

Sports

Titans eliminate Aggs in playoffs

Fitch fired after late season dive

By Hal L. Hammons
Assistant Sports Editor

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STARKVILLE, Miss. — Before the bottom of the ninth inning May 30, Cal State-Fullerton pitcher Paul Johnson asked his teammates if they wanted to play another half-inning or nine more that evening.

The Titans trailed Texas A&M 3-1, and a loss would have meant a game that night for the NCAA South Regional championship. A win that afternoon, however, would give Fullerton the crown early.

Five runs and 20 incredible minutes later, Johnson's question got a convincing answer, as the Aggies fell 6-3, eliminating A&M from post-season play one step shy of the College World Series.

The Aggie outfielders didn't even turn around to watch Mike Ross' three-run game-winning home run soar over Dudy Noble Field's left-center field fence.

A&M looked like it had the game tied away, and with it a trip to Omaha. Not only were there two out in the ninth, the Aggies had a well-rested pitching staff waiting, which figured on giving them a big advantage in the second game.

A&M Coach Mark Johnson said, "With momentum gathered, I thought we'd win. I had a strong feeling we'd go to Omaha."

But it was a classic case of putting the cart before the horse.

Ralph Ramirez walked to start the inning. But Scott Centala, 5-1, struck out the next two batters.

Aggies end recruiting by signing 10 players

The Texas A&M baseball team wrapped up its recruiting season Monday by announcing the signing of 10 prospects — eight high school players and two junior college athletes.

The Aggies signed pitchers Ronnie Allen from Kirkland, Wash., Brent Gilbert from Blinn Junior College, Rod Huffman from Dallas, and Sean Lawrence Oak Park, Ill. Lawrence is the only left-hander in the group. Gilbert and Harvey will be entering their junior years, while the others will be freshmen.

A&M also added four infielders to its roster. The Aggies signed Kenny Kendrena from West Covina, Calif., Jason Marshall from Abilene, Travis Williams from Austin, and Trey

Witte from Houston. Witte is also an outfielder.

Outfielder Chris Finley from Houston's Lamar High School also signed with A&M.

"If we don't get hurt by the June (professional) draft, we feel good about this recruiting class," A&M Head Coach Mark Johnson said. "All of these players are good athletes and should be able to help our program."

A&M has lost one pitcher who signed a scholarship to a professional contract. After being drafted in the fourth round by the Kansas City Royals, Greg Harvey of Seminole Junior College signed with the Royals.

Then the wheels came off. Greg Mannion walked, and Rex Peters and Shane Flores singled to tie the game at 3. Ross' homer put the game away.

The Titans were scoreless until Keith Kaub's solo shot in the eighth. The run seemed to give them a boost going into the ninth.

However, Cal State Fullerton didn't look like it was in it early. The

Titans left runners on base in five innings, including three on third.

A&M starter Fred Riscen, who was removed from the rotation early in the tournament because of shoulder trouble, surprised everyone by going longer than he had all season.

Riscen gave up six hits and walked four, but he allowed no runs through seven innings before yield-

ing the mound to Centala in the eighth.

Two baserunning errors cost A&M runs in the middle innings. John Byington, on base with a single, ran halfway through a "hold" sign at third after Tom Carcione doubled in the top of the fourth. Byington was tagged out between home and third.

Terry Taylor put A&M ahead 2-0 with a single that scored Carcione and would have scored Byington.

Mike Easley led off the fifth with a single, and Kirk Thompson's bunt single and a wild pitch put runners on second and third with no outs.

Easley was caught off base and tagged out when Chuck Knoblauch grounded hard to third. Tim McWilliam singled to score Thompson, but the score was 3-0 and not 5-0 like it easily could have been.

Knoblauch, voted the All-South Regional Tournament Most Valuable Player, said, "When you lose, everybody looks to find what went wrong. We had a big lead, and we shouldn't have lost it."

Knoblauch went 7-for-17 in the tournament with a home run and two steals. He also made several sterling defensive plays.

Teammate Scott Livingstone, who broke the Southwest Conference record for career hits during the tournament, was voted to the All-Regional team. He went 7-for-16 with a homer and a steal, but was hitless in four at-bats in the final game.

The Aggies ended their season at 52-15 — a team record for wins.

HOUSTON (AP) — Houston coach Bill Fitch, under fire from some Rockets fans and All-Pro center Akeem Olajuwon, was fired Monday with three years remaining on his contract.

Fitch, who led the Rockets to the NBA finals in 1986, drew criticism from Olajuwon for his iron-fisted approach during the 1988 season as the Rockets slumped at the end of the season.

The Rockets announced they would begin a search immediately for a new head coach and personnel director. Fitch held both positions.

The Rockets lost in the first round of the NBA playoffs to Dallas this season. Olajuwon criticized both Fitch and Houston point guard Sleepy Floyd during the late-season tailspin.

"We just felt that we didn't make progress at the end of the year," Ray Patterson said. "We were playing under .500 ball with pretty good personnel. So we felt it was time for a change."

Fitch could not be reached for comment.

"Bill Fitch, who has three years remaining on his contract, will take a month's vacation, after which some decision will be reached as to his future duties with the Rockets or a position with another organization," Patterson said.

The Rockets were on the brink

of becoming an NBA power after the 1986 season with the "Twin Tower" lineup of Olajuwon and all-star power forward Ralph Sampson. But Sampson was traded to the Golden State Warriors this season, breaking up the tandem, and the Rockets never were able to gain consistency the rest of the season.

Patterson said the Rockets will divide the positions of head coach and personnel director and mentioned assistant coach and former Houston player Rudy Tomjanovich as a candidate for the personnel position.

The Rockets will try to name a coaching replacement before the June 28 NBA draft, Patterson said.

Speculation about a new Rockets coach has focused on Kansas coach Larry Brown.

Fitch compiled a 216-184 record with the Rockets in five seasons. Besides the 1986 finals, where Houston lost to Boston in six games, Fitch led the Rockets to the playoffs the past four seasons.

Fitch ranks fifth on the all-time NBA coaching list with a lifetime record of 762-714 in 18 seasons.

Fitch had a 242-86 record at Boston from 1979 to 1983. His Celtic team beat the Rockets in the 1981 NBA finals. Fitch compiled a 304-434 record at Cleveland.

Dorsett ready to rumble for Broncs in familiar No. 33

DENVER (AP) — Tony Dorsett on Monday made the transition from Dallas to Denver official, accepting an orange Broncos jersey with his No. 33 on it as reporters quizzed him about his age and playing ability.

"My style of play will fit in with this offense extremely well," Dorsett said at a news conference Monday. "I don't feel it's going to be a problem adjusting."

"This is going to make it fun again." Dorsett, who played 11 seasons with the Cowboys, said little about the contract he signed with the Broncos Friday, but he said he was happy with it.

"I was both happy and sad (about the trade)," Dorsett said. "Dallas was a place where I had a great 11 years. It's a great franchise and has a great coach."

"I thought my career would end in Dal-

las. Unfortunately, it didn't. But this is a new beginning. It's refreshing."

The 34-year-old running back, who wanted out of Dallas after he lost his starting job to Herschel Walker last season, was acquired by Denver in exchange for a conditional fifth-round draft choice in 1989. The Broncos could end up paying as high as a first-round pick, depending on Dorsett's performance in Denver this fall.

Reporters asked Dorsett whether at 34 he still had the speed and running ability that made him one of the NFL's premier running backs.

"I'll let you make the call," he said. "The old flame is burning and it's burning pretty hot."

The trade reunites Dorsett with his former offensive coordinator, Denver Coach Dan Reeves. Reeves was an assistant coach

with the Cowboys until he took the Denver job in 1981.

Reeves has said he believes Dorsett, the fourth-leading rusher in NFL history, has two good years left in him and anything beyond that would "be a plus."

With Dallas, the 5-foot-11, 189-pound Dorsett gained 15,468 yards rushing and receiving, second only to Walter Payton on the NFL's all-time list.

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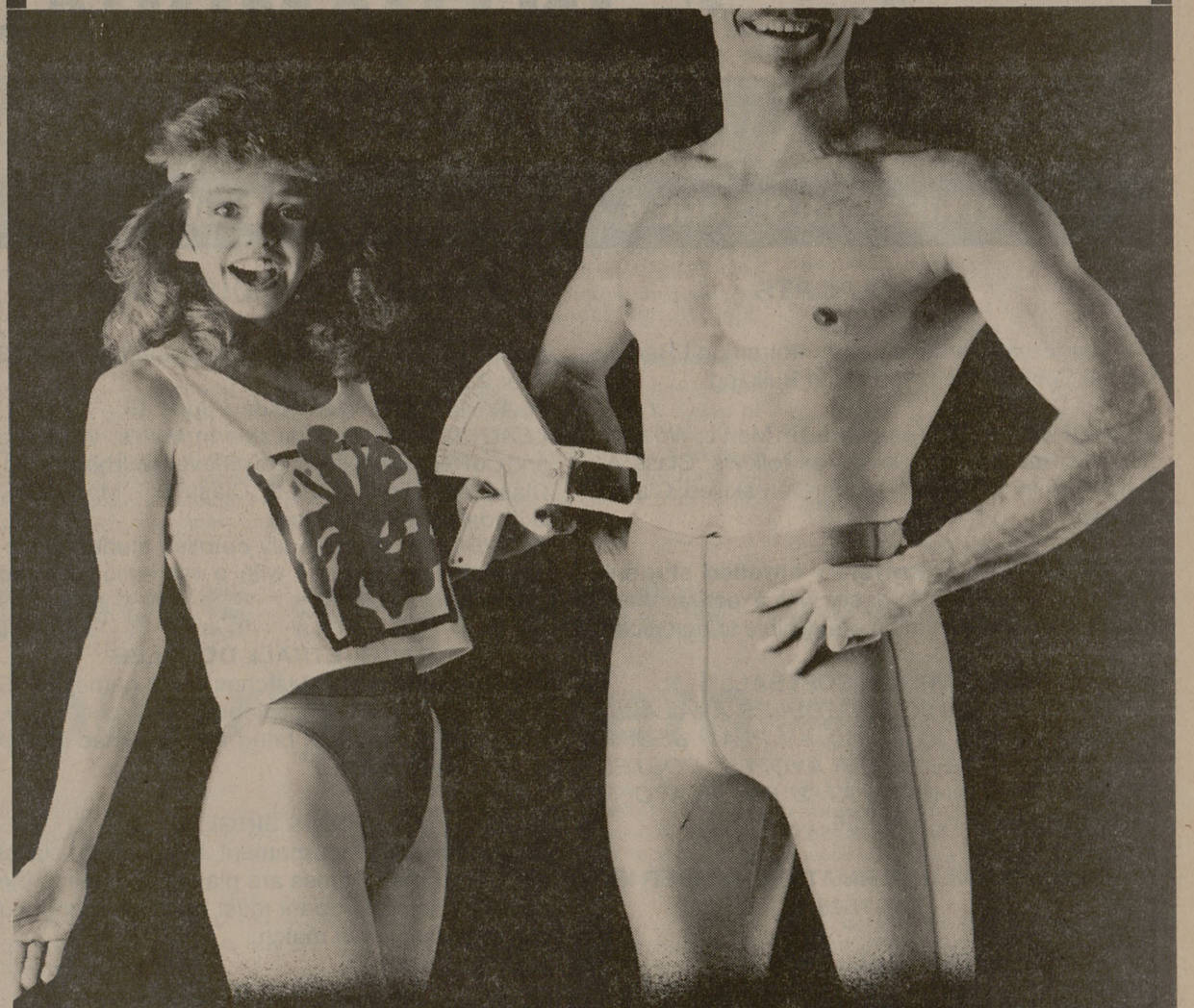
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