

Double trouble

Stoll, McDonald ready for run at softball title

by Frank L. Christlieb
Battalion Staff

When Lori Stoll and Shan McDonald wind up, the Aggie softball team starts ticking.

Just like a pair of dependable, self-winding watches, these two athletes have withstood the test of time. Sure, they'll take a licking every so often, but it's never too much to take them out of commission.

The Texas A&M softball team has ticked loud and long with Stoll and McDonald, both senior pitchers in their final season with the Aggies.

During the past three and a half years, these two pitchers and their Aggie teammates have shared the heartbreaking losses, the close-but-no-cigar games and the emotional victories. After leading Texas A&M to the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women national title last spring, Stoll and McDonald say they're not finished yet.

But after the national title, what's left? Try the NCAA championship, toward which Coach Bob Brock's Aggies will begin working when the spring season opens Tuesday. Texas A&M, which now has a home field on campus in the intramural complex near Olsen Field, will host the University of Evansville in a double-header that afternoon at 3.

Stoll, who has compiled a career record of 137-18 at Texas A&M, looks at the NCAA crown as the Aggies' main goal this season.

"I'd say I have more desire to win the NCAA championship, because we didn't face some of the teams last year in the AIAW," she said. "I'd say it'll be as tough in the NCAA as in the AIAW. A lot of teams have changed, but I'm sure it's going

to be tough."

The Aggies, who lost five seniors from last year's 84-9 squad, finished the 1982 fall season with a 32-3 record. This year's team, Stoll says, has the necessary ingredients to keep moving toward another title.

"I'd say that the people we lost had more experience, knowing when to do what," the Chillicothe, Mo., native said. "That's what our freshmen will have to learn. They have the talent, but they have a lot to learn about what to do and when to do it. A lot of the freshmen have played at nationals with their summer teams, so it's not completely new to them."

McDonald, who has spent her life in Scarborough, Ontario, has a 116-19 record with the Aggies and was named 1982 player of the year. She said she anticipates a tougher season as a result of the team's jump from the AIAW into the NCAA.

"I think it'll be a lot tougher," McDonald said. "The schedule is heavier, but since we're not in a conference, the schedule isn't a warmup for nationals. It's a route to nationals, and if we don't do well in that, we can't say anything about the 'next game.' I think that to win the national championship, we may have to get tougher."

Stoll, who holds seven Texas A&M pitching records, began her softball career at the age of 9 in Missouri. Now, after 13 years of playing, the left-hander throws at speeds up to 70 mph during the Aggies' games.

"I still need a lot of development," Stoll said. "My fastball has been about it, so I've been trying to work on a rise pitch and a drop. My drop has been all right, but it still needs a lot of work."

Although it seems that competition between the two pitchers would be fierce, Stoll said that's not the case.

"I wouldn't say there's any competition," she said. "We work together well, because she's right-handed and I'm left-handed. If Coach Brock ever takes one of us out, it's such a completely different look that we show the other team."

But with a two-pitcher rotation, what gives Stoll the stamina to pitch day after day and maintain her control and speed?

"I like to win," she said with a laugh. "I just go out and throw. Sure, I get psyched up, but that's not a big part of it. Last year at nationals, we had to win because we'd gotten so close the last two years and hadn't won it. Last year, I really wanted to win bad."

The pressure in the 1982 double-elimination national tournament built up right away, as the Aggies lost to U.S. International University in the opener. But instead of folding, Texas A&M won seven straight games and defeated Oklahoma State in the final, as Stoll won her 34th game of the season.

Stoll has encountered situations in which her strength and determination played key roles. For instance, during her sophomore year Stoll pitched in a 29-inning game here against UCLA, only to lose by a score of 2-1.

"I can pitch," she said, "as long as it takes to win. In the 29-inning game against UCLA, I was tired mentally, but not so much physically. My arm just doesn't seem to get tired that easily."

"Mentally, that game was one of the hardest I've ever played. There were so many innings ... where they'd get runners in

scoring position and I'd get real hyped up about it. I'd get them out and it'd be a relief for that inning. But then they'd come right back and do it again. At nationals, there was pressure in every game, because we had to win them all after losing that first one."

With the Aggies involved in several tournaments each season, Stoll and McDonald face days when one or both of them must pitch twice in the same day. But Stoll said that doesn't hinder her pitching performance.

"Soreness has been a problem before," she said. "If I lay off pitching for two or three days and pitch a game, I get a sore arm. But during games, I can keep pitching. During the summer I've had to pitch six games in the same day."

"It's hard for me to just throw pitches to a catcher in practice. It's hard to get motivated to do that. I'd rather just play games all the time."

As for the Aggies, Stoll said, the defense has been the most consistent aspect of the team.

"I'd say our defense would be strongest point," Stoll said. "We usually hold the other teams long enough until our offense can give us a run. I feel good about the defense every time I go out. They seem to always get to the ball, wherever it's hit."

"If we score the run early in a game, it eases the pressure some, because you know that you have a one-run leeway. But when you get to the seventh inning and it's 0-0, then the pressure starts getting worse."

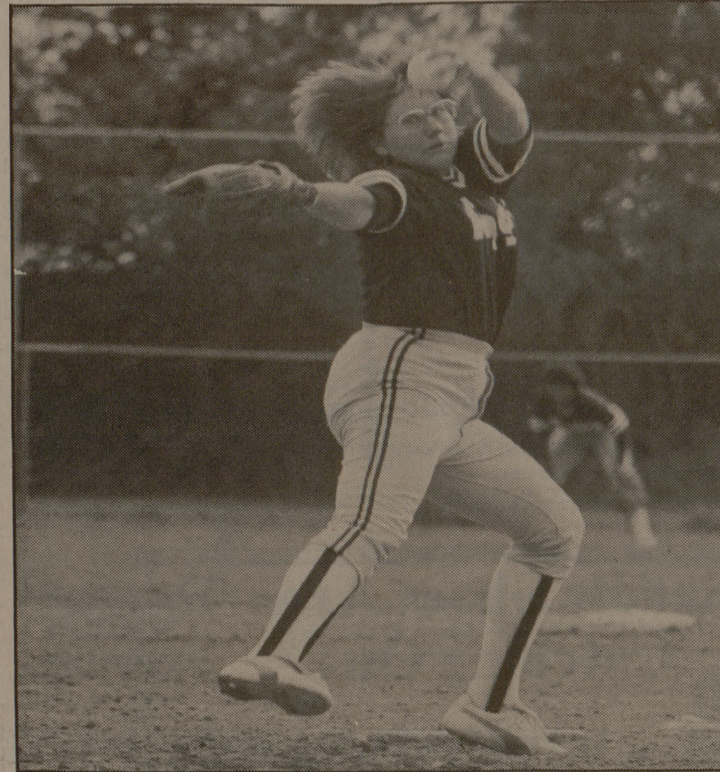
McDonald's participation on the Canadian National Team during the past two years has brought her a great deal of experience. The squad, which travels around the world to play,

placed fifth at the world championships the past summer in Taiwan.

But the 5-foot-10-inch McDonald hasn't been a pitcher during her entire career. If not for her coach during eighth grade, McDonald still might be playing at first base or in the outfield.

"We needed a pitcher for the school team, but they wouldn't let me pitch because I always had speed but no control. They were afraid that I was going to hurt someone and they wanted it to be fun."

"But then that summer, the
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Softball pitchers Shan McDonald, above, and Lori Stoll, left, return this spring to lead the Aggie softball team, which won the AIAW national title the past season.

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