

Confessions of a former baseball card junkie

Love makes you do funny things. I can testify because I've done some crazy things to get baseball cards.



Alan Lehmann
Sports Editor

I've paid outrageous sums of money for the little pieces of cardboard, given plasma to get money for them and angered my fiancée countless times over my weakness for cardboard.

I've even driven 500 miles to get free baseball cards at a Texas Rangers game.

Crazy things. But I haven't been this way for long. A little over a year ago, I thought baseball card collecting was stupid. I used to laugh at others who spent big bucks on thin cardboard slices, and I vowed that the sickness would never strike me.

Last year it did. Stuck in my hometown over Spring Break, I decided to check out the baseball card shop near my house, just for laughs.

But I wasn't laughing long. I had always been a big baseball fan, and I was suddenly surrounded by cards of all my favorite players. I bought a Rangers team set, 1990 Fleer.

I didn't realize until later that the five bucks I spent on it was an outrageous price. But I didn't care, I still wanted to have Rangers cards to admire.

So I started hanging around the card shop, and by the end of the week, I was hooked. I bought a Ruben Sierra rookie card (1987 Fleer) and a couple of boxes of 1990 cards, trying to put together Fleer and Score sets.

My obsession started innocently enough, as I opened each pack of cards slowly and examined each card. I enjoyed looking at the pictures and examining the statistics on the backs.

Rude awakening

But then I bought my first Beckett Baseball Card Magazine, the 'bible' of baseball card price lists and checked the value of my newfound treasures. I looked on in horror as I saw that most of the cards that I had just shelled out for were worth next to nothing in the Beckett guide.

Thinking it was a mistake, I took the cards that I had duplicates of back to the baseball card shop, hoping to swap some of them for more Sierra cards. I had all the good cards, a Dwight Gooden, a Jose Canseco, a Cal Ripken and two Bo Jacksons.

I was dismayed when the card dealer shook his head and told me my cards were worthless.

"I'll give you a quarter each for the Bos," he said, "but I've got plenty of the others."

I protested that the Bo cards were worth almost a dollar each in Beckett, but to no avail. He just pointed to a stack of Bos and said he already had more than he can use.

A couple of little boys — they couldn't have been older than 10 — laughed at my ignorance.

"Rookie cards are the only ones that are worth anything," one of them said. "Don't ya know anything?"

I didn't, but I soon learned. I rounded up some rookie cards — a player's first card in a regular issue set is his rookie card — and took them in for trade. I didn't get as much in return as I had hoped for, but I got enough to wet my appetite.

Rookie Fever

I had rookie fever. I ripped through packs of cards, seeking the all-important rookies and tossing all others into a pile.

Blinded by greed, I no longer cared about cards with beautiful pictures or thrilling stats. Heck, I even lost interest in Ranger cards.

All I cared about was getting more rookies so that I could trade them in for more packs of cards so that I could get more rookies.

But, one day I looked around my room at the hundreds of crumpled up wrappers and realized that I had gone too far.

I told myself that I would sell my valuable cards and stop this foolishness. So I took my rookies down to the card shop, and got a rude surprise.

The dealer wouldn't pay as much for rookies, even though they had gone up in Beckett. It seemed that everyone else was selling their best cards too and there was a glut on the market.

Dejected, I looked down at a basket of commons — cards that have little to value because they are in short supply — and spotted a Geno Petralli marked for only a nickel.

The Ranger catcher had always been a mental favorite of mine.

Bob Uecker, Petralli has survived major leagues for a long time with sible talent. Furthermore, he once for Dr. Pepper, just like my dad.

I had a collection of his cards, and I could get a dozen of them for a hot rookie.

I care that Petralli's cards are being to other collectors, I want to sell them. And even if the baseball industry falls apart

THEY, I'll still enjoy having them.

Aggie tracksters improve, still fall

By Douglas Pils
The Battalion

FORT WORTH — In keeping with the plan for the 1991 Southwest Conference Indoor Track Championships, Texas A&M's track and field teams improved upon last year's performance, while Arkansas and Texas ran away with the men's and women's titles, respectively.

Finishing fourth, the Aggie men's team slipped a notch from last year's performance, but their 53 points was a five-point improvement from a year ago. Arkansas won its 11th straight indoor championship with 151 points as it heads to the Southeastern Conference next year.

Baylor was second with 93 points on the strength of its 4x400 relay team and Texas was third with 60 points.

The women's team took fifth place, an improvement from sixth last year, with 30 points. Juniors Gwen Buck and Amy Paulsen paced the Aggies with second-place finishes in the high jump and the shot put. Buck cleared 5-8 3/4 as senior Sandra Hines, who went in as the meet favorite, was scratched from the event with an injury.

Paulsen, a freshman from Norfolk, Nebraska, tossed the shot 48-2 to surprise the field.

Texas won its seventh straight women's title with 141 points, followed by Arkansas with 80, Baylor with 76, Houston with 67 and A&M.

Placing three hurdlers in the top four of the men's 55-meter hurdles turned out to be the Aggies' highlight of the finals, which were held on Saturday.

Senior Richard Bucknor, running in his last SWC meet, started slow but finished the last three hurdles strong for his third consecutive championship in 7.32 seconds. Arthur Smith of Baylor took the second spot, but senior Greg Williams and junior Nic Pollard finished third and fourth with times of 7.40 and 7.41, respectively.

Bucknor, who transferred from Central Arizona Junior College and hails from Kingston, Jamaica, said he wasn't real happy with the race, but he's glad it's over. "It wasn't the best race I could've run,"

Bucknor said. "My start wasn't that good and I was slow over the first couple of hurdles, so I had to work hard on the last few hurdles."

"I'm happy it's over. My coach in high school went to Texas, so I feel good about being able to go back and tell him that I won five SWC championships."

Pollard said that while he was pleased with the race, things could've gone better.

"I felt pretty good," Pollard said. "It's exciting to see everyone do well, but it could have been better if (Ricky) Barker had made it to the finals."

Barker, a decathlete in the outdoor season, finished seventh in the long jump and just missed qualifying for the finals after making it to the semifinals.

Aggie head coach Ted Nelson, coaching in his first SWC championship after the retirement of longtime coach Charlie Thomas, said the teams over-achieved their goals but some golden opportunities were missed.

"We did good and even did a little better than we thought," Nelson said. "But with a little bit here and there we could have done better."

"We missed a few chances in the pole vault, I was disappointed with the high jump and we were close in the 600 yard dash and the 400 meters. Those are all small things, but if you add those things, we could have been third."

Nelson praised the efforts of the women's team, especially Paulsen's shot put.

"Amy Paulsen competed very well in the shot against some really tough competition," he said. "They did good, we just need to move up a couple of notches."

Other Aggies scoring points were:

Women
Long Jump — Sheryl Pavelka, Jr-2L, fifth, 19-2.
Shot Put — Robin Westbrook, Jr-2L, sixth, 43-0 3/4.
5000 M — Michelle Byrne, Fr-HS, sixth, 17:34.74.
3000 M — Melissa Weaver, Jr-1L, fourth, 9:47.49.
800 M — Ginger Hoot, Jr-2L, sixth, 2:17.3.
55 hurdles — Kalleen Madden, So-1L,



KARL STOLLEIS/The Battalion

A&M runner Richard Bucknor clears the final hurdle of his collegiate indoor career. Bucknor garnered the only Aggie victory at the Southwest Conference Indoor Track Championships Saturday in Fort Worth.

fourth, 8.26.
4x400 relay — Kina McMillian, Jr-2L, Pavelka, Kafi Carter, Fr-HS, and Stacy Stuart, Fr-HS, sixth, 4:04.72.
Men
Pole Vault — Dan Signorelli, Jr-2L, second, 16-10 1/4.
Long Jump — Kevin Sims, Sr-2L, sixth, 23-8.
Shot Put — Steve Collier, Sr-1L, fourth, 56-11 1/4.
High Jump — Lee Pool, Fr-HS, sixth, 6-11 3/4.
600 yard — Mike Miller, So-Sq, fourth, 1:10.45, Rick Smith, So-1L, sixth, 1:13.34.
400 M — Howard Davis, Sr-2L, fourth, 47.72.
55 M — Kary Vincent, Sr-Sq, third, 6.33.
4x400 relay — Richard Murphy, Fr-HS, Miller, Davis, Ray Griffiths, Jr-2L, fourth, 3:15.04.

No. 14 Aggies sweep NLU; improve to 7-2

By Steve O'Brien
The Battalion

The boys of summer got a taste of Old Man Winter Saturday afternoon, and for the Aggies it was a feast.

A&M gobbled up Northeast Louisiana in both games of a twinbill in front of 979 fans at Olsen Field as the temperature dropped to 50 degrees. A driving rain delayed the opener an hour and nine minutes.

A&M head coach Mark Johnson was pleased with how his team responded to the challenge.

"We're talking about a positive reaction to a negative situation," Johnson said. "Tonight I thought our guys did a real good job with that."

The two victories on Saturday completed a three-game sweep of NLU after a 13-2 victory in the series opener Friday night.

The Aggies pushed their record to 7-2 and NLU dropped to 3-5.

A&M hosts Westmont College today and Tuesday to conclude the eight-game homestand. Both games start at 3:00 p.m.

In the opener Saturday, A&M right-hander Steve Hughes got the win and evened his record at 1-1. He came out of the bullpen in the fifth inning to relieve starter Jason Bullard as the Aggies won 8-5.

Hughes threw five shutout innings, giving up four hits and striking out five.

"I thought it was an outstanding performance by (Hughes)," Johnson said. "I made it a point to tell the team I thought he did a great job."

Even though the Aggies were behind when Hughes entered the game, he wasn't worried.

"I had confidence in our hitters that they were going to come back and win it for us," Hughes said. "I just went out there and tried to shut them down."

A&M equalled its season high with 13 hits in the game, but they still had to come from behind to win.

NLU had built a 5-2 lead after four innings before a three-run fifth brought the Aggies back.

During the comeback, Aggie right fielder Dan Robinson drove in two runs on a two-out double and finished the game 3-for-4.

"That's a positive," Robinson said. "Every chance we get we need to come back like that."

"The ball just looked a little bigger today. Hopefully it'll stay big the rest of the season."

The Aggies took the lead in the sixth with a RBI single off the bat of second baseman Sittichoke Huckuntod.

"That was a real boost for us," Johnson said. "We got some clutch hitting and when we had a man on second base we seemed to make something happen. It's encouraging."

In the nightcap, right-hander Jason Hutchins threw a seven-inning complete game shutout to lead A&M to 4-0 victory.

Hutchins got his first decision of the season, making his record 1-0.

Leading the offense for A&M were center fielder Brian Thomas and shortstop Jason Marshall.

Marshall went 2-for-3, pounding an RBI double in the second inning to start the scoring for A&M.

Thomas scored on Marshall's double,



JAY JANNER/The Battalion

NLU's Jay Nelson (1) tries to convince the umpire that A&M's Sittichoke Huckuntod is out at second base, while Tim Fiene awaits the call. Huckuntod safely stole the base Friday at Olsen Field and the Aggies won 13-2.

in the fourth inning Thomas hit a solo home run over the right field wall to make A&M's lead 3-0. Robinson drove in the final run of the game with a sacrifice fly in the fifth.

In Friday night's action, A&M starter Ronnie Allen allowed only one run in seven

innings of work, as the Aggies bit into NLU pitching with a 13-hit attack. With the victory, Allen goes to 2-0 and improves his ERA to 1.29.

3-for-4 with two RBIs and designated hitter David Rollen drove in two runs with a double in the fifth inning.

In one inning of work, left-hander Jay Hogue allowed one run and right-hander Chris Messick closed the game in the ninth.

The Aggies' weekend feeding frenzy comes after a disappointing two-game split with Southwest Texas earlier in the week.