

Monday, April 17, 1989

Byington gives Aggs twinbill sweep over Longhorns Dramatic ninth-inning home runs fuel victories

By Jerry Bolz

ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

The Texas Aggies screamed a shout of deliverance after John Byington hit a last-inning homer in the final two games to give the Aggies a 2-1 victory in their Southwest Conference series with Texas.

Top-ranked A&M moved to 42-2 overall (11-1 in the SWC) by winning

Aggie Update

• **Score:** A&M wins two of three from Texas by scores of 2-6, 18-14 and 8-5.

• **Record:** 42-2.

• **Ranking:** First.

• **Next game:** Tuesday double-header against Stephen F. Austin at 5:30 p.m. at Olsen Field.

a series from Texas for the first time since 1981. Tenth-ranked Texas is now 37-12 (8-4 in the SWC).

Byington knocked a grand slam with the score tied 14-14 in the ninth inning in game one and muscled a three-run shot in the ninth of the series finale with the score knotted 5-5.

Both homers were on the first pitch. Texas' Kirk Dressendorfer led the 'Horns to a 6-2 victory in the first game of the series.

Byington said he was expecting the pitch he got on both home runs. The first was an inside fastball by reliever Dressendorfer and the final game's pitch was a curve by Chris Gaskill.

"It was a curve ball," Byington said of Gaskill's pitch. "I was looking for it all the way. I'd touched them a couple of times on the fastball, so I was looking for the breaking pitch." Byington and the Aggies ended a long dry spell against the Longhorns. Before the series, Texas had defeated A&M 13 of the last 14 meetings.

After the 18-14 win, a game where the Aggies lost a seven-run lead, Byington said the Aggies definitely weren't affected by the aura of Texas.

"To lose a seven-run lead — if we were having a problem with Texas mystique, we would have laid out and died."

A&M center fielder Kirk Thompson said there was no doubt the Aggies would win the series.

"We knew we could win," he said.

"We just had to prove to everyone else we could. I think they know we're the better team — we deserve the ranking."

The first game, played Saturday night due to a rain out Friday, began as a pitching duel. Texas threw Dressendorfer against A&M's Pat Sweet.

After five innings, neither team had a run and the Aggies didn't have a hit. In the sixth, Texas' Scott Bryant doubled and scored on a double by Arthur Butcher to make it 1-0.

Texas got five more in the eighth as David Lowery scored on a Bryant double and Craig Newkirk took A&M reliever Scott Centala's pitch over the left field fence for a grand slam to make it 6-0 Texas.

A&M got one run in the eighth and one in the ninth off Dressendorfer, who upped his record to 11-1 and 5-0 in the SWC. Sweet dropped to 7-2 and 3-1 in SWC with the loss.

Although the Aggies lost, the last two innings seemed to make them believe they could beat the Longhorns. The confidence carried into

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Photo by Phelan M. Ebenhack

A&M's John Byington (sliding) beats the throw to second as Texas shortstop Steve

Bethea sets to throw to first during a 6-2 Texas win over the Aggies Saturday night.

Byington's heroics may have put an end to The Aggie Choke

It looked so familiar.

Bottom of the ninth. Texas 14, Texas A&M 9.

A&M, the nation's top-ranked baseball team, had apparently fallen victim to its annual case of "the chokes."

After all the hype, A&M seemed shellshocked as the Longhorns erased a seven-run deficit by the third inning.

I angrily thought: "How could they do this to me?"

"If ever there is a year A&M should beat Texas, this is it. We're 40-2!"

You see, Saturday night's 6-2 loss wasn't a letdown. Kirk Dressendorfer is a great pitcher. Losing a game to him isn't going to make a team drop in the polls.

But blowing a seven-run lead at home and looking primed to lose the series to the Horns, once again, is a little hard to take.

Especially when I have to go home this weekend and see my friends, most of whom are big Texas fans. I was starting to



Doug Walker
Sports Editor

reconsider making the trip.

All week long the memories of last year's series with Texas lurked in my mind. I figured game one was just a continuation of the mysterious domination Texas baseball has held over the Aggies.

"Accept it," I thought. "Texas always beats A&M. It's a fact of life. We'll never beat Texas — especially when it's so important!"

And rarely, if ever, has a Texas-Texas A&M series been so important on a national scale. The two teams always rule the Southwest Conference, but Texas usually comes out on top.

"I might as well accept it and save myself more misery," I thought. "Texas just has A&M's number."

Then it happened. John Byington's grand slam home run caps nine-run ninth inning to give A&M an 18-14 victory.

Later, another game-ending Byington blast, a three-run shot, wins the nightcap to give A&M the series and probably keeps the Aggies atop the national polls.

How many times has that happened for A&M? It's never happened against Texas. It's not supposed to happen against Texas.

I mean, this is Texas! The team which has won 61 SWC titles in 74 seasons! Texas doesn't do things like that!

The Aggies, as most Texas fans will

readily tell you, have a dubious tradition called The Aggie Choke.

The Aggie Choke is legendary in my family. My oldest brother, who attended A&M in the late '60s and early '70s, used to talk about it when I was growing up. Each year, when the A&M football team would seem to be making a run for the conference title, he would begin considering ordering Cotton Bowl tickets.

One year, (1974, I think.) he decided to put it off until the Aggies played Texas in Austin. A&M only had to win to get the Cotton Bowl bid and a trip to Dallas. The Aggies responded by fumbling away the ball on their first three plays from scrimmage and losing, 32-3.

Pretty soon he became a true believer in The Aggie Choke. As an impressionable youngster, I became a convert. Any optimism I felt would be overcome by doubt about the Aggies' chances in any

game against Texas in any sport.

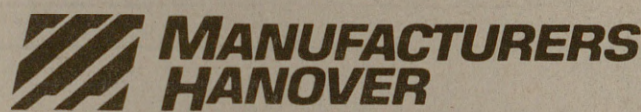
The success of the football team in recent years helped me overcome much of my belief in The Choke. However, the antics of the Aggies in last year's series in Austin — and in the subsequent SWC Tournament — convinced me that A&M was psyching out by the Longhorns.

In the opener last year, the first five Texas batters walked to start a five-run inning as the Aggies never had a chance in a 10-2 Texas win. UT swept the Aggies.

The events of Sunday's first game were bearing out my belief in the Aggie Choke. It bothered me. I find it less irritating when something unexpected happens which isn't to my liking.

When I feel like something is going to happen and I have to sit by helplessly and watch it take place, it drives me up the wall!

This time I was wrong and I'm glad. I guess that puts an end to the Aggie Choke.



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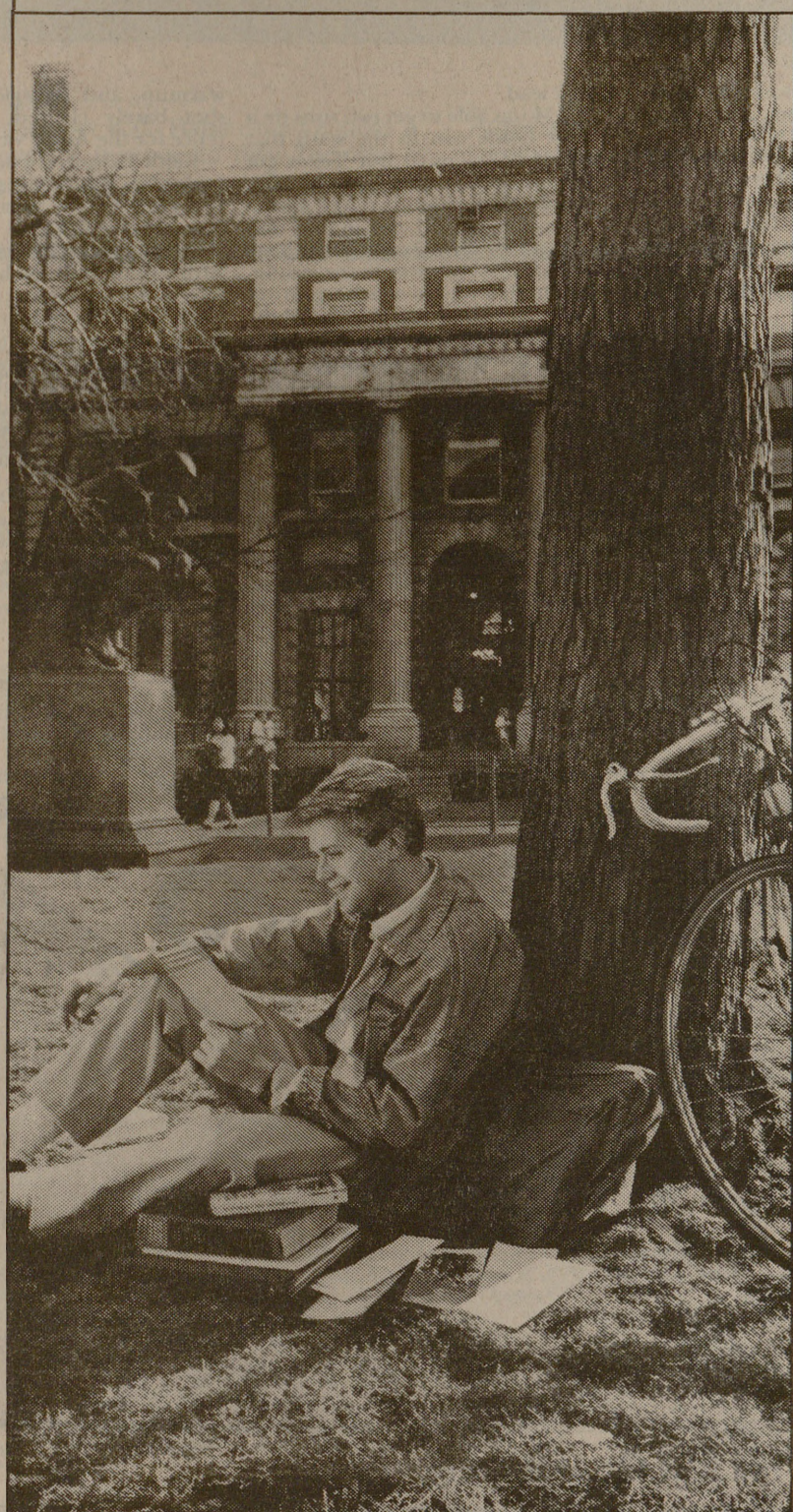
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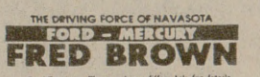
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