

Sports

Desperately seeking SWC best

Tom Tagliabue
Sports Viewpoint

The Southwest Conference has a lot of talented athletes on the baseball diamond and now that the season is over, it's time for this pencil-pushing prognosticator to pick the All-SWC team members.

• **First base:** Dave Patterson, Arkansas. The senior slugger is hitting .409 in conference play, leads in runs scored, second in hits and RBI and is third in home runs.

• **Second base:** This is the biggest toss-up position in the conference. No one player has stood out all season long. The top contenders appear to be Lynn Van Every of Arkansas, Ben Mathews of Rice and Shawn McAfee of Baylor. McAfee's offensive numbers are better, but this choice ought to be made on defensive abilities. Unfortunately, I don't have any to go on, so I'll eeny-meeny-miny-mo on Mathews.

• **Shortstop:** Forget the hitting stats, there should be no doubt that A&M's Ever Magallanes is the best shortstop in the SWC, bar none. He's even picked up some clutch hits in the last couple of series. This one is a sure thing.

• **Third base:** This looked to be a two-man race between Jeff King of Arkansas and Jay Searcy of Texas. But the numbers tell me all I need to know — King is the better of the two. King should make his second appearance on the All-SWC team, unless someone just totally ignores the excellent offensive stats of the leading RBI man in the conference. He ranks fifth or better in five offensive categories.

• **Outfield:** There are lots of players to choose from, but my choices are — Mike Scanlin of A&M, Mike Malinak of Baylor and Ralph Kraus of Arkansas.

Kraus has the highest SWC batting average (.475), the most hits (38) and the most doubles (14). He ranks third or better in three other offensive categories.

Malinak gets the next spot in the outfield because he hit seven home runs to lead the SWC and ranked in the top five in five other offensive categories.

The final spot will go to Scanlin,

despite a slump near the end of conference play. Scanlin, who finished with a .378 SWC average, edges out Scott Coolbaugh of Texas.

Scanlin, as has been well documented before, has nearly rewritten the A&M record books. He holds 11 Aggie records and is approaching more.

• **Catcher:** Bubba Jackson of TCU has the numbers to back his selection, although his arm didn't impress me this past weekend. Jackson is one of the top hitters in the SWC with 26 hits, including four homers.

• **Designated hitter:** Kevin Garner of Texas was by far the big gun of DHs in the SWC. My sentimental pick is Pat James of A&M, who in my opinion, became the most consistent hitter on the A&M team late in the season.

• **Pitcher:** Finally, another easy one.

If you want a three-man rotation, you can't go wrong with Greg Swindell of Texas, Dale Barry of A&M and Steve Parker of Arkansas.

Swindell is Mr. All-Everything in the pitching department. He is widely recognized as the best pitcher in college baseball today. He was 6-2 in conference with a 1.61 ERA and had 86 strikeouts, which nobody in the conference even came close to.

Dale Barry, who transferred to A&M from Texas-El Paso after it dropped baseball, was superb all year. His only loss of the season came at the hands of Swindell, a 3-1 decision in Austin. Barry finished SWC play with a 6-1 record and a 2.29 ERA.

Parker, who finished at 6-1 with a 2.57 ERA, recorded the only no-hitter of the season against A&M. Parker nearly picked up another against Texas, but a ninth-inning hit spoiled the no-hitter.

• **Coach of the Year:** A&M second-year Head Coach Mark Johnson. His team started out an awful 2-6, but bounced back. Just before conference play started, the Ags were trounced by national powers Mississippi State and Hawaii. The Ags started SWC play by getting beaten up by UH. Somehow Johnson pulled his team out of the nose dive and turned them into SWC co-champions. Some say the Ags backed into the crown, but no doubt about it, Johnson's team did what was needed to win.

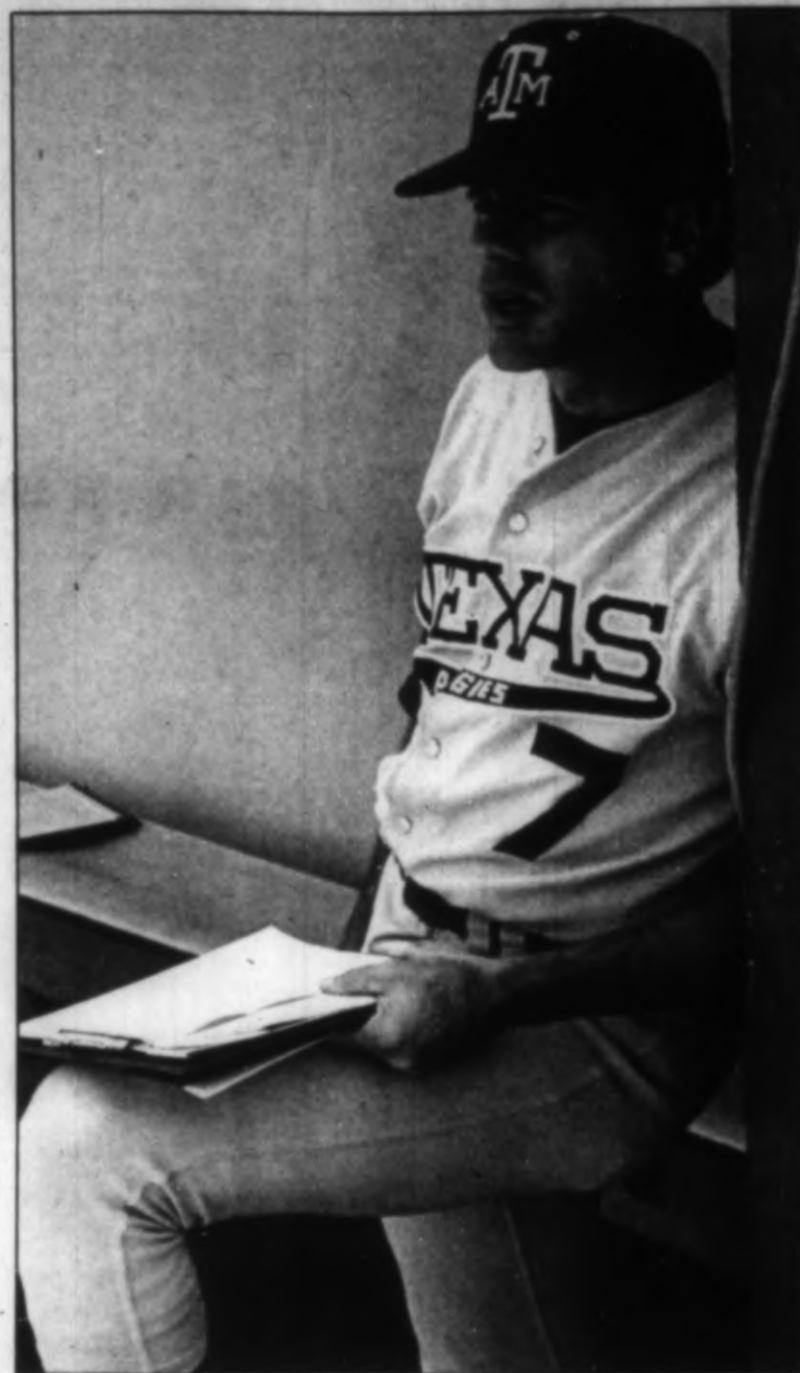


Photo by Anthony S. Casper

A&M Head Baseball Coach Mark Johnson monitors the action during last weekend's conference-clinching series with TCU.

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