

Women's softball opens Tuesday against Evansville

Brock confident about Aggs' title chances

by Frank L. Christlieb

Battalion Staff
Although new faces dot his 1982-83 roster, Aggie women's softball coach Bob Brock finds himself in a comfortable position entering the spring season. Texas A&M, which opens against the University of Evansville in a 3 p.m. double-header Tuesday, won last spring's Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women national title. But this year, second-year coach Brock and his players have their eyes focused on a trip to the NCAA national tournament, scheduled for May 26 in Omaha, Neb.

Tuesday's double-header, along with all of the Aggies' home games, will be played on their new field in the intramural complex next to Olsen Field. However, the Aggie Invitational tournament, set for April 8-10, will take place at Travis Park in Bryan, where Texas A&M has played all of its home games during the past year and a half. Texas A&M starts the season ranked No. 2 in the NCAA national poll behind No. 1 UCLA and ahead of No. 3 Cal-State Fullerton.

The Aggies, who lost five seniors from last year's championship squad, finished the fall season with a 32-3 record. Lori Stoll and Shan McDonald, the two pitchers who have a career record of 253-37 at Texas A&M, combined for a 0.35 ERA during the fall.

Brock, who will rely on the services of several freshmen this season, says the team's younger players have talent but don't yet have a great deal of college experience. "I think we're not going to lose a whole lot (from last season) as far as ability's concerned," he said. "The biggest thing we lack is experience, although this last semester gave us a lot of time to let a couple of freshmen to play third base and a couple of freshmen to play first base. From last year's team, we're not that different in terms of talent, but we lack experience in certain key spots — certainly in the infield."

Brock, whose squad hit .284 and fielded at a .970 clip during the fall, will change the starting lineup slightly to start the season. Josie Carter, who usually plays in the outfield, will play first base, opening a starting spot in left field. Freshmen Cindy Foster and Debbie Rollman will compete for that starting position.

Linda Lancaster, a junior and Brock's "every-position" player, probably will start the season in right field and sophomore Iva Jackson will remain in center field. Brock said he's confident about his team's defense, especially with senior shortstop Carrie Austgen and junior second baseman Patti Holthaus back as starters. "We're pretty good up the middle," he said. "We've got Gay (McNutt, catcher) back, Patti Holthaus at second and Carrie Austgen at shortstop and Jackson in center. And the pitching staff (Stoll and McDonald) is back for its final semester after four years here, and I think it's going to be their best."

Although he's not sure if the Aggies have the depth they had last season, Brock said Lancaster could help in crucial situations. "I don't think we have quite as many this year that I could consider bona fide players at each position," Brock said. "It seems that I have to rely on Linda Lancaster a little more this year than last year to back up nearly every position on the field if needed."

Carter, who led Texas A&M with a .331 average, 72 RBI, five home runs and 97 hits during 1981-82, kept her hot during the fall by batting .300 and picking up 47 hits. However, Carter had only 17 RBIs and no home runs, so Brock said he's going to make sure that situation changes.

"Last year, we pretty much lied on Josie as the DH," he said. "I think she got a year better defensively. The difference is that she plays a 'good' left field but she plays a 'great' first base."

"The biggest thing I missed this fall is that ... we don't seem to have as much consistency in the players who were batting before Carter and Jackson. They were all freshmen. It seems Josie wasn't coming up to bat in the RBI situations the way she was last year. But I think I'll remedy that and get her into RBI production. She continues to hit during the fall, but her RBIs really dropped off."

Brock said his tentative batting order starts with freshman Cindy Foster leading off. Brock, No. 2 position, he said, is in the air, but may go to man third baseman Cooper. Cooper, Holthaus, right fielder Rose Ruffin and designated hitter Brock are slated at No. 2 during the fall, will hit third; Carter will be No. 4, Holthaus will be No. 5, Austgen (.366 average) will hit sixth and Lancaster should hit seventh. Brock alternate designated hitter throughout the season at No. 8 spot and sophomore catcher Gay McNutt will be ninth.

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Crucial games dominate SWC

United Press International
The second-ranked Houston Cougars and fifth-rated Arkansas Razorbacks embark on their final assignments Saturday before their scheduled run in at Fayetteville next Thursday.

The next-to-last weekend of regular season action will see Houston hosting the neighborhood rival Rice Owls and Arkansas at home against the surprising Texas Tech Red Raiders.

"Our players realize that if they lose, there won't be any shootout with Houston," said Arkansas coach Eddie Sutton. "Houston isn't going to lose."

In addition to the games involving two of the nation's top-rated clubs, the Texas A&M Aggies will face TCU in a game critical to the league's post-season tournament and the Texas Longhorns will be at home against Baylor.

Houston will take a 22-2 season record and a spotless SWC slate into its meeting with Rice, a team that has beaten the Cougars only once in 24 tries.

The Cougars have won 17 games in a row and 21 straight conference outings — the longest such streak in 54 years.

Arkansas, meanwhile, will be going for its 100th home victory since the arrival of Sutton in Fayetteville. The Razorbacks have lost only four conference games at home under Sutton.

But in Texas Tech, the Razorbacks will be facing one of the most overachieving ball clubs in league history.

With only eight players on the squad — one of them a walk-on — the Raiders have posted a conference record.

And even though Arkansas has won 13 of the last 14 games with the Raiders, Tech is the only school in the conference to hold a series edge over the Razorbacks.

"Texas Tech has become a good basketball team," said Sutton. "They have good fire and (coach) Gerald Myers has done a fine job. We've had some great games with Texas Tech."

The TCU-A&M game will be a long way toward determining the third-place finisher in the conference race. The game will be regionally televised at 3:10 p.m. tipoff.

TCU is 9-5 in conference while the Aggies, upset at last Wednesday night, are 7-5. The team that winds up in third place will receive an automatic bye past the opening round of the league's post-season tournament — which begins on Feb. 7 at three separate sites.

The likelihood is that Texas A&M, Texas Tech and SWC will host the first round of the tournament. Baylor, Rice and Texas Tech are expected to be the visiting teams in the opening round.



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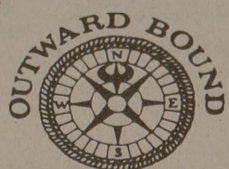
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