

# Aggie Baseball '91

## Johnson must build young pitching staff

By Alan Lehmann  
Of The Battalion Staff

If Mark Johnson ever retires from coaching, he has a future in construction — or rather reconstruction.

Last year the A&M head baseball coach rebuilt a team from the rubble of a successful year and the following draft. This season, he must patch together a pitching staff.

Following the 58-7 year in 1989, the Aggie lineup was wrecked by graduation and the pro draft, and Johnson had to replace all eight position players — three of them All-Americans. Johnson's young Aggies responded well, and the team finished 43-17 last season.

This season, he faces the same quandry with his pitching staff.

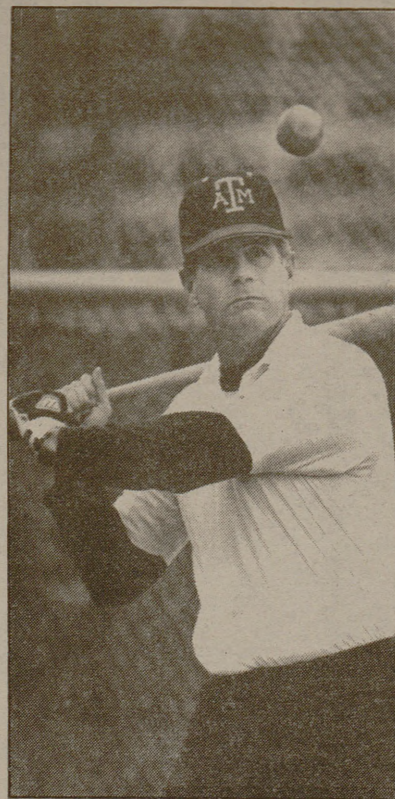
Gone are the six pitchers who combined for 32 of A&M's wins last season.

Now Johnson must clear the rubble and start over.

"We've got a long way to go," Johnson said. "We lost a lot of pitching, but we have several guys who are ready to step up and cross the line."

The cornerstone of Johnson's staff will be junior Ronnie Allen. Allen, who has starred for the Aggies since he was a true freshman in 1989, was 6-4 last season with a 2.35 earned run average.

Allen played on Team USA, the United States national team, and was 0-1 with a 2.64 ERA before leaving the



KEVIN IVY/The Battalion  
Coach Mark Johnson  
team with an injury. He is a quiet leader who should lead by example.  
The other two returning pitchers are

Steve Hughes and Jason Bullard, both of whom were relievers last season.

Hughes, a senior co-captain this season, may see action this year as a starter although he has never started a game for A&M.

Bullard, who was 4-0 with a 3.12 ERA in 16 appearances last year, will be heavily counted on this season, Johnson said.

"Jason has made great strides since the fall," Johnson said. "He will be a pitcher who will get the ball on weekends."

A&M plays its Southwest Conference games on weekends.

The Aggies' pitching prospects may not be as barren as they seem. But that's just because Johnson had a banner recruiting year last summer. He hauled in a load of talented freshmen and junior college transfers and will count on them in 1991.

Among the six true freshman pitchers on the A&M roster, lefthander Jay Hogue has impressed Johnson the most.

"Jay made great strides this fall," he said. "He really stepped forward and gained confidence."

Kelly Wunsch, a lefty from Bellaire (Houston) also caught Johnson's eye and Brian Parker could contribute.

Transfers Jason Hutchins, Jeff Johnson and Alan Fiveash could all make significant contributions.

Hutchins comes from Golden West Junior College in California with outstanding credentials. He passed up a

chance to play in the Baltimore Orioles system this summer when they drafted him.

Hutchins also pitched a no-hitter this summer in the Cape Cod League against Hyannis. The Cape has a reputation as being one of the better leagues in the nation and is regularly filled with all-star players.

The mystery of this year's pitching staff will be the bullpen stopper.

The Aggies did without one last year, because of their bullpen depth and the 21 complete games that the staff threw.

This season, Trey Witte may be called on to fill the stopper role.

Although he was the starting second baseman last season, Witte has shown promise on the mound and a will to do the job.

Johnson said that he would be happy if Witte could fill the role.

"I would love it if Trey could get the job done," he said. "He wants to do whatever he can to help the team, and I would rather have him out there in the ninth inning than throw a freshman into that situation."

While the pitching will be important this season, the veteran Aggie offense will be the foundation of A&M's playoff hopes.

Although the Aggies managed only a .253 team batting average and 32 home runs in 1990, the addition of two solid transfers should bolster both stats.

Sitichoke Huckuntod, a senior transfer

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## Surprising Ags fall apart, miss playoffs

By Alan Lehmann  
Of The Battalion Staff



J. JANNER/The Battalion  
Tim Holt's reaction to a called strike out exemplifies the Ags' season.

All's well that ends well, but the 1990 Aggie season did not.

After starting the season with a surprising nine-game winning streak, the Texas A&M baseball team lost five of its final six games, finishing the season 43-17.

The five losses were crucial Southwest Conference games against Houston and Arkansas, and as a result of the slide, A&M failed to make the four-team SWC tournament.

But an even more crushing blow came May 21 when Coach Mark Johnson and his team found out that they had been excluded from the 48-team NCAA tournament field.

"I felt that was hard to put behind us," Johnson said. "It's something that stays in the back of your mind."

It indeed seemed a travesty of justice that A&M was left from the field. The Aggies had one of the best records in the nation of any team not to make the tournament.

But Johnson said he realizes the Aggies dug their own hole.

"We knew what we had to do, and just didn't get it done in those last three series," Johnson said. "We had our fate in our own hands."

Although the season ended on a sour note, 1990 should be remembered as a successful one.

The team that Johnson led onto Olsen Field in the Feb. 9 opener against the University of Texas-Arlington was virtually devoid of experienced position players, having been decimated by graduation and the pro draft in the summer of 1989.

Only two position players, Travis Williams and Trey Witte, survived the purging, and they had played sparingly as freshmen.

At the time, Johnson admitted that he'd never lost so much talent in one summer.

So Johnson knew he'd have to count on junior college transfers and a strong pitching staff to get the Aggies off to a solid start.

And they certainly did.

A&M won its first nine games of the season before dropping four of six on a hectic Louisiana road trip.

But the Aggies bounced back behind a surprisingly strong pitching staff and took two of three games from Louisiana State in a rematch of the 1989 NCAA regional.

Shortly thereafter, A&M won the Aggie Continental Classic, finishing the double-round-robin tourney with a 5-1 record.

From that point, the Aggies caught fire, winning 12 in a row for a 30-7 record. During the string, A&M swept Missouri, Southwestern, Texas Tech and Hardin Simmons.

The streak stopped in Waco as the Bears edged the Aggies 7-6 in the series opener. A&M and Baylor swapped shutouts in the doubleheader finale.

The Aggies followed by pounding out six consecutive victories, including three over Rice to take a 37-9 record into the crucial three-game set against the Longhorns in Austin.

Texas won the opener, behind Kirk Dressendorfer's pitching and sloppy Aggie defense. Junior Rich Robertson, a trans-

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## Dempsey, Davis provide new voices at Olsen Field this year

By Steve O'Brien  
Of The Battalion Staff

Texas A&M journalism lecturer John Mark Dempsey and radio station sales executive Randy Davis will have a big mouth to fill this season.

The pair will replace Derrick "D.D." Grubbs — the only person who has seen every Aggie home game at Olsen Field — as public address announcers for Aggie baseball.

Grubbs, who was the voice of A&M baseball from 1976 until this season, played signature songs for Aggie players as they came up to bat and blared the Olympic Theme after great defensive plays.

For 15 years, his assortment of music and game antics provided color to games at Olsen Field like no other col-

lege ball park in the country.

Dave South, A&M assistant athletic director for marketing and promotion sales, said Grubbs will be missed.

"We won't be able to replace D.D. Grubbs, nor are we going to try," South said. "It would be like trying to take over for the David Letterman show."

"The bottom line is what's going on out there on the field. The main show is the nine players on the field."

Without the personality of Grubbs, other things will be used to get the crowd involved in the games, South said.

"We're going to incorporate the scoreboard in the games this year," South said. "We're going to give away more prizes."

"Every game there will be a chance for two people to win a Toyota."

Dempsey is a longtime fan of Aggie baseball and said he is looking forward to the challenge of replacing a legend at Olsen Field.

"I think it's going to be fun," Dempsey said. "I'm a baseball fan and an A&M baseball fan."

"I've spent a lot of nights out there watching (the Aggies). It's a fun place to go and have a good time, and I know a lot of people would like to do this."

Dempsey said he also has been a fan of Grubbs for many years.

"He did a sensational job and I'm sorry he's not going to be here," Dempsey said. "I enjoyed what he did as much as anyone."

Davis, a former morning talk show host for radio station KTSR, acknowledges the big job in front of himself and Dempsey.

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## Wrap-up

fer from San Jacinto Junior College, upped his season record to 9-0 with a 5-3 win in the second game. But the Aggies fell 2-1 in the heart-breaking finale.

The Aggies then beat Texas Southern in a two-night doubleheader, blanking the Tigers both games 6-0, 9-0. The nightcap marked the 12th shutout the Aggies had thrown, breaking the record for most in a season formerly held by the 1979 squad.

But A&M could not maintain their momentum, and dropped the middle game of the TCU series, dropping their SWC mark to 10-5. Still, with series remaining against Houston and Arkansas, the Aggies needed only to win two games to clinch a spot in the SWC Postseason Tournament.

They did not make it. A&M lost all three games of the Houston series and two against Arkansas and missed the tournament for the first time since 1985, Johnson's first season at the helm.

The Aggies' bats failed them in the Houston series as they lost by scores of 1-0, 4-3 and 4-2.

As a result, Rice went to the tournament instead of A&M. The Owls finished SWC play 11-9 (by virtue of a rainout against Texas), one-half game ahead of the Aggies. Under SWC rules, if a game cannot be played on the weekend it is scheduled, the game is canceled and will not be made up.

The NCAA selection committee chose not to invite A&M to the NCAA tournament, apparently because the Aggies failed

to make the SWC tourney. The NCAA generally does not invite teams that do not make it to their own tournaments.

A&M managed only a .252 team batting average with 32 homers for the season, but held opposing batters to .219 and 25 homers.

Designated hitter David Rollen led the Aggies with a .297 average and eight home runs. Freshman Brian Thomas batted .290, despite hitting no homers.

The lack of home run power was typical of the Aggie season. The team total was anemic compared to the 88 that the 1989 squad bashed.

A glaring hole in the Aggie attack was the lack of an effective lead-off hitter. Centerfielder Tim Holt, who led off most of the season, managed only a .220 average.

Third baseman Travis Williams had a .273 average and his eight homers were good for a share of the team lead.

But the pitching was phenomenal in 1990.

Aside from Robinson's strikeout clinic, the Aggie staff featured junior Ronnie Allen, who went 6-4 with a 2.35 ERA. Allen's record does not tell the true tale because Allen constantly faced the opposing staff's ace.

Kerry Freudenburg, Sean Lawrence, Bo Siberz and Steve Hughes anchored the Aggie bullpen, combining for a 13-4 record and seven saves. Junior Jason Bullard was 4-0 with two saves.

## Preview

fer from Central Missouri State, pushed Trey Witte from the second base spot.

Huckuntod, a two-time Division II All-American, brings speed as well as good bat control.

"He's at full speed after two steps," Johnson said of Huckuntod, who hit .475, .418 and .314, while stealing 110 bases over three seasons. Johnson also said that Huckuntod was a probable leadoff hitter for the Aggies.

Conrad Colby, a junior transfer from Rancho Santiago Junior College (Calif.), is a prototype cleanup hitter. The 6-foot, 197-pound first baseman brings a .412 career average with 10 homers.

Colby bashed 15 home runs while playing summer ball in Alaska last year.

Junior Travis Williams will hold down the third base spot again this season. The two-year letterman finished fourth on the team in 1990 with a .273 average.

Shortstop Jason Marshall gained over 10 pounds in an off-season workout program and hopes to add punch to the Aggie attack this year. The senior hit .259 and stole five bases in 1990.

Marshall is backed up by sophomore

Mike Hickey, a highly touted transfer from the University of Oklahoma.

The most unstable spot in the infield this year is at catcher, where Blake Pyle, David Rollen and Ben Blake contend for the job.

Pyle, a senior co-captain, holds the inside track with a solid lefthanded bat. Rollen put in more time last year at designated hitter and has not shown the defensive skills Johnson would like. Blake, a junior transfer from Westark Community College (Ark.) has shown immense improvement since the fall, Johnson said.

The outfield positions have been hotly contested, but some positions appear to be solidified.

Sophomore Brian Thomas, who filled in for the injured Dan Robinson last season, will start in left field. Thomas hit .290 as a true freshman, and showed a good eye for the strike zone.

Robinson missed the bulk of the season after he suffered a broken jaw and a concussion in a March 17 collision with Witte. At the time of the accident, he was leading the team in homers, RBI, runs scored and stolen bases.

Although he lost 15 pounds as a result of the injury, Robinson has gained it back and has regained his timing at the plate.

Centerfield is the most uncertain outfield spot.

Tim Holt played the position well last season, but managed only a .220 batting average. Holt is still the best defensive outfielder on the squad and should play as long as he hits well.

Thomas has the speed to play center, should Johnson decide to put Chad Broussard into left field, where he played most of last season.

Broussard's low home run production — he hit only six last season — seems to have cost him the starting role this season.

Cornelius Patterson, who also plays football for the Aggies, played in centerfield last season, but was used primarily in a pinch running role.

Brett Weinberger and senior Steve Medina could challenge for a spot.

Rollen held down the designated hitter role last season, and should do so again this year. Pyle, if not playing catcher or first base, would be available as a lefthanded designated hitter.

## Huck

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will see his parents on their vacation and they will make weekend trips to College Station for the Texas and Arkansas series.

On the field, Huckuntod does not find any one part of the game more difficult than another.

The arrival of Huckuntod caused baseball coach Mark Johnson to make a position change on the team.

Last year's second baseman, Trey Witte, will play many different positions this year, including pitcher.

Huckuntod respects the way that Witte has accepted his new role with the team.

"Trey is a great athlete," Huckuntod said. "He can play just about anywhere."

Coach Johnson has high expectations for Huckuntod this year.

"He hit the ball as well as anybody this fall," Johnson said. "He could be someone we circle the wagons around."

Huckuntod already has proven himself on the field as well as in the classroom.

He is a two-time Division II All-American as well as the 1990 Division II Academic Player of the Year.

Coach Johnson has Huckuntod penciled in as his lead-off hitter to utilize his speed. Huckuntod stole over 100 bases during his three years at CMS.

Huckuntod's base stealing prowess should help a team whose leader last year was Tim Holt (12 steals).

"(Huckuntod) has got good speed," Johnson said. "He can go full speed after two steps."

There are some more subtle qualities about Huckuntod that Johnson has noticed.

"He is very sharp and popular and has a twinkle in his eye," Johnson said.

Even though Huckuntod lived most of his life in Missouri, he never had a chance to make it to Omaha, Neb. for the College World Series.

"I'll go sometime," Huckuntod said. "Hopefully I'll make it this year so I won't have to go and watch it."

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