

Sports

A&M trio is pillar of strength for young baseball squad

By Doug Hall
Sports Writer

Over the past century of baseball, America's favorite pastime has left us with sets of names that just naturally go together.

Gherig and Ruth, Spahn and Cain, Drysdale and Koufax and the magical double-play combination of Tinkers to Evans to Chance.

But to Texas A&M Baseball Coach Mark Johnson, who begins his third season at the helm of the Aggie squad on Friday, the names of Fry, Magallanes and Livingstone have tremendous significance.

The Aggies, whose 1986 record of 45-23 allowed them to win the Southwest Conference tournament and advance to the NCAA regional playoffs, will take on Northeast Louisiana at 3:00 p.m. at Olsen Field in their opener.

A&M will be led by co-captains Darryl Fry and Ever Magallanes as well as 1985 All-SWC third baseman Scott Livingstone.

Fry, a left-handed pitcher out of Houston North Shore, enters his senior season for A&M coming off an impressive 11-5 record in '86 that included 60 strikeouts in 97 innings.

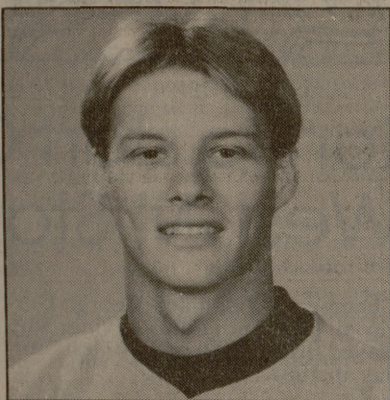
During the off-season, Johnson said Fry added an additional 10 pounds to his 5-11 frame in hopes of increasing his velocity.

But Fry, who said he is only concerned with getting his arm in shape at this point, is known more for the location of his pitches than his velocity.

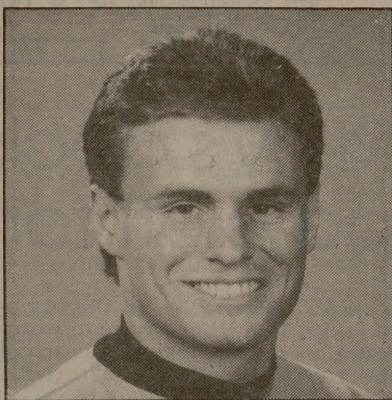
"I'm not really trying to throw hard," Fry said Monday at the pre season press conference. "I throw four different pitches and I'm just trying to stabilize my control on those. I want to have the confidence to throw any pitch at any time."

In addition to Fry, the Aggies return three pitchers to the mound who had playing experience last year. Johnson said righthanders Gary Geiger and Russ Greene and southpaw Pat Wernig all will figure in his rotation, although the order has yet to be decided.

But Johnson also said the Aggies



Darryl Fry



Scott Livingstone

were counting on help from Ed Perez, transfers Tim Herrmann and Sean Snedeker and highly touted freshman Randy Pryor from Pearl-

and. Fry knows the difficulty of stepping on the mound against major college teams — especially as a freshman.

"I could tell at every level of ball how much the hitters improved," he said. "In high school, a team might have had three good hitters. In junior college, maybe they had five good hitters. But in college, everybody you face can hit the ball out of the park."

The long ball, as a matter of fact, was something the Aggies hit with regularity last year. Unfortunately for Johnson however, the majority of those hitters have moved on to the minor leagues. The lone exception being Livingstone who combined a .302 average with seven home runs and 46 RBI.

But hitting the ball deep is not a primary concern for Livingstone, who along with senior shortstop Magallanes combines for what Johnson called "a left side of the infield that will be as good as any in the country."

"I'm just going to do what comes naturally," the junior from Lake Highlands said. "If the long ball comes, then it will come. A lot of

people are telling me that I'm the one who has to supply the power this year, but I think we're going to concentrate on improving all areas of our game."

One of the keys to last years co-championship team was Magallanes' ability to step in and fill the shoes of shortstop Rob Swain. The 5-11 native of Chihuahua, Mexico played junior college baseball at Cerritos Junior College in California before transferring to A&M prior to the '86 season.

His steady fielding and .310 average was good enough for him to be drafted by the New York Mets last summer.

But Magallanes, like Fry (also drafted by the Mets) and Livingstone (New York Yankees), all chose to return to A&M for this year's campaign.

"I'm ready to get the season started," Magallanes said. "It's going to be an extremely exciting race. We've got a lot of young guys (as of Monday Johnson planned to start at least three freshmen) in the line up, but they're all good athletes."

Offensively, Magallanes said he would like to hit in the .300 range again, but driving in runs and putting the ball in play are just as important to him.

As important to him, as Fry, Magallanes, and Livingstone are to Johnson's 1987 Aggies.

Controversy continues to cloud NCAA's 19'9" three-point basket

By Hal L. Hammons
Sports Writer

In the "unusual sports news" department last month, the NCAA got front page billing. Who else could take an already-controversial subject and make it even more so?

Viewpoint

But let me explain. By now every member of the sports fan community knows about the latest scourge of college basketball. I refer, of course, to the three-point shot of song and story. Those on high decided before the advent of the present season that any shot 19'9" or farther from the basket was worth three points instead of the regular two.

Now, anybody who watched North Carolina State steal the national championship away from Houston a few years ago, knows there are people who find shots of that magnitude to be somewhat simple.

However, the criterion is not difficult to meet. If you doubt it, go to the Read Building on a Saturday morning and watch all of the non-scholarship talent at our own university. Hey, I can make seven or eight out of ten if I get hot.

On the surface, the NCAA seems to have come to the same conclusion. NCAA officials, in their infinite wisdom, agree that saying a 19'9" jump shot is worth three points is inappropriate. And they say they have fixed the problem. Beginning immediately, the three-point line is being moved back to 21 feet. Sort of.

And I say "sort of" because of the most bizarre part of the whole arrangement. Instead of counting distance from the center of the hoop as before, the distance will now be numbered from the center of the backboard. This amounts to 15 inches added to the shot.

Give me a break.

I'm not trying to misrepresent anybody. I'm just finding it difficult to see the reasoning behind calling a jump shot of a certain length a jump shot of that length plus 15 inches.

In a phone conversation with Ed Steitz, secretary of the NCAA rules committee, Steitz insisted the change in terminology was to equate the three-point distance with free-throw distance. Free throws are 15 feet from the backboard, not from the middle of the hoop as is commonly believed.

However, the two do not equate. The free-throw line is drawn in relation to the baseline, not the basket. The three-point line is drawn to be a set distance from the basket.

The problem is not, as Steitz sees it, that people misunderstand the relative distances on a basketball court. The problem is that the entire concept of a three-point shot in college basketball is lame to begin with.

For a complete understanding of the motives and intents behind the three-point shot, one must step back in time a bit.

It all started with the ABA. It was a fledgling trying to fly with the NBA eagle. Like all young leagues, it needed some kind of draw that would make athletes and fans come to it rather than the more established one.

The draws of the ABA were basically three in number: a red, white and blue ball; Julius Erving; the three-point shot.

The three-pointer provided extra excitement to a league that needed any kind of attraction it could get. Halftime fireworks, dancing bears, anything.

Then, a few years after the two leagues merged, the NBA decided it needed more excitement, which would translate into more ratings points.

The NBA decided it could create more excitement by helping teams come from way behind to make games close. And if it could open up lanes to allow Erving and those like him to penetrate for graceful layups and devastating dunks, so much the better.

So the league looked in its garbage cans and found the three-pointer.

Then college ball, ever the trend-follower, decided it was a pretty

good idea and some of the conferences decided to try it out.

The distances from the basket varied. One of the closest was in the ACC at 19'9". Teams like North Carolina, N. C. State, Georgia Tech and Duke proceeded to make ribbons out of the net from long range just as they always had, except the teams got three points per shot for it.

After that fiasco, NCAA officials promptly decided that 19'9" sounded pretty good for the whole league.

The first, and still the biggest, question in my mind about the question of three-point shots was, "Why?" None of the old motives for starting it apply in the case of the NCAA.

College basketball never has and never will need any help to draw in fans. And those fans don't feel the need for artificial means of interest stimulation. The game is exciting enough as it is.

And most of the basketball fans I know, pro and college alike, seem to think that if a team has trailed a better team for the entire game, and with five minutes to play, has to resort to three-pointers to get back in the game, that team *deserves* to lose. Doesn't that make sense?

But the basic fact of the matter is that a shot from 19'9" (or 21 feet, however you want to measure it) is just not worth an extra point.

In games prior to Jan. 26 by Southwest Conference teams this year, the combined shooting percentage was 47 percent. The teams shot a combined 35 percent from three-point range.

So essentially, the NCAA is giving 50 percent more points for a shot that's 12 percent more difficult to make. Pretty sensible, huh? I can't figure out why teams with fair long-range shooters don't take a three-pointer every trip down the floor. Mathematically, it should result in more points.

Hopefully the NCAA will realize that the problem is not with the measuring system, but with the entire concept. It's not fair, and it's certainly not needed.

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