

Moving in

Buddy Haney finding a home at first base

by Frank L. Christlieb

Battalion Staff

On opening day of the 1982 baseball season, Aggie freshman second baseman Buddy Haney was battling for a starting position.

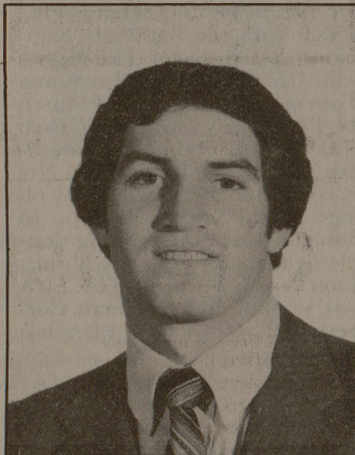
After coming to Texas A&M as a shortstop and being moved to the other side of the infield during fall practice, Haney had to adjust to his new job. Although senior second baseman Brad Hisle had his feet firmly planted in the starting lineup, Haney still had visions of playing time bouncing through his head.

But suddenly a great opportunity short-hopped its way into Haney's glove. After the first week of the season, Texas A&M coach Tom Chandler approached the freshman in the locker room and popped an unexpected question.

"After the first couple of games, I guess (the coaches) weren't real happy with the first base job, so Coach Chandler asked me if I had ever played it," Haney said in an interview Tuesday.

"I said I hadn't, but that I'd give it a shot. I was hitting the ball pretty well and they said they wanted to put my bat in the lineup. That was the key — my offense."

"The next day at practice, I took a few at first, and a couple of days later, I was starting at first. That first day was a little awkward. Taking throws from the infield is a little different than throwing to the first baseman. I had to work on a few things, like footwork, but it wasn't that tough of a change. "It took me awhile, but it's



Sophomore Buddy Haney says pitching is key to '83

hard moving from the middle of the infield to first base, because there's not as much action. But I've accepted it."

Thus, shortstop-turned-second baseman Buddy Haney became the Aggies' starting first baseman. And with Texas A&M approaching Saturday's season-opening, noon double-header with Southwestern University, it looks as if Haney will keep the position he'd never played before college.

"When I got here," he said, "I thought I had a shot at second. I played only shortstop in high school, but I really didn't have the range to play shortstop (in college). I knew I'd get a chance to play somewhere just because of my bat. I hit well over .500 my senior year in high school and led the district, but I was pretty good defensively. I had a bit of a wild arm, but I was pretty good on defense."

Although Chandler wanted him in the starting lineup to utilize a strong bat, Haney may have surprised Texas A&M coaches with a strong defensive performance. Haney, finishing the season with a .989 fielding percentage, had only four errors while compiling 343 putouts.

Hitting .286 in 49 of Texas A&M's 53 games, Haney wound up with 44 hits, 22 runs scored, 27 RBI and four home runs. From the left side of the plate, where he always hit before coming to Texas A&M, Haney batted .293 (34 for 116) and from the right side, he finished at .263 (10 for 38).

Haney, a right-handed thrower, had never hit right-handed before his freshman year, but he decided to try it during the 1981 fall workouts. And with his overall success, Haney says he'll keep switch-hitting this season.

"I started out last year real well, but during the middle of the season I ran into some tough times," Haney said. "I had been working on my switch-hitting and it seemed that around the time we played TCU and Houston back-to-back, they had a lot of left-handers."

"So I didn't have the confidence batting right-handed that I have batting left-handed. At that time, I didn't hit the ball well right-handed, which hurt my average. Then toward the end of the year, I hit the ball well, but I was hitting it right at (the fielders)."

Even as a switch-hitter, Haney said he feels more comfortable hitting from the left side.

"I'm not going to be the so-called power hitter as much right-handed as I am left-

handed," he said. "But I get the base hits, and I had trouble batting left-handed off the left-handers during the fall. So batting right-handed really helps. I'll get my hits anyway."

Haney, whose father played center field at Sam Houston State and for the Kansas City Athletics for three years, says he's feeling comfortable about his position on the team.

"I'm getting pretty comfortable at first base," he said. "If I had a choice, it'd probably be somewhere else in the infield. But as of now, this is where I'm needed and the other spots are filled. I'm accepting it and really liking it."

With the help of his father, Haney has been able to improve and stay active in baseball.

"He probably had the most to do with my career, because he's pushed me the most," Haney said. "I guess when I was about 2 years old, we started swinging. I don't remember it, but he's told me about when I used to hit a ball hanging from a tree on a string."

"He pushed me from the start, even all the way through high school. We'd get up at 6 in the morning during the off-season and lift weights, and things like that have really made a difference in my career. He knew what I wanted, and he's really been the guiding force."

And what does Buddy Haney want, both this season and in the future?

"I've set some pretty high goals — probably higher than most," he said. "But I definitely want to hit over .300, and I should be able to with no problem. And I want us to go further than we did last year as a team."

And if I have a good year, I think I could have a shot at all-Southwest Conference."

Haney, who at 6-foot, 175 pounds showed during the 1982 season that he can hit with power at times, said he must concentrate on base hits rather than trying to hit homers.

"This fall and spring, I've been pulling the ball a little bit and grounding out to first base," Haney said. "I think I've been subconsciously thinking about the home run, which I don't really need. But they'll come, and I think I'll probably hit more homers this year."

As for the Aggies, who finished 33-19-1 overall and 10-10-1 in the SWC last year, Haney said he sees the makings of a solid ballclub. But as for the rest of the conference, he said, the Texas Longhorns should again take top honors.

"Texas has to be the front-runner," Haney said, "but Houston has a real good pitching staff and Rice has good pitching and could be tough. But I'd say we'd definitely have to be in the top four teams in the league."

"We had some tough times with our pitching, and then we had spurts where we didn't hit the ball too well and sometimes we'd let down defensively. So as a team, we just went through some bad streaks. At the end, we came on pretty strong and we played Texas a good game in the (SWC) tournament (taking a two-run lead before losing 12-7). I thought we should have beaten them."

Haney said the pitching, which will rely on senior right-

See HANEY page 14



staff photo by Diana Sultenfuss

Aggie first-baseman Buddy Haney looks toward third base for a signal from Texas A&M head coach Tom Chandler last year. Haney and the Aggies open up the 1983 season with a double-header against Southwestern University Saturday at 1 p.m. in Olsen Field.

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