

SPORTS

Aggies counting on Horns

A&M needs help from Texas to host tourney

By CHAREAN WILLIAMS
Assistant Sports Editor

Just a week ago, the bookies had the odds in the Texas A&M baseball team's corner. The Aggies were favored to take at least two of three from Texas and move a step closer to the Southwest Conference Championship.

Now, a week later, the Aggies don't have roses wrapped around their necks. They aren't the front-running team. Shoot, they aren't even ranked in the Top 20 anymore.

"That's the structure of athletics," said A&M Coach Mark Johnson. "One week you're a hero and the next you're a bum."

After a disappointing three-game sweep by the Horns, the Ags (37-15, 10-8 in SWC) can only hope for help in order to even get to post-season play.

The Ags must count on arch-rival Texas to provide assistance. Texas must sweep Houston in their three-game series, which begins Saturday. The Ags must also take care of their own business in a three-game series with the TCU Horned Frogs in Fort Worth that begins Friday.

That would move the Ags to fourth in the SWC, allowing them to host the conference tournament.

"I think our chances are good," said Johnson, the Ags' first-year coach. "Texas is hot. Houston isn't as hot as they once were."

But, the Ags aren't as hot as they once were either.

"Losing three (games to Texas) certainly crushed any momentum we had," Johnson said. "We have to play our ball game and take them one at a time."

The TCU series won't be a "gimme."

"Their real power is in their right handed pitcher," Johnson said. "The (Major League baseball) scouts are real interested in him. He will be tough for us."

Gegan heeds Roosevelt's wisdom

By KENNETH SURY
Sports Writer

Fred Gegan must live by a slight variation to Theodore Roosevelt's famous words.

With Gegan, the phrase is "Talk softly and carry a big stick," because that's just what he's been doing this season as the Texas A&M baseball team's top hitter.

This soft-spoken transfer student from Kennewick, Wash., leads the Aggies with a .378 batting average going into this weekend's series against Texas Christian in Fort Worth.

The Ags must win all three games and hope league-leading Texas sweeps Houston this weekend to qualify for the Southwest Conference Tournament.

If the Ags sweep the Frogs, Gegan said he and the rest of the team will have an anxious Saturday and Sunday since the Houston-Texas series won't be over until late Sunday afternoon.

Even with the impending anxiety, Gegan is pleased with the Aggies' season thus far.

"I think we've had an excellent season," said the 5-foot-11 first baseman. "We had a really good season, if you take away those last three games against Texas. If we would have won two out of three or all three of those games, this would have been one of the best years that A&M's had because we would have been sitting in first place."

"We've played 55 games (including the TCU series) this year and it came down to three games (against Texas). That was really the turning point (of the season)."

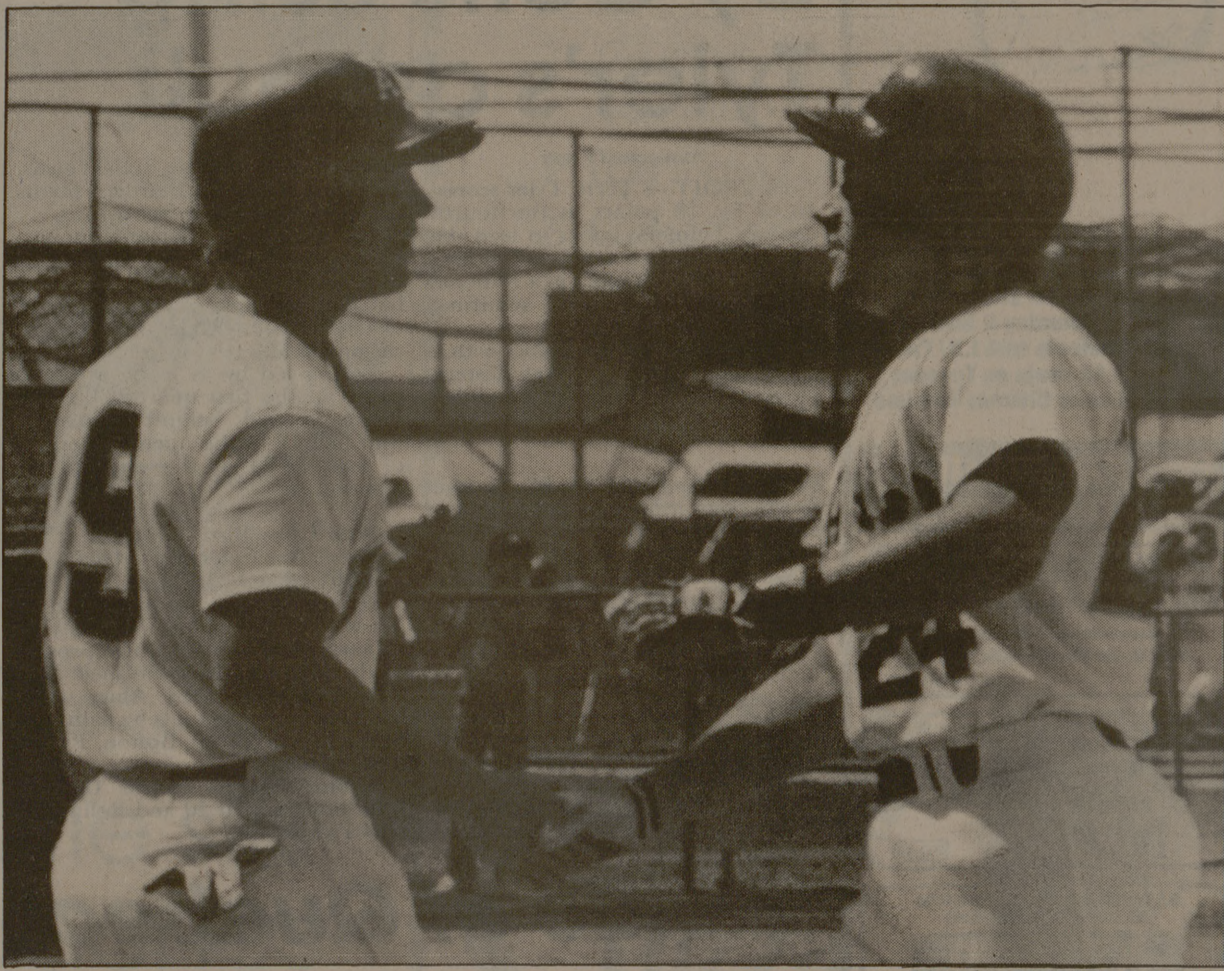
"We've still got a chance, but if we would have won those three games we would have been sitting in the driver's seat."

Gegan feels comfortable in the driver's seat.

Last year at Lower Columbia Junior College in Washington, he helped lead his team to the Northwest Junior College Championship in addition to being named an all-state player.

So how did Gegan end up at A&M?

Pure chance.



Texas A&M's Rob Swain (left) congratulates teammate Fred Gegan (right) after one of Gegan's ten home runs this season. Gegan, a

transfer from Lower Columbia Junior College in Washington, and Swain lead the Aggies in nearly every hitting category.

Photo by ANTHONY S. CASPER

"It was really a fluke that I came here because I was recruited to go to the University of Texas at El Paso by our (A&M) pitching coach, (Jim Lawler)," Gegan said.

(Lawler) recruited me for UTEP, but, at the end of the year, he found out he was going to get the assistant coaching job here, so he found out from (A&M Head) Coach (Mark) Johnson that he could bring me in here, so I got a lucky break there. I had no idea that I'd be coming to A&M."

But Gegan said he hasn't regretted the move to A&M.

"Yeah, I like it a lot," Gegan said. "There's all kinds of things to do and the weather's real nice. People are more friendly down here. I really noticed it."

"It's like they try to say, 'hi' to you instead of passing you by."

The warm weather was one of the reasons Gegan considered a move to Texas from his home state of Washington.

"My arm couldn't handle the cold," he said. "I couldn't get

loose there. I came down here and it's been a whole different ball game."

Gegan's other reason for heading south was to become more noticed in the college baseball scene.

"I came down to start over, establish something down here," he said.

"Fredgie," a nickname pinned on Gegan at Lower Columbia, has definitely established himself in his first year in maroon and white.

Gegan currently leads the Ags.

not only in batting average, but also hits, runs scored, RBIs and walks. He has already broken or tied some of A&M's season and individual game hitting records and should set more records during the TCU series.

Gegan attributes his hitting style as the reason he leads the team at the plate.

"I'm a picky hitter," Gegan said. "I always look for my pitch. I'll go up to the plate looking for a pitch in a certain zone, usually in the middle of the plate or to the inside of the plate. Anything that's outside or a little up or a little down I'll let go, until I get two strikes, then I battle (the pitcher)."

"I always like to try to hit my pitch. Doing that has given me a lot of walks."

But Gegan said he has changed his style since coming to A&M.

"When I was playing at junior college, I was more of a spray hitter — batting for average," he said. "When I came down here, I noticed that most of the hitters down here are more power hitters, a lot more pull hitters."

Gegan now tries to hit the ball harder and farther. He has 10 home runs this season, which is one more than the record he set last year at Lower Columbia.

For Gegan, and the rest of the A&M baseball team, next season will see major changes.

Several key players will be graduating after this season, including outfielders Buddy Haney and Shawn Choruby, pitchers Tom Arrington, Kelly Keahey and Phillip Taylor, catcher Steve Johnson and last season's All-Southwest Conference shortstop, Rob Swain.

Swain will especially be missed by the team.

Swain currently is batting .339 for the season and is second only to Gegan in RBI production this year.

Even though these players will be missing from next year's lineup, Gegan is optimistic.

"We've got a good base (to build from)," Gegan said, "with a lot of guys that did a good job this year. And then, with some of the recruits that we've got coming in, we should be all right next year."

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