

# Sports

## National champs training early Aggie softball team still strong after loss of seniors

Part one of a two-part series

By Hal L. Hammons  
Assistant Sports Editor

It's only early February, but the Aggie softball team is already out there — running, swinging, firing each other up for the upcoming season.

They face high expectations from their coach, their fans, and themselves. They will enter the 1988 campaign ranked fourth in the nation, but that's about three places too low for these competitors. You'd think they were football players.

Even a casual glance reveals that these young women play a sport that is a little less brutal.

They make up the Texas A&M softball team. And the similarity between them and their football counterparts breaks down in more ways than one.

The softball team plays before a couple dozen fans instead of 72,000. The ladies play in a corner of the Penberthy Intramural Complex, not a multi-tiered stadium. It costs \$1 to see them instead of \$15 or \$20.

And the Aggie softball team won the national championship last year. In fact, softball is the only sport in which A&M has won an undisputed national championship. Ever. And we've done it three times.

Softball Coach Bob Brock thinks his team is even stronger than last year's team in many respects. "We're going to have a better hitting team, and we weren't bad last year," Brock says. "We probably have even more speed than last year."

Speed, hitting and pitching were the team's biggest assets last year. The loss of All-America pitcher Andaya makes the Aggies' lineup play the focus of interest.

"When you lose an All-America pitcher, a lot of people think you're going down the tubes," Brock says. "However, he says the other return starter — Julie Carpenter — should be able to shoulder the burden."

"I think Julie Carpenter is one of the best pitchers in the country — one of the three or four best in the NCAA," Brock says.

The second pitcher slot will be filled by freshman Catherine Stedman, a shortstop from the Pan-American team. Brock says Stedman hasn't pitched for a couple of years, but she is adjusting well and will add a lot of offensive punch to the lineup.

Brock says, "There weren't a lot of pitchers out there (to recruit), so we took a chance on Catherine Stedman."

"What we have here is another Liz Mizera. This girl already has a reputation as a hitter — she earned that on the Pan Am team."

Combined with the original Mizera, the Aggies' power-hitting shortstop, A&M promises to have a fourth- and fifth-hitter tandem that will be one of the best in the nation.

Andaya's absence is not the only hole that needs filling. Another All-American, third baseman Judy Trussell, is also gone.

Her position will be filled by another freshman — Rhonda Halbert. "She's an impact player," Brock says. "She's going to do a good job."

Last year's starting first baseman, Kelli Biggs, decided not to return to the team this year, but Brock thinks converted catcher Karen Robertson will do well at the position.

The catching chores will be left to junior Carrie Heightley.

Brock says, "(Heightley) was probably the best catcher in the nation last year, and what we decided to do was put her in the outfield and move her around. What we were doing was saving her legs for the big games. If you'll remember, at the last of the season, in all the big games she was behind the plate."

Andaya and Trussell haven't left A&M. Both are still in school working on their degrees, and both are working with Brock as "student coaches."

"They're going to give me that winning attitude," Brock says. "They have that respect from the players, from A&M, and from their coach."



A&M catcher Carrie Heightley gets ready to throw during a practice session Wednesday at Penberthy Intramural Complex.

Photo by Gary Bean

"Eventually I hope one of them stays here (as an assistant coach), if not both."

The success of last year's team leaves a problem this year — what to do next.

Brock says, "There's not but one place for A&M to go, and that's to stay right where we are. We can't go up. We don't want to go down — that's no good."

"I think there has to be more in-

centive for a lot of people to play us. I've convinced the players not to worry about rankings. We've got enough to worry about right now."

"Everybody's going to be up for us. But then, they were up for us last year."

Brock says he knows what everyone's hopes and expectations are for this team, and he thinks the Aggies have a good chance of fulfilling all of them.

## Sherrill: A&M recruits will fill key positions

By Anthony Wilson  
Sports Writer

Unlike A&M's past two football recruiting classes, the Aggies did not attract big-name high school talent this year. Instead, A&M went after and got players who could fill key spots in the near future, Head Coach Jackie Sherrill said.

"We went after definite needs," Sherrill said Wednesday afternoon at a press conference at Cain Hall.

"We had a very unique situation because we only went after players we felt who could play for us or enhance us and help us win two more games and go to the next level."

Three junior college transfers and 22 high school seniors signed national letters of intent with A&M Wednesday, national signing day.

In October, the A&M coaches decided to sign one receiver, quarterback, tight end and running back, four defensive backs, five linebackers and twelve linemen, Sherrill said.

A&M's biggest blue chip recruit was Robert Wilson, a 6-foot-1, 235-pound running back from Houston Worthing.

Wilson was rated among the top 50 players in the nation and was ranked the second-best running back in the state.

However, Sherrill was high on several other signees, including tight end Michael Jones and linebackers Anthony Williams, Trey Logan and Trent Lewis.

"We felt very comfortable with Mike Jones," Sherrill said. "He's the type of player who can get us back to the (Rod) Bernstine-type player. The kind of athlete he is reminds you of Bernstine. But he's a little bigger than Bernstine. I think he'll have an opportunity to play."

Williams, 6-foot-2, 225 pounds, was heavily recruited by Texas and Oklahoma to play

middle linebacker. Logan was the District 5-5A Defensive Player of the Year as a junior and senior at Denton High School. Lewis, a 6-foot-3, 230 pounder from Huntsville, is also one of the state's top linebacker prospects.

"I thought it was important for us to bring in some linebackers because of us losing five out of six next year," Sherrill said. "All these guys can run. They fit the mold of all the guys who we play at linebacker — guys who are good-sized and physical."

The Aggies felt a need in the defensive backfield with the losses of seniors Chet Brooks and Kip Corrington. A&M signed four defensive backs, all of whom have 4.5 speed and should be able to cover in A&M's style of play, Sherrill said.

Sherrill said the recruiting period in the spring is almost as crucial as the regular season in the fall.

"Recruiting is like shaving," he said. "You miss a day and you look like a bum. You've got to do it every day."

"We have two seasons. There's one you play on the field from September through January 1. The other is national signing day. What you do is get all the alumni and former students kind of pumped up and excited. The only problem is you get them too excited and they want to know why you're not winning."

A&M's 1988 class won't be ranked in the top 10 in the country as its 1986 and 1987 classes were. But Sherrill said that doesn't worry him.

"I don't mind people saying we didn't have the best recruiting year as long as we win on Saturdays," he said.

Sherrill pointed out that the Notre Dame team the Aggies beat in the Cotton Bowl had 17 high school All-Americans on its squad. He also noted that several of A&M's players were not considered hot prospects.

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