

Sports

NCAA-champion A&M softball team made up of 'average' Aggie students

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Part two of a two-part series

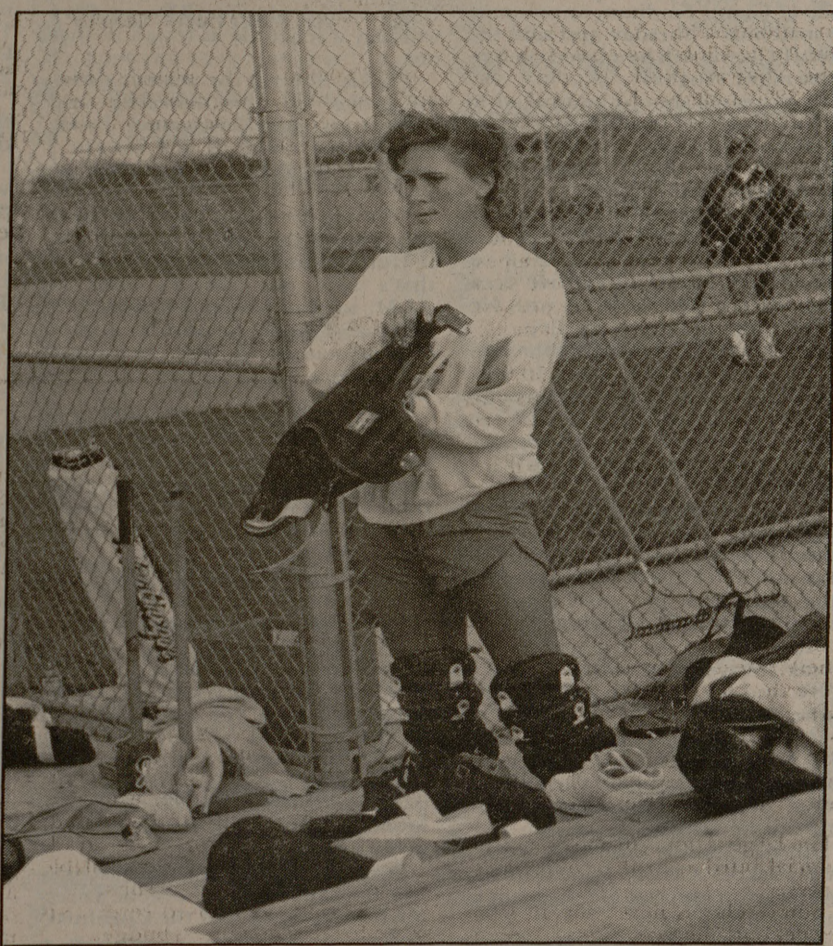


Photo by Gary Bean

A&M's Carrie Heightley gets ready for practice Thursday afternoon as Coach Bob Brock stands in the background. Brock has called the A&M junior "probably the best catcher in the nation."

self up for, or else her other wants and needs will override her love for the game.

"It's a habit," she says. "It's a habit to come out and play every single day. You feel horrible, but you come out here. It's a chore to put in two to two-and-a-half hours per day."

But the chore is necessary to achieve the desired results come

gametime — Gospel According to Brock.

Thursday Brock made it clear once again to the team that warm-up time is not relaxation time. Fun with the team ends when work starts, and it begins again immediately afterward.

And practice is work — make no mistake. There's a lot of chatter between the players, but it's all in the

area of encouragement. The focus is making the practice as close as possible to the real thing.

"When you're into it in practice, you know you'll be into it in the game," Carrie says. And she's convinced that four months of the one without any of the other will make the team stronger when it comes time to perform.

Everybody — Brock, Carrie, and the rest of the players and coaches — agrees these people eat, sleep, live and party as one.

The unity of the players makes the softball experience more fun for Carrie.

"I like it because we're a team," she says. "You don't get that very often. Most of us are friends. We run around together."

She even lives with her battery partner, pitcher Julie Carpenter. That's how close the game is to her.

But it can't last forever. Eventually her eligibility will run out and Carrie will be just another student.

But completion of eligibility doesn't mean an exhaustion of interest. Both of the seniors from last year's team — Shawn Andaya and Judy Trussell — have returned to the team this year as student assistants to Brock.

Carrie has some interest in coaching — her summer in Australia will be as a player-coach — but she says she doesn't think her career lies there.

So it remains that she's spending hours and hours every day in what most people would consider a "dead-end" pursuit. But everyone has to have their hobbies.

Carrie's happen to be in the entertainment business: she makes her fans happy.

She says it is a little discouraging that there aren't as many softball fans as there are fans of "bigger" varsity sports. But she doesn't resent that, and in a way she understands that that is the way it always will be.

"Men's athletics is such a big deal," she says. "There's professional football, professional basketball, . . . I know personally I'd rather go watch

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Aggie baseball team opens season today

Opening day is finally here for the sixth-ranked Texas A&M baseball team as it plays a single game with Lubbock Christian today at 3, and a doubleheader at 1 Saturday afternoon against the Chaparrals.

All the action takes place at Olsen Field.

Today's game begins an eight-game homestand for the Aggies. A&M will play a doubleheader against Southwest Texas State Tuesday Feb. 16, and a three-game series with the University of New Orleans next weekend.

A&M finished 44-22-1 last year

and missed the College World Series by one game, losing 11-9 to eventual national runner-up Oklahoma State in the Midwest Regionals in Starkville, Miss.

The Chaparrals were 44-29 last year and finished third in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics playoffs last year. They are off to an 0-2 start after losing a doubleheader to Baylor Wednesday.

A&M's Sean Snedeker will take the mound in today's game, while Nick Felix and Randy Pryor will handle the pitching chores in the doubleheader Saturday.

Men's, women's swim teams to wrap up dual meet season

The Texas A&M men's and women's swimming teams will face their final dual meets of the season when they take on Texas and Louisiana State here this weekend at the P.L. Downs Natatorium.

The Aggies swim against Texas today, with the men's 1000-meter freestyle race beginning at 5 p.m., and all other events beginning at 6 p.m. The teams will face LSU Saturday at 1 p.m.

The UT women's team comes into the match ranked No. 2 nationally, a

ranking that's likely to improve after the team knocked off top-ranked Stanford 90-50 last weekend, and the Lady Longhorns have won 18 consecutive matches dating back to February 1986.

A&M Coach Mel Nash said he hopes his teams will be up to the challenge.

"Both teams are nationally ranked," he said. "This will help us tune up for the conference meets, and we should start seeing some faster times."

Basketball teams face Bears Saturday in G. Rollie White

Both Texas A&M basketball teams will return to action Saturday when they play Baylor at G. Rollie White Coliseum.

The A&M women's team will take the floor first in a 2 p.m. game, and the men's team will play at 7:30 p.m.

The Lady Aggies, 10-9 overall and 4-5 in the Southwest Conference, lost to Creighton 75-71 last Wednesday in Omaha, Neb. Coach

Shelby Metcalf's men's team is 13-10 and 5-4 in the SWC after a 94-71 loss to Southern Methodist in Dallas.

Women's coach Lynn Hickey said Saturday's game is a must-win situation for A&M.

"This is a 'have-to' win for us," she said. "If we're going to have the opportunity to play in the conference tournament, we have to take this game."

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