

Aggies attempt to clear cobwebs against Louisiana Tech



KEVIN IVY/The Battalion

Second baseman Sittichoke Huckuntod throws out an SHSU batter.

By Steve O'Brien
The Battalion

After a roller-coaster ride this past week, the A&M baseball team gets a chance to smooth things out against Louisiana Tech this weekend at Olsen Field.

A&M lost two of three games against top-ranked Louisiana State last weekend beat Sam Houston State 4-2 Monday. The Aggies begin a three-game series against the Bulldogs with a 3:00 game today.

The Aggies are ranked No. 13 by Baseball America with an 11-4 record while the Bulldogs are unranked at 4-5.

Junior right-hander Ronnie Allen will start for the Aggies, and Richard Hunter will take the mound for Tech.

Allen carries a 2-0 record into the game with a team-leading 1.29 ERA.

Hunter boasts a 1-2 record with a 2.76 ERA.

The teams square-off in a Saturday twinbill, starting at 1 p.m.

The Bulldogs' Mark Harris will start in the first game and senior Andy Overholser draws the start for Saturday's second game.

Harris 0-1 with a 1.30 ERA and Overholser is 2-0 with 3.38 ERA.

Probable Aggie starters for the doubleheader are Jason Hutchins and Kelly Wunsch.

A&M leads the series 21-6, but Tech won two of three last year in Ruston.

In the Aggies' victory Monday, former second baseman Trey Witte started his first game of the year. Although he got no decision, A&M won 4-2 behind the hitting of Sittichoke Huckuntod. The senior second baseman smacked an RBI triple

to give the Aggies a 3-2 lead. Designated hitter David Rollen, centerfielder Brian Thomas and Jason Marshall also provided RBI.

Wunsch, a freshman lefthander, overcame a weekend battering by LSU, going three innings to pick up the win.

A&M leftfielder Mike Hickey leads the team with three home runs and 16 RBIs.

Wunsch went into Monday's game to relieve Witte in the fifth and sixth innings. Wunsch picked up the win, improving his record to 2-1.

Relief pitcher Steve Hughes entered the game in the top of the seventh and went on to close the game, grabbing his first save of the season.

The Aggies head for Beaumont Tuesday to take on Lamar in a 1 p.m. doubleheader at Vincent-Beck Stadium.



HUY THANH NGUYEN/The Battalion

Aggie freshman Kelly Wunsch prepares to deliver a pitch against Sam Houston State Monday. Wunsch pitched two innings in relief and earned the win as A&M triumphed 4-2.

1991 Texas A&M Softball Preview

Lady Aggies in the hunt again for NCAA championship

Matured Aags ready for challenge

By Douglas Pils
The Battalion

Return 11 players from last year's NCAA regional softball team, one returnee from the 1988 NCAA fifth-place finisher, start off the season 7-0 on the road and most coaches would be talking national championship.

However, turn that around and six of those from last year's team are sophomores, the addition from the 1988 team is playing for the first time in two years and the team stands ready to play 20 games over the next 10 days. Looking at it from that perspective, it's easy to understand Bob Brock's cautious optimism.

Brock, the head coach of the ninth-ranked Lady Aggie softball team, believes his team is headed in the direction of post-season play this year, but he's going to wait until

after those 10 days to pass any further judgement.

"If we really play well and do a nice job we might could be off to the best start we've ever had," Brock said. "If we take these games one game at a time and just get through these two weeks, then we might be 27-0. Realistically, I don't know if we can do that, but the possibility exists."

Those 20 games will be held at the Lady Aggie Softball Complex adjacent to Olsen Field, and 17 of those are part of the Aggie I and II Invationals. Aggie I starts today with A&M playing at 10 a.m. against Northeast Louisiana, noon against Penn State and a 4 p.m. matchup with Sam Houston State. Aggie II starts next Friday.

Games against 17th-ranked Missouri Saturday at 6 p.m. and the big one with fourth-ranked Cal-State Fullerton should be good indicators

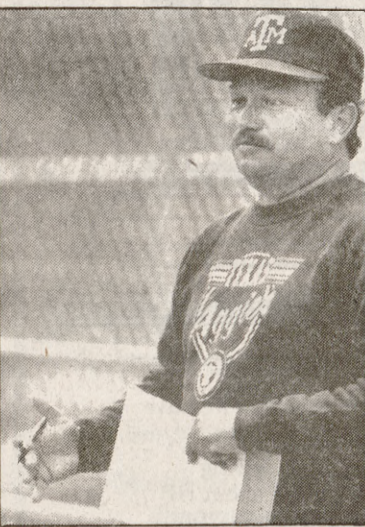
of the team's progress.

Tough games like these are nothing new for Brock, as his teams have consistently matched up with the nation's best. Ever since his first year as the A&M coach in 1982, Brock has had nothing but success.

The Aggies won 84 games against only 9 losses for an incredible 90 percent winning percentage. The team won the last AIAW national championship that year and came back in 1983 to win the NCAA national championship with a 41-11 record. The only year A&M didn't make it to the regional playoffs was in 1989 after a 31-27 season.

Another national title, two second-place finishes and 314 wins later, Brock said this year's team holds some similarities to some of

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KEVIN IVY/The Battalion

Coach Bob Brock is back for his 10th year at the A&M helm. Over that period, he has led the Lady Aggies to three national championships and a 439-139 record.

Young guns down batters

By James Bruce
The Battalion

If pitching is an art, then Missi Young is an artist.

Young already has painted some victories for the Texas A&M softball team this year, compiling four wins without a loss. The team hopes this artist can create enough pitching masterpieces to put them back on top of the NCAA softball world.

Last season, Young showed her artistic value on the mound, compiling a record of 26 wins and 11 losses with an earned-run average of 0.61. These accomplishments earned her first-team all-region honors in her freshman season.

Young, a sophomore from Santa Fe, has always been a pitcher and is uneasy at any other position.

"When I'm not pitching, I feel uncomfortable with the game," Young said. "Position players are often waiting for the game to come to them, but as a pitcher I feel in

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KEVIN IVY/The Battalion

Missi Young led the A&M with 22 wins and 272 strikeouts last season.

McFalls bursts into shortstop spot

By Chris Whitley
The Battalion

Jennifer McFalls never thought she'd make it to Texas A&M.

"I guess it was kind of a dream come true," the freshman sensation of the Lady Aggies said about coming here.

"I've always liked this school. I always wanted to come here. I didn't think I would end up here, but that's what happened."

Now McFalls is the starting shortstop for one of the nation's top college softball teams in her first year on the A&M squad.

"Jennifer, as a freshman, has done a super job," head softball coach Bob Brock said. "She's very tough mentally."

"She's producing for us immediately, batting in the number three position, and she's doing some great things defensively."

For McFalls, College Station is a long way from the local softball league fields in Grand Prairie, her hometown.

"It was a big adjustment all around," McFalls said. "As far as softball goes, it was different because we didn't have it in high school, so it wasn't like we had to practice every day."

"I found out how dedicated I was to it."

McFalls started playing softball at the tender age of 8 in the Grand Prairie Girls League. In the ten years she played in that league and in nearby Irving, her teams took home numerous titles.

Also, she has played in the national championship tournament four times. Last year, her team went to California for the nationals and finished seventh out of 60 competitors.

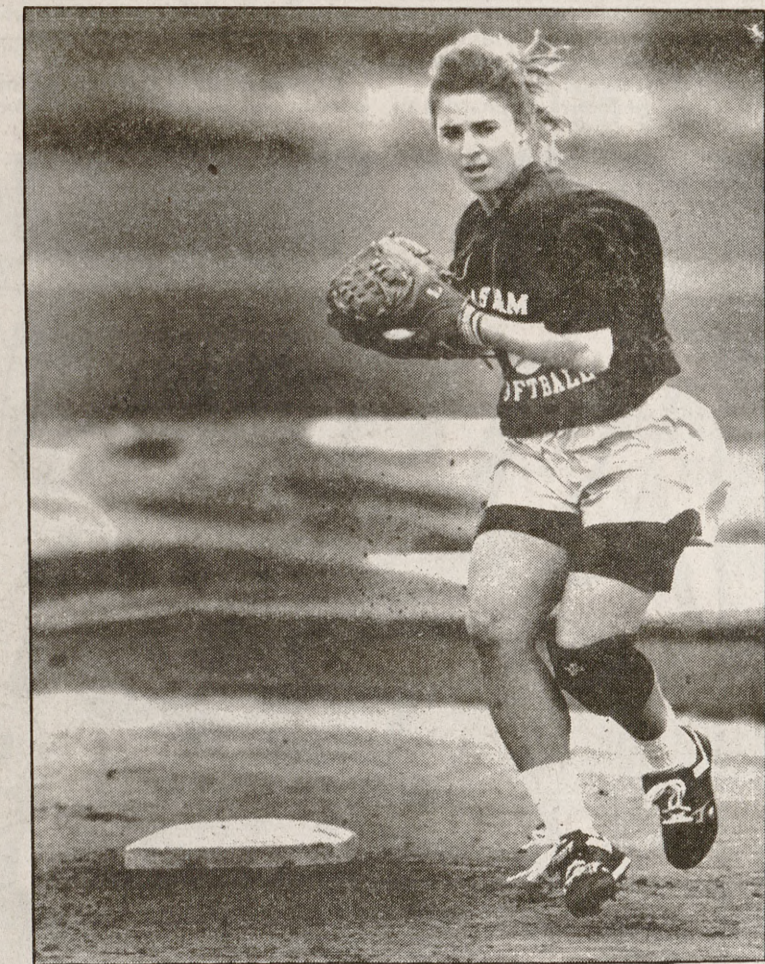
In the years McFalls has played, she almost always has been the shortstop, but said she would have changed to play at A&M.

"I wasn't sure that I would definitely play shortstop when I was recruited," McFalls said, "but I was willing to give it a shot if the coach would give me the chance."

Brock did, and McFalls impressed him enough to beat out veteran Rhonda Halbert for the spot. Halbert moved to third, and now the pair form a solid tandem.

"Having Jennifer and Rhonda on the left side is really going to help us out this year," Brock said.

Excelling in athletics has always been a strong suit for McFalls. At South Grand Prairie High School, she was on the volleyball, soccer, and basketball teams while playing



KEVIN IVY/The Battalion

Freshman shortstop Jennifer McFalls is the only A&M freshman on the squad.

softball in the summer. There, she was voted Most Athletic of her class.

In fact, she was recruited in every sport she played, but she had her mind made up to play softball and to play it at A&M.

"I remember one time after a basketball game, my coach said, 'Jennifer, there's somebody here who wants to talk to you, but I already told him that he's going to have to talk you out of A&M first,'" McFalls said.

She chose softball because she felt it was her better sport despite all of her accolades in others.

She attributes her athleticism to her family, who is also her main source of support.

"I've been brought up in a very athletic family," she said. "They were all big in sports."



KEVIN IVY/The Battalion

A&M third baseman Rhonda Halbert is back in school with much more determination.

Halbert fights back into school, lineup

By Alan Lehmann
The Battalion

Rhonda Halbert has the eligibility of a junior, but the wisdom of a graduate.

The junior third baseman from Yukon, Oklahoma has taken an unusual route to the hot corner at Aggie Field, but has learned a valuable lesson.

Failing grades forced her to withdraw from Texas A&M in 1988. She said that it hurt her to quit the softball team, but poor grades were her own fault.

"When I came to A&M, I came to play softball, not to get an education," she said. "I hardly ever cracked a book."

Halbert returned to Oklahoma and enrolled in a local junior college. She dedicated herself to studying and got her first job.

"I was working in a hospital back home," she said. "It was nice to have my own money, but it motivated me to get back to school."

Halbert was also motivated to improve her grades. "Having to leave (A&M) made me realize how important an education is," she said. "I didn't miss softball as much as I thought I would."

She completed the hours that she needed and transferred back to A&M last fall. But it was not easy and Halbert said she often had doubts.

"At times, I felt like giving up," she said. "It just seemed too hard."

"But once I started making good grades, they were easier to keep making."

And she has continued to succeed. Halbert earned a 2.75 GPR in the fall, and said her classes are going well this semester.

For A&M softball coach Bob Brock, that is music to his ears.

"Rhonda is a super athlete and a great person," Brock said. "Her coming back to the team was a very pleasant surprise."

He said that Halbert's academic problems, and her subsequent successes have become a positive factor on the team.

"She is a great influence on the team," Brock said. "Rhonda is someone for the girls to look up to and learn from."

Halbert can also teach the team something about courage. As a third baseman, she plays about forty feet from the plate, a terribly short distance to field the rocket shots she is sometimes confronted with.

"I don't think about it," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "If I get hit, I get hit."

Halbert is no slouch at the plate, either. An ideal lead-off hitter, she has a .400 batting average and .412 on-base percentage through five games this season.

The year and a half layoff apparently has not affected Halbert's skill.

"She has just gotten better," Brock said. "Rhonda is not yet where she should be physically, but she will get better over the next couple of weeks."

But no matter how the softball team fares, Halbert knows what is important.

"When I see athletes with the attitude that 'I don't need to study, I'll always have my talent to fall back on,' I just want to go up to them and shake them," she said, "because that's how I used to feel, and I found out the hard way."