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149/24

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192tfn

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Battalion File Photo

After a disappointing spring, A&M second baseman Judy Trussell (left) says the Ags are ready to win back their NCAA Championship.

Ag softball team already gearing for championship

By DOUG HALL
Sports Writer

Pressure is a term associated with teams that consistently finish high in the national standings.

Therefore, the Texas A&M Women's Softball Team under Coach Bob Brock expects the pressure to be there year after year.

"I wouldn't want it any other way," Brock said. "It (pressure) serves as a goal and a level that we must maintain. We use it as a motivating factor. It's expected of me to perform well and it's expected of my players."

After winning the NCAA National Softball Championship in '82 and '83, and finishing a close second in '84, the Ags were eliminated in the first round of the '85 tournament.

That disappointing loss, combined with the graduation of four starting seniors, including All-Americans Josie Carter and Gay McNutt, puts pressure on Brock's Ags to return to form and put together a national title contending season in the spring.

But two weeks ago in the Oklahoma State Softball Tournament in Stillwater, some of that pressure may have been relieved. The Aggies breezed through that tourney with a unblemished 6-0 record.

"We were pretty happy with the competition there (at the OSU tourney)," Brock said. "It was a good tournament for us this early in the season. We have a really fine team."

A&M All-American second baseman Judy Trussell agreed.

"We really did a good job," said Trussell, a junior from Lake Jackson. "Our hitting was excellent and so was our defense and the pitching was superb."

Brock admits the loss of four starters has left the Ags searching for help.

"I think it's hard to replace people who have been part of two national championships and one runner-up in the past four years," he said. "But I like seeing some upperclassmen who haven't gotten to play in the past getting a chance to start. We need to get that experience going."

Trussell said the Aggies haven't had much trouble adjusting to the loss of starters in the past because of Brock's solid recruiting.

"We lost a lot of people at real important positions (catcher, pitcher and two outfielders). But if last week was any indication, it didn't affect us hardly at all."

"As one group moves out, another

comes in and we just kind of adjust. We have to move on with what we have. And he (Brock) got some good recruits."

At the OSU tourney, which included highly regarded teams from Nebraska, Wichita State and host OSU, two A&M recruits came through with fine performances.

Carrie Heightley, a freshman from Bethany, Okla., inherited the starting catching duties for the upcoming '86 season.

Not an easy job, by anyone's standards, considering Heightley is taking over for All-American McNutt.

"I was very pleased with Carrie," Brock said. "She proved she could step in and catch some pretty big ball games."

Heightley said there was some pressure on her going into the tournament, but she was able to overcome it and play well.

"I put a lot more pressure on myself than anyone else did," Heightley said. "I had to come in and fill some pretty big shoes (replacing McNutt)."

"I was pretty nervous at first, but I got to catch every game and I did pretty well. As a team, we all played well together."

Julie Carpenter, a freshman pitcher from Huntington Beach, Ca., also stood out with a two-hit, 14 strike-out win over Iowa State in her opening performance.

Like many other sports these days, softball now requires year-round training and Brock's Ags are no exception.

The Aggies began weight training and strengthening exercises as well as running and exercising several days after school started.

"Weight training definitely benefits women almost overnight," Brock said. "It has been a big factor in our success."

The OSU tournament is the only time the Ags will play this fall, due to a new NCAA ruling, which limits each team to 60 games per year.

Brock will use his remaining 54 games in the spring traveling across the nation playing as an independent.

"We usually take it one game at a time," Brock said. "We do the best we can and work toward our other season, that's the (NCAA) playoffs."

Heightley agreed, saying, "We are taking it one game at a time. I think everyone learned from last year not to jump ahead toward anything."

Trussell said, "Last year was just really disappointing. But I think we are ready for this year. We just have to go out and do our best. I think we will be alright."

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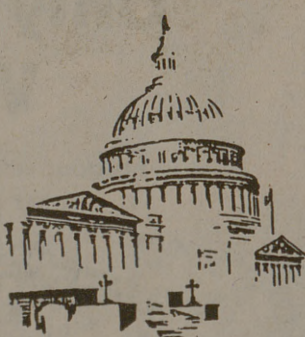
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