

Sports

'87 Aggies could be overachievers

By Homer Jacobs
Sports Editor

Most college football experts agree that the 1987 Southwest Conference race will be a battle between the Arkansas Razorbacks and Texas A&M, with the majority of the so-called aficionados picking Arkansas to grab the conference crown.

A&M is supposedly in a transition year after losing quarterback Kevin Murray and other key starters like Rod Bernstine, Roger Vick and Johnny Holland.

Could it be a down year for the two-time defending SWC champs? No way.

Granted the Aggies have a lot of young, untested talent that will take the field, but game by game those youngsters will undoubtedly improve.

And there are going to be plenty

of pleasant surprises on this year's squad for Aggie fans to enjoy.

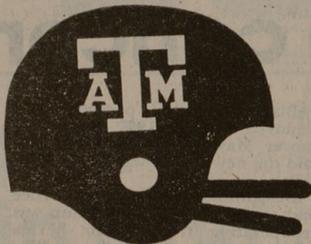
For example, before the 1986 Cotton Bowl against Auburn, such players like Bernstine and kicker Scott Slater were hardly game breakers. Last fall, they became game savers.

This season, look for players like strong safety Chet Brooks and line-backer Dana Batiste to step to the forefront and grab superstar status.

But what is going to make the 1987 season interesting for Aggie fans is the unpredictability of a young team and a schedule that may be unmatched in quality in college football this year.

A good example of unpredictability stirring interest came in the Aggies' 1985 march from mediocrity to a national power.

No one expected A&M to beat SMU 19-17 on a 47-yard field goal by Eric Franklin, then sneak past Arkansas 10-6 and finally trounce the



Longhorns 42-10 for an outright SWC title.

That year marked the first time the Aggies had picked Cotton and gone to Dallas since 1968. That year started a new trend at A&M — winning consistently.

It was the best of times for all Aggies, new and old. The Aggies then seemed to be on the brink of a national championship in '86. But after

upset losses to LSU and Arkansas, A&M had to settle for *justa* Cotton Bowl berth without a shot at a national title.

The season was a case of expectation being overpowered by reality. The Aggies were 9-3, but the season ended on a sour note with the poor performance by Murray in the Cotton Bowl, resulting in a 28-12 loss to Ohio State.

But the 1987 campaign could be a case of lower expectations giving way to higher achievement. With a favorable home schedule, including battles with Louisiana State, Washington, Arkansas and Texas at Kyle Field, A&M could sneak up on everybody.

This season is probably the last time for at least the next three or four years that A&M will not be picked to win the SWC in football, with its stockpile of talent waiting in the wings.

In any case, the year will be a memorable one, win or lose.

Astros becoming frustrated with poor hitting since All-Star break

HOUSTON (AP) — Houston's Kevin Bass and Bill Doran each vented their frustrations in the homestand finale against Philadelphia Sunday by slamming their helmets to the turf.

It's becoming an Astros ritual.

The Astros had better luck hitting the ground with their helmets than hitting baseballs with their bats in the opening games of the second half of the season.

The power outage has pushed tempers to the limit.

"I can't stand much more of this, I'm going to start breaking things," Doran said. "You guys (media) come in here asking the same questions and we have to give the same answers."

"I don't know what the answer is. We just have to keep battling."

The Astros, who surged from the All-Star break to win the National League Western Division title last season, have not found such a magic formula in the opening series after the break this season.

The Astros scored only six runs in losing three of four games to the Phillies. Sunday's loss dropped the Astros below .500 for the first time since June 8 and into third place.

They completed the home stand that started before the All-Star break with a 3-8 record and opened a road trip at Montreal Monday night.

Pitchers Nolan Ryan, 4-11, and Bob Knepper, 3-11, who follow Mike Scott in the rotation, have a combined 7-22 record.

Glenn Davis, the team's power hitter, hasn't hit a home run since July 2. In the 11-game home stand, Davis got six hits and drove in one run, leaving 16 other baserunners stranded.

Ryan stepped in a hole on his ranch during the All-Star break and missed his first turn in the rotation with a sprained ankle. He pitched 2 1/2 innings Sunday but left with a hip injury.

The Astros were thwarted Sunday by Bruce Ruffin, who brought a 6-7 record and 4.37 earned run average

into the game. Ruffin's sinker pitch resulted in 20 ground ball outs.

"We can't keep getting beat by guys who have a high ERA and bad records," Manager Hal Lanier said.

The Astros hitting would be even worse without rookies Ken Caminiti and Gerald Young in the lineup.

Caminiti, called up from Class AA after the All-Star break, has been involved in five of the six runs. Young drove in the winning run, scoring Caminiti, in Thursday night's victory.

Young is anxious to stick with the major league club and not return to Class AAA at Tucson.

"I can't let myself get too up or too down because whatever happens today, I still have to come back tomorrow and do my job," Young said.

Caminiti is hitting .500 on seven hits in 14 at bats with two home runs, a triple, double and three runs batted in in his brief stay with the Astros.

Despite their travails, the Astros started the road trip trailing Cincinnati by only 3 1/2 games.

Long still in baseball record book as Mattingly's homer streak ends

From the Associated Press

The name Dale Long is still part of baseball history.

Long, while on a business trip, watched on television Thursday night as All-Star Don Mattingly hit a home run for the sixth consecutive game, tying the American League record.

Mattingly broke the AL mark Friday night and tied Long's 31-year-old major league record of hitting a home run in eight straight games Saturday.

Long saw the replays and read the stories, then called Mattingly to offer congratulations.

On Sunday night at Texas, the New York Yankees first baseman tried to break Long's mark and add another footnote to his increasing list of honors. But all he could manage was a single and double as the Rangers' Greg Harris and Jeff Russell combined to stop the streak. The Yankees lost 20-3.

Mattingly was the AL MVP in 1985 and the runner-up last season. His 238 hits in 1986 tied the Yankees' all-time record for one season

and his 53 doubles broke Lou Gehrig's club record of 52, set in 1927.

Long said after Sunday's game that he was proud to share his record with Mattingly.

"If I had to pinpoint one person playing baseball to break my record, it would have been Don Mattingly," Long said. "He told me on the phone (before the game) he'd sacrifice a home run for a Yankee win. That's my type of player."

Long spent 12 years playing for 15 clubs in 12 leagues before he made the headlines in 1956 with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Long recalled that after he had homered in five straight games the word was out that he was on to something special.

"I had been feeling loose," Long said. "... The next day (May 25, 1956) against Curt Simmons of the Phillies I hit my sixth."

Long said he made a deliberate attempt to break the record on May 26. In the eighth inning he hit an 0-2 pitch off the Phillies' Ben Flowers to set the record and become a hero, at least for a day.

Long appeared on the "Ed Sullivan Show," got a raise from the Pirates and a Pittsburgh bread and milk company hired him to plug their products. There was even a Dale Long T-Shirt.

He made eight straight games with a fourth-inning homer against Brooklyn's Carl Erskine on May 28 and won the game 3-2 for the Pirates.

"When I hit it, I didn't think it was going," Long recalled. "The ball just cleared the right-field wall in Forbes Field."

The 32,221 fans at Forbes Field made Long come out for a curtain call, something reserved for truly great moments 30 years ago.

The next morning, Long awoke at 4 a.m. to appear on the "Today Show." That night Brooklyn's hard-throwing Don Newcombe stopped the streak.

"The newspaper fellows wrote afterward that Newcombe overpowered me," Long said. "But the fact is I was tired. I was so beat up I couldn't get my bat around. You can do that. I'd face Newcombe and expect to hit a homer."

Strawberry accepts new batting niche

NEW YORK (AP) — The lineup change was handled quietly but its significance could not be ignored. Darryl Strawberry bats cleanup for the New York Mets now.

Strawberry, fined twice and benched once this season by Manager Davey Johnson, inherited the No. 4 slot in the lineup Sunday when catcher Gary Carter, who usually bats fourth, was rested as usual in a day game after a night game. But Johnson said Strawberry would stay put, even when Carter plays.

"You'll see more of this lineup," Johnson said. "The middle of the lineup hasn't produced. Darryl is getting on base more than any of those guys and has been the most consistent driving in runs. He's hitting left-handed pitching better, even better than Carter, and deserves to be in the responsibility spot."

That's fine with Strawberry, who has yearned for the niche for some time.

"I'm glad Davey is giving me this opportunity," he said. "It tells me that Davey wants me to bat in more situations with runners on base. That's what I want, too."

Johnson and Strawberry haven't always seen eye to eye this season. The manager fined the right fielder \$1,500 in spring training for missing one day's work and arriving late for another. Then Strawberry was fined \$250 for being late to the ball park two straight days in Chicago last month. Johnson kept Strawberry on the bench for two days.

When first place St. Louis played a three-game series in New York at the end of the month, Strawberry appeared at a recording studio in Manhattan but then begged off playing two of the games because he said he was sick. Teammates Wally Backman and Lee Mazzilli publicly questioned his dedication to the team, creating a tense situation in the clubhouse.

Now, though, Johnson has pinned the Mets' second half hopes on the lanky right fielder. "For us to make a run (streak), we need big production from Darryl," the manager said.

"It'll be a big lift for me," said Strawberry. "It'll be nice seeing those ducks out there on base, knowing I have a chance to drive them in."

Mattingly not upset home run streak over

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Don Mattingly took the end of the streak in stride.

"I'm not disappointed it's over," the New York Yankees first baseman said Sunday night after failing to hit a homer for the first time in nine games. "I knew it was over tonight one way or the other."

Mattingly had homered in eight consecutive games to tie the major league record set in 1956 by Pittsburgh's Dale Long. But in a 20-3 loss to Texas Sunday night, he singled and doubled in four at-bats.

"I think they wanted to see me hit a long ball," Mattingly said. "If I was a fan, I would have wanted to see it."

Mattingly, who doubled off Jeff Russell in his final at-bat, carried a .342 average into Monday night's game against the Minnesota Twins. He was named the AL's Player of the Week Monday.

"Russell showed me something," Mattingly said. "He came in right after me. He didn't lay one in, but he came in with his best stuff."

After the game, Mattingly appeared more concerned with the Yankees' loss than his failure to break Long's record.

"I just want to help the club," said Mattingly, the American

League's MVP in 1985 and runner-up for the award last season. "It doesn't help them if I try for homers. ... You do what you can, but you do it for the club."

Long said he was proud to share the record with Mattingly.

"I can live with him," Long said. "He's an automatic .330 hitter lifetime. He's going to be one of the game's all-time greats."

In the first inning of Sunday's game, Mattingly grounded out to first base. He singled in the third and lined out to first baseman Mike Stanley in the fifth.

Mattingly's record-tying streak started on July 8 against Minnesota when he hit two home runs. On July 9, he homered against the Chicago White Sox's Rich Dotson and the following day he hit a grand slam off Chicago's Joel McKeon.

He hit solo home runs off Chicago on July 11 and 12. After the All-Star break, Mattingly hit two homers against Texas on July 16, including his fourth grand slam of the season. On Friday, he established an AL record when he homered in his seventh consecutive game, connecting against Texas' Paul Kilgus.

Six other American Leaguers had homered in six straight games. Reggie Jackson was the last, with Baltimore in 1976.

Lopez 11th woman to earn rights for LPGA Hall of Fame

NEW YORK (AP) — Nancy Lopez, only the 11th woman to be inducted into the LPGA Hall of Fame, never thought the day would come.

"My goal that first year was to win one tournament," Lopez said Monday, hours before she was to be formally inducted into the Hall of Fame. "I always set goals, and I never set this as my goal. I said 'Nobody could ever do that.'"

The 30-year-old Lopez won her 35th tournament with a victory in the Sarasota Classic on Feb. 8, requiring her only to wait until July to mark her 10th anniversary on the tour.

The LPGA Hall of Fame requires victories in 30 official events, including two different major championships, 35 victories and one major or 40 victories and 10 years on the tour.

"It's tough. It's fair now that I'm in," she said jokingly. "That's a lot of

tournaments with the competition the way it is."

Lopez, the second-youngest player ever to be inducted next to Mickey Wright, who made it in 1964 at age 29, joins an exclusive club that includes Babe Didrikson Zaharias, Patty Berg and Kathy Whitworth.

Lopez began her career in 1977, playing in two events and finishing in the top five both times. In 1978, she gained national attention winning nine events, including an LPGA record five consecutive tournaments.

She won eight more events in 1979, but many consider her best year the 1985 season, when she won five tournaments, won the Player of the Year for the third time, set an LPGA record with a 70.73 stroke average to win the Vare Trophy for the third time, won the Mazda-LPGA point series, and set a career earnings mark with \$416,472.

Faldo's victory celebrated by the man and his country

MUIRFIELD, Scotland (AP) — A wave of sporting patriotism swept across the country Monday in the wake of Nick Faldo's last-gasp victory in the British Open golf championship.

Faldo's one-stroke defeat of America's Paul Azinger after shooting 18 successive pars was Britain's second success in three years at the world's oldest golf tournament. Sandy Lyle won the event in 1985.

Banner headlines were splashed across the front pages of the country's national newspapers.

The story also dominated the sports pages, which lavished praise on the new champion while sympathizing with Azinger. "American led the tournament from early on

the second day before bogeying the final two holes in Sunday's final round.

Faldo was a model of consistency as the tournament reached its climax. His par-71 final round gave him a 5-under-par total of 279, one stroke ahead of Azinger, and Australia's Rodger Davis.

As he reflected on headlines such as "Fabulous Faldo" and "Great Nick," the 30-year-old Briton said the most pleasing aspect was that he has an automatic right to play in all four "majors" every year.

Faldo, whose victory earned him \$120,000, said the money was not as important as being able to beat the wind-swept golf course under pressure.

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