

Texas A&M

# The Battalion Sports

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## Road to Omaha

### Softball team hosts KU in NCAA mini-series

by Joe Tindel Jr.

The NCAA recently did Texas A&M softball coach Bob Brock a big favor.

Not that he needed it — now his Aggies seem to be polished and ready for post-season play — but his team gets to play the NCAA regional play-off mini-series in College Station.

That's College Station, a veritable haven where the Aggies are 12-0 this spring.

The potential victim in this first NCAA regional series will be Kansas University, presently the nation's 7th-ranked team with a record of 33-7. Kansas led for the Big Eight Conference championship with Missouri, and they'll match talent with the Aggies Friday at 5:30 a.m. and Saturday at 1 p.m. at the Penberthy Intramural Complex.

The winner of the best-of-three mini-series will advance to the NCAA Softball World Series in May 26 in Omaha, Neb.

A month ago the outlook for the Lady Jayhawks would be less grim, even with the Aggies' undefeated home record. Back then, pitcher Shan McDonald was nursing a sore shoulder and the Aggie bats weren't making as many solid sounds as Brock says they are now.

That, however, was a month ago. Kansas will now visit a Texas A&M squad that's ranked second nationally with a 34-10 record and has perhaps the most solid pitching duo in the country in seniors McDonald and all-america Lori Stoll. It's an Aggie team refreshed by a week of rest and some solid workouts.

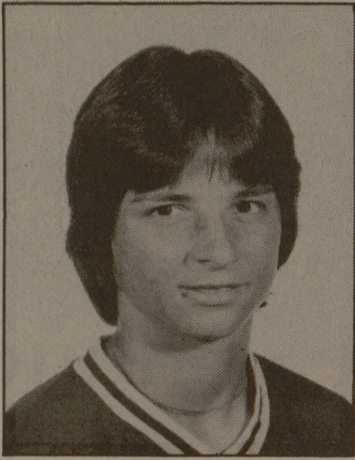
"I think we needed to rest and get out and work on some of the fundamentals again," Brock said. "This team has a lot of fun going repetition over and over and making plays to first and double plays and bunts. They know it makes them that much better."

Brock let his players rest last week before practice began again this week, and he said they were ready to take the field when the time came to start preparing for this weekend's regional mini-series.

"I saw a team that was real enthusiastic," he said, "and it looks like they got some things out of the way as far as school and rest is concerned. I saw a lot of hey, it's about time we got back on the field' attitude."

And now that he's fielded his team again, he's seen some signs of promise for post-season success.

"I see a healthy Shan McDonald, for one thing," Brock said. During all this time she's been mending and working. In the



Carrie Austgen



Cindy Cooper

two practices that we've had she has really looked sharp. So this rest has done her a lot of good."

Brock said he'll pitch McDonald some this weekend, but eyes also certainly will be on Stoll, 25-6, who has an amazing 0.35 earned run average this spring.

The Aggies' main weakness this spring — hitting — seems to have improved since the earlier part of the season. In an earlier interview, Brock refused to call his team's hitting problem a weakness. He preferred the term "deficiency."

Improvement may have proved that terminology more accurate.

"What seems to have been the difference this year is when one's not hitting, we're all not hitting," Brock said. "When

we're all hitting this year, it doesn't make any difference who I bring off the bench. We're going to get a base hit.

"But I've noticed here lately that it's been splitting up some, which is what we really need. We need six that are hitting and three that are not, instead of nine that are not."

While Brock admitted the "deficiency" was definitely a problem, he said the team has always had the ability to be a superior hitting club.

"I don't think anybody in the national tournament is going to have the potential hitting team that we've got — (a team) that can beat you with one swing," he said.

Senior shortstop Carrie Austgen has been one of this

spring's most productive hitters, batting .303 in 142 at-bats. Sophomore outfielder Josie Carter, a key hitter last year, hasn't had quite the spring the Aggies expected, Brock said, but she's also showing signs of coming around.

Carter had eight RBI in last spring's AIAW National tournament.

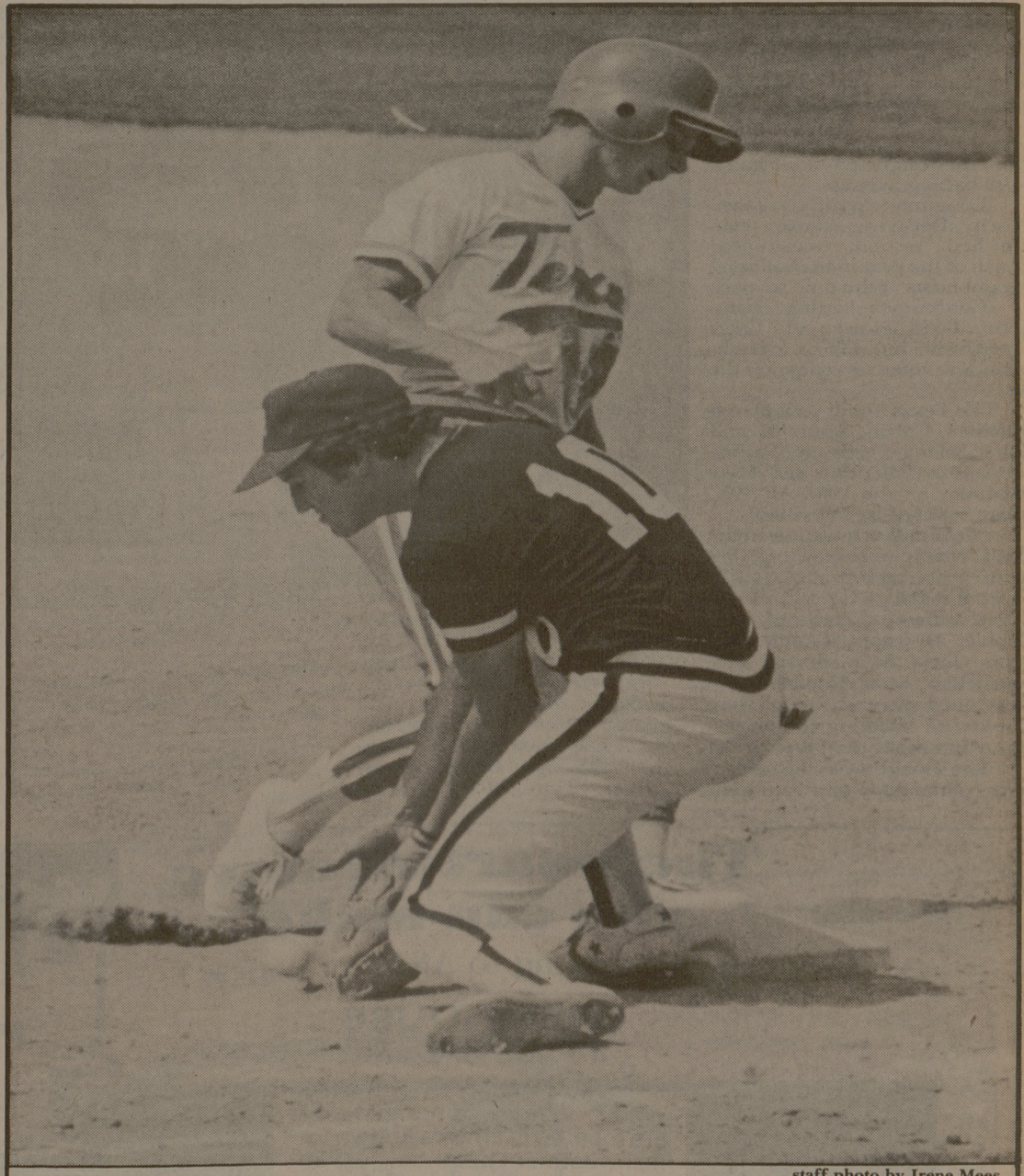
Freshman Cindy Cooper has built an early reputation for productive hitting, batting .279. Sophomore Iva Jackson has been another clutch hitter for the Aggies.

Brock also praised the performance of his newcomers this spring. Cooper, catcher Mary Schwind, outfielder Deb Rollman and outfielder Cindy Foster are some of the freshmen who have filled in well this year.

"I think the freshmen and the people that we've had that have been the bench support have really come through and done a good job for us," Brock said. "I don't think you can call our freshmen unseasoned ball players anymore after this last road trip."

Brock said the Aggies have learned lessons about overconfidence against teams like unranked Creighton, which upset the Aggies in the Nebraska Invitational, and 13th-ranked Louisiana Tech, which split a double-header with the Aggies two weeks ago.

"I do have to make sure that we worry about the game at 5:30 on Friday and nothing else," Brock said. "We worry about the next game at 1 o'clock on Saturday. If we win that, then we can think about the World Series."



staff photo by Irene Mees

### End of the road

Buddy Haney takes an attempted pick-off throw against Texas on Saturday. A&M lost all three games to the Horns, ending the season at 24-21.

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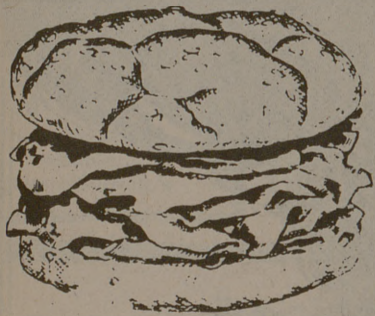
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