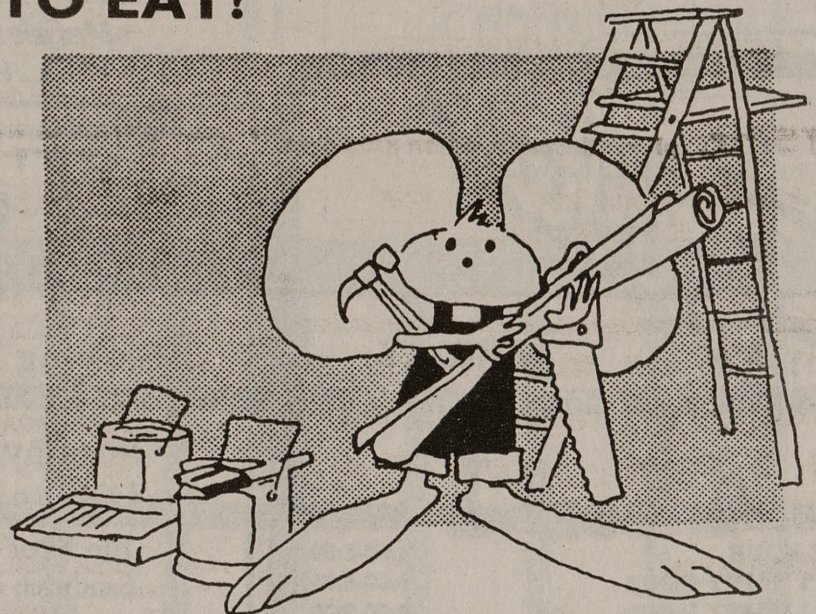
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