

Gustafson's Horns have it all in '85

By **BRANDON BERRY**
Sports Writer

The Texas A&M baseball team won its first 11 games and presently owns a gaudy 18-4 record.

The Aggies have scored almost 80 more runs than their opponents and are averaging more than seven runs a game. Their pitching staff is giving up less than five runs a game.

They have not lost a game yet this season in the friendly confines of C.E. "Pat" Olsen Field, located just across the railroad tracks from the "friendliest campus on the Brazos."

In other words, they are a team on a roll and they've done it without highly-touted pitchers Tom Arrington and Jimmy Flowers for much of the season.

Now, imagine what happens when this offensive dynamo meets a team that averages offensively almost seven runs a game and allows defensively only four runs a game?

Do you have time to grab a hot dog?

Well, the Aggies don't have to face just one opponent with such fancy credentials. The previously-mentioned statistics are the hitting and pitching averages of all eight teams in the Southwest Conference so far this season.

SWC schools have a whopping 157-33 advantage over non-conference opponents. When the standings show Texas Tech to be the owner of 11 of the non-conference defeats, the conference race promises to be a dead-heat.

And the starting gun sounds for the Ags' SWC season tomorrow in Houston, against the University of Houston at Cougar Field.

The Cougars are ranked 10th nationally by Collegiate Baseball magazine and have a season record of 20-2. And they're doing it with power.

Houston averages nine runs a game and is hitting .349 as a team. Their pitchers give up only 2.63 runs a game. They have hit 31 home runs already this season.

"Houston, Texas and Arkansas are all going to be ranked highly going into this season because of what they have coming back from last season," said A&M Coach Mark Johnson. "But the funny thing about college baseball is the role of the junior college transfer. One guy can come in and turn a program around."

And another thing is chemistry — you can never tell if the group of

guys that you have are going to come together and click as a team until they prove it out on the playing field.

Junior college transfers Fred Gegan and Jeff Schow have filled definite needs for the Aggies at first and second base, respectively. Seniors Buddy Haney, Steve Johnson and Mike Scanlin have also contributed heavily to the team's quick start "chemistry."

The '85 conference race can be broken up into four categories — the no-shots, the long-shots, the contenders and the favorites.

SMU — One of only two no-shots in the field. The Mustangs have an excuse, though, because they abolished their baseball program back in 1980.



Texas Tech — The other no-shot in the conference, but unlike SMU, they can't claim non-existence — just inexperience. The Red Raiders start four first-year players for Coach Gary Ashby.

Tech is a couple of years away from being any kind of a threat in the toughest baseball conference in the nation. The Red Raiders' 14-11 non-conference mark is a pretty good indication of an impending losing conference ledger against teams with potential and experience.



TCU — This is a team of intrigue. They are 19-1 heading into conference play, but who have they played? Their schedule looks like a tour of the cute, little religious colleges in and around the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolis. The Froggies may find the SWC a little rougher than J.R.-Country holy rollers.

They are led offensively by short-stop Brent Barker, second baseman Steve Cottage, outfielders Johnny Morgan and Mike Ramsey and pitcher Brian Ohnoutka.

Looks like a long shot to me.



Rice — The Owls may be patsies in other sports, but, as Tug McGraw and Jim Palmer have proven, ath-

letic physiques play a smaller role in baseball than in other sports. Baseball is a thinking man's game, so it should fit right in at a school where the favorite pastime is syllabus-prediction.

The Owls are led by Mike Patrick, Eric Graff, Ben Matthews, Curtis Fox and Jay Knoblauch offensively. On the mound, Rice boasts two of the best pitchers in the conference in Derek Hoelscher and Todd Ogden.

Pitching plus hitting usually equals success, but this school has attitude problems. They value academics above athletics, which makes them another long shot.



Baylor — The Bears are loaded with talent this season. The names Steve Jarvie, Greg Dennis, Kyle Todd and Mike Malinak send more balls over the fence than bad tennis players at the Knights of Columbus Community Center.

Speedy Tony Huey scores more than Joan Collins at a convention and Blaine Beatty, Don Dumas and Kenneth Patterson give the Bears quality pitching depth. They also give Baylor contender-status in a year where talent is as plentiful in the SWC as non-conference wins.



Arkansas — Before the '85 season began, the Razorbacks were touted for possible conference and post-season honors. The Hogs of Coach Norm DeBriyn haven't let anyone down, as they have broken out of the starting gate with a 20-4 record.

The Razorbacks' heavy reliance on pitcher Fred Farwell might be the only weakness in a line-up that includes All-American hitters, sound defenders and experience. Farwell is already 2-0 in SWC play, and the Hogs are one of three early favorites for the conference title.



Houston — The Coogs are off to the second-best start in their history and they're doing it with great pitching, flawless defense and power hit-

ting from up and down their line-up.

The Cougars could win the conference if they keep playing the way they're playing right now. The question is, will they be able to keep their confidence and composure against Arkansas and that traditional powerhouse in Austin?



Texas — The Immutable Juggernaut. The SWC champions nine of the last 10 years. National champions two years ago. National finalists last year. Six starters and two All-Americans returning this season.

The favorites? You bet your life. Longhorn Coach Cliff Gustafson has found a way for the past 15 years to contend for the title, win it down the stretch or run away with it from the very beginning. His players may change, but the burnt orange uniforms always seem to be on the long end of the score when play-off time arrives.

Third baseman David Denny leads a cast of sluggers that threatens to blast the "non-offensive" image of "Gusball" over the outfield fences. Designated hitter Doug Hodo, outfielders Elanis Westbrook and Jeff Vondenkampf and slugger Dennis Cook all return as well.

The most imposing name in the Horn line-up however, is All-American second baseman Bill Bates, who gets on base 70 percent of the time and makes defensive mistakes about as often as Haley's Comet cleans Josephine's toilet bowl pipes.

Unsurprisingly, Texas stands at 31-3 on the season and presently rides a 22-game winning streak.

So whether it's FM-290 or I-35, the road to the '85 SWC Baseball Championship still runs through Austin. Not a very original prediction, but a safe one.

And where does A&M fit in?

You can pencil in the Aggies right behind the Arkansas Razorbacks and right in front of the Baylor Bears. The Ags have hitting, but not very much power. And they have pitching when Arrington and Flowers are healthy and Kelly Keahey is pitching well, but they lack depth.

The Aggies should make the SWC Tournament, but they lack the seemingly one crucial ingredient to a conference championship in the past 15 years — an Austin address.

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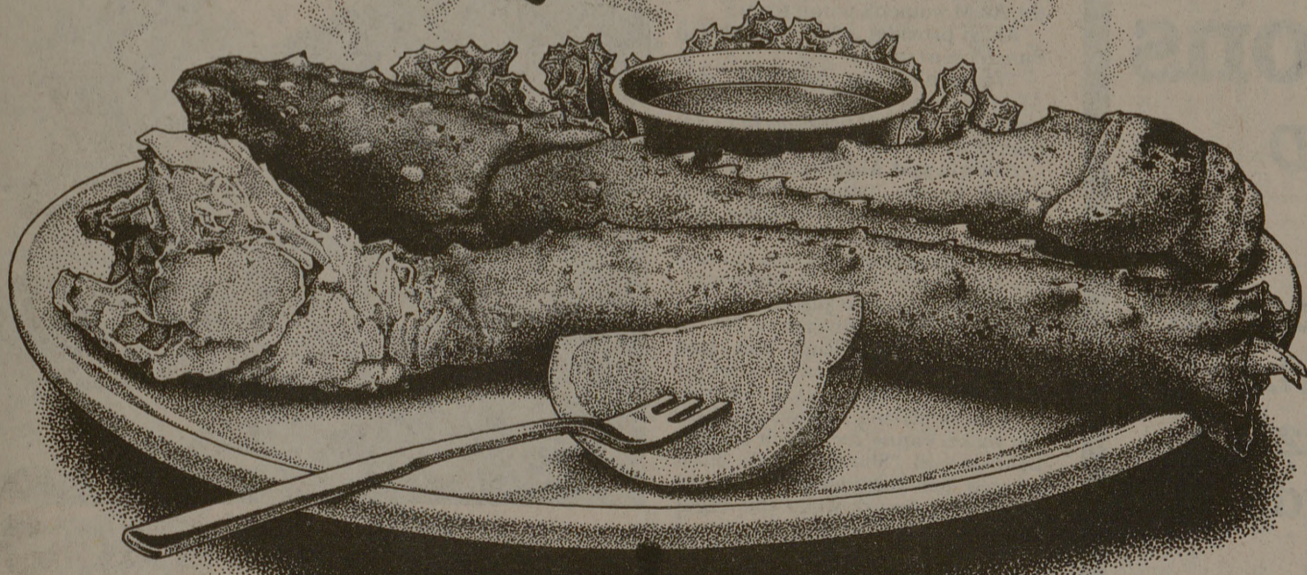
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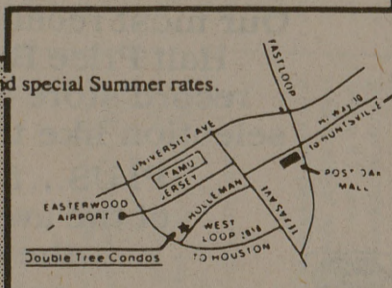
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