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Matson's A&M career highlighted dismal '60s

By Tim Stanfield
Sports Writer

Texas A&M's athletic success during the 1980s has dimmed — but not erased — the dismal 1960s, when Aggie football squads were usually pitiful, and only an occasional Southwest Conference title in baseball, basketball or track broke the Aggies' chain of mediocrity.

Coach Jackie Sherrill's Aggies have won three consecutive SWC titles with Cotton Bowl trips after each one. All-SWC and All-American players were numerous on each of those squads, as they have been on other A&M athletic teams lately.

- Matson's career**
- Silver Medal in shotput — 1964 Olympics
 - NCAA Indoor Champion, shotput — 1965
 - SWC Outdoor Champion, shotput and discus — 1965-67
 - All America, shotput and discus — 1965-67
 - Shotput world record — 1965 (70-7¼), 1967 (71-5½)
 - NCAA Outdoor Champion, shotput and discus — 1966-67
 - Current SWC record holder in discus (213-9½) 1967
 - Discus world record (1967)
 - Gold Medal in shotput — 1968 Olympics

Nevertheless, none of the recent Aggie heroes have even come close to achieving the level of success one Aggie had in the mid-1960s.

That man, Randy Matson, stood out like a beacon on a dark, dreary night. He not only won SWC individual championships in the shotput and discus in each of his three years on the A&M varsity, he added several NCAA indoor and outdoor championships in both events and took the silver medal in the 1964 Olympics and gold medal in the 1968 Olympics (both in the shotput).

and discus with tosses of 71-5½ and 213-9½ respectively.

Twenty years later A&M's Randy Barnes broke Matson's shotput record by four inches. The discus toss is still a conference best.

"When I graduated from A&M a person couldn't make a living participating in track meets," Matson said. "I was a stockbroker paid on commission at first and then moved to West Texas State University where I was chief fund-raiser."

Matson is currently the executive director of the Association of Former Students located in the Clayton W. Williams Jr. Alumni Center. He recently recalled those days when he set the standard for everyone else in the world in the shotput.

"I had certain things that had to be done before I could work out. Now I could make a good living in track. Had that been the case before I would have retired when I was about 35 years old having to start all over in a new career."

"I had grown up reading about guys such as Dallas Long, Dave Davis, Gary Gubner and Parry O'Brien," Matson said. "Then, while I was still in high school, I competed against several of them in an A.A.U. meet."

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"Though I finished fourth behind O'Brien, Gubner and Davis, I still made the squad that went to Europe."

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"Even though I respected them I never competed with anyone else — just the tape. And I was never satisfied with my performance."

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Matson quickly progressed from a youngster who as a junior at Pampa High School won the state title in the 12-pound shot with a toss of 64-7 to the collegiate who won three consecutive SWC titles in both the shot put and discus, culminating his sterling career by winning the gold medal in the shotput in the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City.

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Not only did Matson break numerous records along the way, many of which he had set, but for a time he was alone at the top in the world in the shotput.

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Shortly after he began tossing the sixteen-pound shot in high school, Matson unleashed one of 55 feet. At that time the SWC record was 57 feet.

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As a high school senior Matson broke the SWC record with a toss of 60-6.

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When he set the world record with a toss of 70-7 in 1965, the next best distance — other than his own tosses — was 63 feet.

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Finally on April 24, 1967, Matson set SWC records in both the shotput

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"Our daughter Jessica is a man here at A&M, while our son Jim is a junior at A&M (where he is a member of the basketball squad)," Matson said. "Our younger son Cole is a senior, and he too is in their basketball program."

"Margaret and I enjoy our children participate in an activity. We see them as much as possible. I can recall watching three of them playing soccer they were younger."

"We have to enjoy them as much as we can because it won't be too long before they will be through their schooling."

Recalling his days as an athlete, Matson pointed out that he feels any pressure until he won the 1968 Olympics as the clear favorite to win his specialty.

"When I took the silver medal in 1964 at Tokyo, I was just happy to get a medal behind a guy like Matson said. "But the time I went up to Mexico City was much different."

"As the reigning world champion I was expected to win the shotput much like Jim Ryan was. I was easily won his races. I was tired to win my event but always felt I could have done better. Of course, Jim didn't fare as well, so that could have happened to me."

In 1970 Matson continued winning ways in the shotput season-high 71-4 in a meet at Berkeley, Calif.

But there were other opportunities available for him and Matson tired from competition thereafter.

What does the future hold for Randy Matson?

"This type of job isn't one that lasts until retirement age, but I'm happy with what I'm doing at the present moment," Matson said. "Getting into this new building challenge, and being responsible for the various entities within it is a challenge for me."

Short helps Rockets rip New Jersey

HOUSTON (AP) — Houston's Purvis Short scored 24 points as the Rockets hit a team record consecutive free throws en route to a 115-87 NBA victory over New Jersey Thursday night.

The Rockets did not miss a throw until 37 seconds remained in the game when Lester Conner missed the first of two free throws. Houston finished with 29 of 32.

Houston's free throw performance eclipsed the previous record of 18-for-18 free throws against Boston Oct. 21, 1978.

Rodney McCray hit 19 free throws for the Rockets.

LPGA season begins with Mazda Classic

BOCA RATON, Fla. (AP) — Patti Rizzo one-putted six holes Thursday on her way to a 5-under-par 67 and the first-round lead in the \$200,000 Mazda Classic, the opening tournament of the LPGA season.

Rizzo, 27, was an All-American at the University of Miami and finished second in the 1981 U.S. Amateur, but has won only two LPGA tournaments and none since 1985. She said she believes 1988 will be the springboard to better times on the LPGA Tour.

England's Trish Johnson, playing in her first LPGA event, and Missie McGeorge were next at 68. Jody Rosenthal, Amy Benz and Nancy Lopez, who birdied her last two holes, shot 69s at the 6,368-yard Stonebridge Golf and Country Club course.

"I think it's going to start this year, too," she said. "I don't feel like it was a fluke today. I think my game's solid right now."

Eight golfers were at 70, including Amy Alcott and defending champion Kathy Postlewait.

Four of Rizzo's six birdies came on putts of 10 feet or longer.

She said she worked hard to improve her putting during an off-season break at her home in Florida.

Johnson also had a sharp game, which allowed her to come seven missed greens.

She said a 7:42 a.m. EST start time kept her from being as excited about playing in her first LPGA tournament.

"I think I was still half asleep the first tee. Plus, there were many people around."

McGeorge, who has never finished better than fourth in an LPGA tournament, missed only two putts and had five birdies.

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