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Sports

A&M's young players give Geiger time to concentrate on pitching

By Doug Hall
Sports Writer

In the 1985-86 baseball season, one in which the Texas A&M Aggies shared a piece of the Southwest Conference championship for the first time since 1978, Gary Geiger was a double-duty man.

On the mound, in his natural position, the 6-foot right hander earned seven of the Aggies' 45 victories and finished with an ERA of 4.27.

And due to the early-season injury to starting first baseman Fred Gegan, Geiger had 27 hits in 102 at bats for a .265 batting average while platooning at first base.

This year, however, thanks to the first base play of sophomore Jim Neumann and freshman Daron Dacus, Head Coach Mark Johnson has been able to leave Geiger on the mound to concentrate on his pitching.

The results speak for themselves. In 13 appearances, Geiger's 7-2 record is currently leading the team. His 3.58 ERA places him third on the team behind Randy Pryor and Russ Greene, and his 60.1 innings are second on the staff.

For Geiger, not having to play both positions has paid off immensely, although he said last year worked out just fine.

"In junior college I played some third base," Geiger said. "But I came here as a pitcher and didn't intend on playing in the infield. But it worked out okay because I was hitting the ball."

"Just pitching gives me a lot more time to concentrate. I don't have to worry about going 0-for-4 at the plate. All I have to do is concentrate on throwing the ball."

In all likelihood, with the way Geiger has been throwing the ball, the senior will start one of the Aggies two games against Rice on Saturday. Darryl Fry, A&M's ace from Houston North Shore, probably will start the series opener Friday at 7 a.m. at Cameron Field.

Official starting pitchers have not been announced.

Although Rice is having somewhat of a mediocre season (22-13 and 5-7 in the SWC), Geiger said the Aggies can not afford to take Owls lightly, especially with the weekend series against Texas around the corner.

"Anyone in the Southwest Conference can beat anybody else on a given day," Geiger said. "The (Rice's junior righthander Todd) den is throwing the ball real right now. We just want to get him at the moment."

"I just hope the young players aren't looking forward to the series. We've got to get by Rice."

The Aggies, 33-13-1 on the year and 6-3 in the SWC, can ill-afford to lose a game this weekend, especially dropping the first three games in the opening series against Arkansas, A&M has proceeded to win six straight SWC games, sweeping over Texas Tech and Baylor.

But between this weekend's series with Rice and next weekend's series with Texas, the Aggies will travel to Stillwater, Ok., to face #1 Oklahoma State University on Monday night. That game will be televised on ESPN.

Cook subdues Augusta greens to grab Masters 1st-round lead

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — John Cook used a new attitude and an old putter to subdue glass-slick greens with a 69 that established the first-round lead Thursday in the 51st Masters.

"The greens played as fast as any I've ever putted on," Cook said. "It was scary."

"A couple of times, if I'd hit the putt any easier, I'd have whiffed it," said Cook, 29, who has won twice in an injury-plagued eight-year PGA Tour career.

"It was a battle," said Cook, who used only 24 putts on the most difficult, frustrating greens the Augusta National Golf Club has presented in years.

For comparable conditions, two-time Masters winner Tom Watson thought back to 1970. Jack Nicklaus nominated 1966.

"You get it above the cup, then miss the hole, you can four-putt," said Larry Mize, whose 70 left him alone in second place.

Jodie Mudd made Mize a prophet, four-putting on the 11th hole.

"The greens were too firm, extremely fast," said West German Bernhard Langer, who won the title in 1985. He three-putted twice on the way to a 71 that nonetheless left him very much in contention.

Tied with Langer at 71 were Watson, Calvin Peete, Curtis Strange, Payne Stewart and Corey Pavin, the only two-time winner on the PGA Tour this year.

Scott Simpson, a winner last week in the Greensboro Open, led a group at par 72. A large group at 73 included Greg Norman, two-time Masters champ Seve Ballesteros of Spain and the ever-present Tom Kite, not yet a Masters winner but often a challenger.

Norman, who dominated world golf last year, backed away from a 2-foot putt on the 12th hole, nervously wiped his palm on his pants leg and then addressed the ball again. He missed the putt.

"The speed of the greens was the crux of the matter," said Norman, who won 10 tournaments around the world last year. "One putt, on the 16th, was the fastest I've had anywhere in the world."

The leader, too, positively trembled over a 12-foot putt on the 16th.

"It was the scariest putt I've ever had," he said. "If it doesn't catch some part of the hole, it's off the green. I think that's the only time in my life I've had a 12-footer I simply didn't want to putt. I was ready to concede."

He didn't, however, and sank the putt.

"I've tried to adopt a new attitude: not treat the tour as a business, just go out and have fun," said Cook, who still is pained by old injuries to the wrist and elbow.

To complement that new attitude, he went to an old putter one he used in winning the U.S. Amateur championship.

It went back in his bag a couple of weeks ago after his club bag had been lost during a flight to New Orleans.

"Maybe it was a blessing in disguise," Cook said.

Some of golf's great ones couldn't handle the demands of one of the world's most famous courses.

Arnold Palmer, 57, who has much of his legend around his four Masters victories, struggled to an 83. He wasn't alone in his difficulties.

Ray Floyd, the current U.S. Open champion and a former winner here, had a 75. Another former champion, Fuzzy Zerkel, shot 76. Sandy Lyle of Scotland, recent winner of the Tourney Players Championship, had a 77. And Bob Tway, the current U.S. title-holder, was at 78.

Lee Trevino, who has a history of trouble in this tournament, had an 80.

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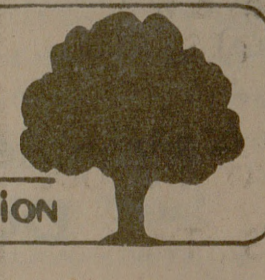
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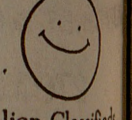
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