

Ranger perfects 'knuckler'

Associated Press

POMPANO BEACH, Fla. — Texas Rangers pitcher Charlie Hough has been winning games with 60 mph pitches for 16 years and he can't understand why the knuckleball gets no respect.

"If you're getting hit, it doesn't make any difference how hard you're throwing," Hough said. "I've sat back there with the gun (a device to clock the speed of pitches) on Dave Stewart. He was throwing every pitch 92-93 miles per hour and they were hitting them out 103-104 miles per hour."

Stewart, a hard-throwing Ranger reliever last season, is gone and Hough, 38, is still around, throwing up an assortment of diving, dipping flutterballs that have made him the ace of the staff.

"A guy throws 90 miles per hour and he's getting killed and the first thing they say is 'Wow, how are they hitting that good stuff,'" Hough said. "I get hit and they say, 'This guy stinks.'"

Hough actually has learned to accept the pitch's lack of respect just as he's learned to remain placid when the knuckler isn't working.

"That's why they call him 'Happy.'" "Sitting on the sidelines and seeing some guy out there without much talent getting killed throwing 60 miles per hour, you don't think much of it," Hough said.

Hough started throwing the knuckler in 1970, when he was with the Los Angeles Dodgers. It's been the salvation of his major league career.

A shoulder injury forced Hough, in desperation, to attempt to master the knuckleball.

"I went to (Tommy) Lasorda and told him I wanted to try it and he said I'd better learn it quick because I'd be gone otherwise," Hough recalled.

Even after he came to the Rangers in 1980, his position wasn't solidified.

"They could have cut me based on my performance that spring," he said. "Heck, they could almost do that any spring."

But the Rangers have allowed Hough to prepare for the season his way, giving him the amount of time to pitch, whether it be in B games or simulated games.

"The thing about a knuckle ball is you have to throw it a lot in the spring," he said. "You have to get more work than the normal pitcher."

Hough led the American League with 17 complete games in 1984 and he finished 14 more games last season. He had a 14-16 record on the last-place team in the Western Division.

"I don't think of it as a trick pitch," he said. "For me, it's Nolan Ryan's fast ball, Don Sutton's curve, Goose Gossage's fast ball or somebody else's forkball."

"It's my best pitch, so I throw it."

Ag women club Hogs; men ease by Tar Heels

The Texas A&M men's and women's tennis team overcame separate obstacles on their way to Wednesday match victories.

The A&M women crushed Arkansas 9-0 at Omar Smith Tennis Center.

In singles play, the Aggies (12-3) lost the first set in four of the six matches, but rebounded in the last two sets

Tennis

all six times. "We did expect to win all nine matches," A&M Coach Bobby Kleinecke said. "But when we lost those four first sets in singles, I became a little skeptical. We fought back well though which gave us some confidence."

No. 1 seeded Vanne Akagi and fifth seeded Helen Christiaanse were the only Ags that didn't run into any trouble. Akagi cruised to a 7-5, 6-3 win over Betsy Meacham while Christiaanse whipped Sandy Schwan 6-2, 6-1.

Meanwhile, the A&M men had to overcome the absence of their No. 1 player in a 6-3 win over North Carolina at Royal Oaks Racquet Club.

While Kimmo Alkio was sitting on the sidelines with an ankle injury, Mark Smith moved into the No. 1 spot and upset UNC's Jeff Chambers, 5-7, 6-4, 6-3.

"Mark Smith did a great job," A&M Coach David Kent said. "I think that's the first time we've ever beaten Jeff."

The Ags (11-6) won three of four three-set matches in singles play.

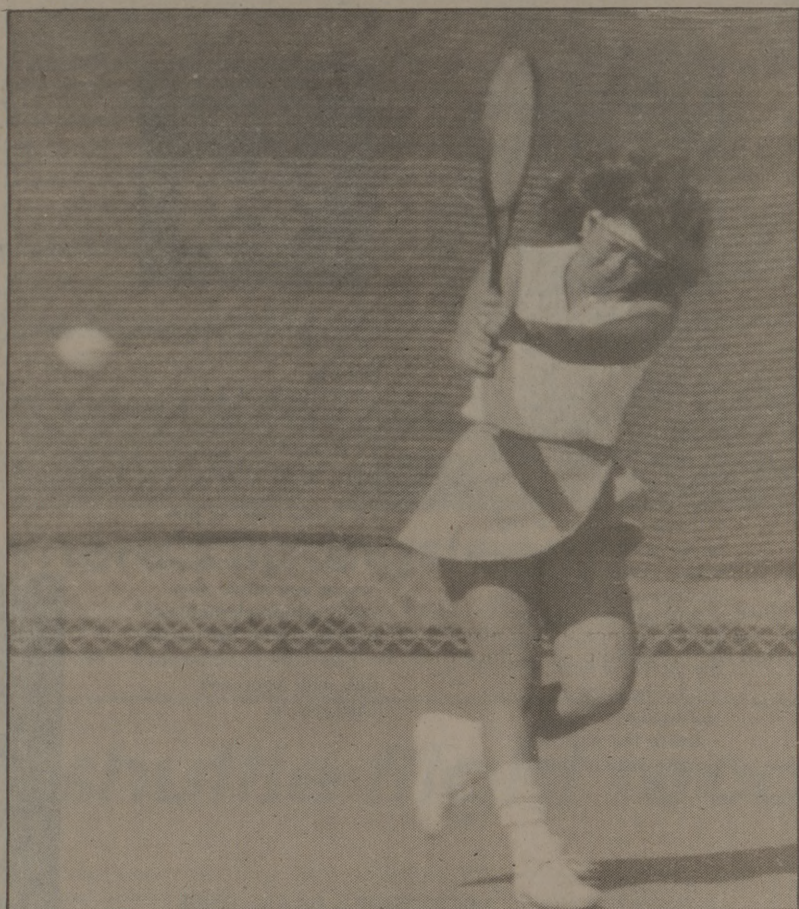


Photo by PAULA SAYRE

A&M's Vanne Akagi, the Aggies' No. 1 singles player, slams a back-hand across the net during Wednesday's match with Arkansas.

UCLA tries to establish new tradition

Associated Press

UCLA, which established an awesome tradition under Coach John Wooden in the NCAA basketball tournament, hopes to begin another one — on a smaller scale in the National Invitation Tournament.

During 1964-75, the Bruins were the NCAA tournament, winning it in 10 of those 12 years.

More often than not, as the defending champion with players like Walt Hazzard (a senior on that first championship team), Gail Goodrich, Lew Alcindor, Bill Walton, Larry Farmer and Marques Johnson, UCLA was all but conceded the title as the tournament began.

Now the Bruins, with Hazzard as their coach instead of their playmaker and 1964 NCAA Player of the Year, are the NIT defending champions — and hoping to become only the second team in the 49-year

NIT Roundup

history of the tournament to win the title twice in a row.

St. John's, now more preoccupied with trying to return for the second consecutive year to the NCAA's Final Four, won the NIT in 1943 and 1944. Nobody before or since has achieved that feat.

The Bruins begin the pursuit of

that quest Thursday night at home in Pauley Pavilion against Cal-Irvine. The Anteaters are 16-12, the Bruins 15-13. No UCLA team has lost that many games since the 1947-48 squad went 12-13.

Upstarts McNeese State and Southwest Missouri State used their home courts to good advantage Wednesday night and beat a pair of big-time programs in first-round National Invitation Tournament games while Boston University fell just short of duplicating that feat.

At Lake Charles, La., Jerome Batiste and Kenny Jimerson combined for 45 points as McNeese's Southland Conference champions re-

corded its 21st consecutive home victory with an 86-75 triumph over Dayton.

And at Springfield, Mo., Winston Garland scored 15 points and had eight steals to lead Southwest Missouri over Pittsburgh 59-52.

However, Providence, playing at home, sank 12 of 13 free throws in the last 3½ minutes and withstood a last-minute scoring binge by Jeff Timberlake to edge Boston University 72-69.

Batiste, an honorable mention All-American, scored 24 points and led McNeese with 12 rebounds. Jimerson scored 21 points and Mike Marshall had 15.

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