

## Benchwarmer blues: no fun being left out

When I agreed to take the job of sports editor of The Battalion, it was my understanding that I just had to report about sports, not play them. So you can imagine my surprise when I was suddenly put in charge of organizing a co-rec softball team.



**KYLE BURNETT**  
Sports editor

I thought this would be no big deal. After all, how difficult can a little organizational work be?

Wanting to get this over as quickly as possible, I hung up a sign-up sheet in the old snoozeroom and doing what every good editor should do, I passed the rest of the responsibilities to someone else.

So now it was set. All I had to do was show up at the field. So the first game came along and we, The Muckrakers, lost miserably to the Nymphs, 11-3. I certainly did my part to aid in our defeat. I hit two pop flies to center field and when a ball was finally hit to me in deep, deep left field, I missed it, giving the batter a two-run triple.

I didn't take it so bad, though. After all, it was I who had stressed to all the Batt staffers that all they had to do was show up because we stunk. We were just there to have fun. Surprisingly, in our miserable defeat we still had a good time.

Well, in order to not repeat my less-than-impressive first performance, I went straight to the batting cages and worked on the old swing. I was ready now. "No more of this pop fly crap," I told myself.

So the next game rolled around and there I was, mitt in hand and ready to take on our worthy adversary, Godspeed.

One small problem, though— we had one too many guys. So instead

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# Ryan leads Rangers to 5-3 victory

By CHRIS WHITLEY

The Battalion

ARLINGTON— Most 46-year-old pitchers would find it difficult to suffer both hip and foot injuries, sit on the sidelines for 72 days and return to action throwing 96-mph fastballs.

But then there's Nolan Ryan. The long-awaited return of the Grand Old Man of Baseball on Monday night did not disappoint the sell-out crowd of 40,676 at Arlington Stadium as Ryan propelled the Texas Rangers to a 5-3 victory over the Milwaukee Brewers.

For the future Hall-of-Famer, Monday's win was a culmination of a frustrating two-and-a-half month sabbatical on the disabled list because of a strained left hip he suffered in a game on May 7. That

was coupled later with a boating accident which required seven stitches in his foot.

Ryan said after the game that there was a time during his leave when he wondered if he could finish his 27th and final year in the major leagues.

"Tonight was a special night for me because three weeks ago, I didn't know if I would pitch again this year," Ryan said. "I didn't know if I did, when I would pitch. So tonight was a big night."

Ryan (2-2) lasted five and two-third innings, allowing only two runs off three hits. He registered six strikeouts, increas-

ing his career record total to 5,684. It was Ryan's first win since the season opener on April 9, his first win against the Brewers since he recorded his 300th win in 1990, and his 321st win overall.

His notorious fastball topped out at 96 mph, serving notice to the Brewers and to himself that the heat was back.

"Overall, I was very pleased with my performance," Ryan said. "I had good velocity tonight. Being off that long, I wanted to come out and throw strikes."

Ryan received some much-needed help from the Rangers' high-powered offense— in particular, Julio Franco. Texas' designated hitter had a 3-for-4 night with 2 RBIs.

Franco started off the game with a crushing solo homerun to center field in the first inning to give the Rangers the early lead. He later made a key single on

a hit-and-run play in the fifth, moving David Hulse from first to third base. Rafael Palmeiro then singled in Hulse, giving the Rangers a more comfortable 4-2 lead.

But Nolan did his part as well. He retired six batters in a row before leaving the game in the sixth inning. Having reached 91 pitches, Ryan decided that was the best time to leave the game.

"I was ready to come out," Ryan said. "I felt like if I stayed much longer I would have gotten into a deficit and that might affect my next start. And really, I had accomplished what I had hoped to tonight."

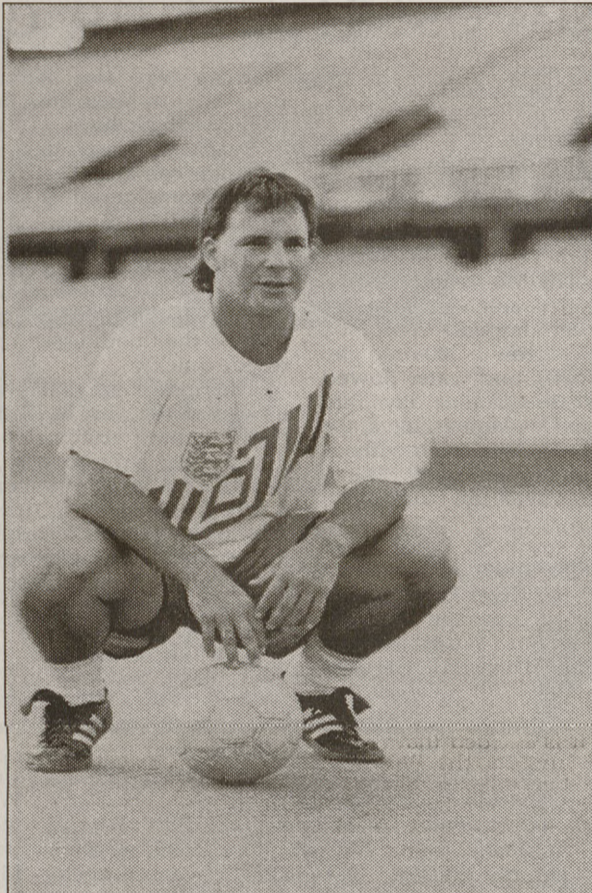
Rangers manager Kevin Kennedy said: "He was outstanding. He did everything we had hoped he could do. He had great

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# Venetoulis balances soccer, football careers

By SUSAN OWEN

The Battalion



BILLY MORAN/The Battalion

Venetoulis

Terry Venetoulis is doing a balancing act.

Texas A&M's powerful placekicker is being recruited by the U.S. Olympic soccer team. Over the summer, Venetoulis has received letters saying he's been nominated for selection to the team. But, he says, though he'd love to play for the U.S. Olympic team, his last year of eligibility at A&M takes precedence.

"I couldn't just back out right before two-a-days and say, 'Sorry, I'm going to go play soccer now,'" he says.

Balancing soccer and football is nothing new to Venetoulis. A&M football fans know him as the all-conference kicker who scored A&M's only points in the 1993 Cotton Bowl, and whose last-second field goal saved the Aggies from being outscored by Texas Tech in A&M's closest game last season.

But he didn't take up football until pretty late in the game. Eleftherios Venetoulis, whose father played professional soccer for Greece, has been playing soccer since he was three years old. "I didn't kick a football until I was a junior in high school," he says.

Since little league and All-State soccer in New York, Venetoulis has played for Texas teams ranging from the South Texas Select Team, at age 12, to high school soccer at Deer Park, to the semi-pro Houston Dynamos, at 16, and a Houston Indoor League championship team.

When he was 13, Venetoulis was chosen for the Under-16 Greek national team and spent three months living and traveling in Greece, playing other European teams.

Venetoulis says he thinks it was last summer while he was playing sweeper and stopper for the semi-pro Houston Hurricanes that Olympic scouts took notice of him. In addition to Aggieland city-league soccer, he is playing for the Hurricanes again this summer, attending classes at A&M and driving to Houston for games and practices.

One might wonder how football fits into all this. The answer is that it almost didn't.

"I guess the turning point in my life was when I was 16," Venetoulis says. He was playing for the Dynamos and was invited to play for a Division I professional team in Europe. On the verge of flying to New York to sign the contract, he reconsidered.

"My mom talked me into at least finishing high school," he says. "She said, 'If they want you now, they'll want you after high school.' Then all of a sudden, here comes football."

He began playing football as a junior at Deer Park. "To me, it was just fun going outside and kicking footballs," he says. "I thought I was just having fun but I guess other people thought I was doing pretty good." A senior All-American and the state's top placekicker, he began to look at colleges and furthering his education.

"I started to realize soccer and football might not last forever," he says. "I didn't really worry about it too much until after my senior year, though. I just wanted to play and have fun."

He visited several schools during the recruiting process and says though he knew little about A&M he liked the friendliness of the school and the loyalty of its fans.

One factor in his eventual choice of A&M may have been his memories of going with his mother to the Texas A&M-Alabama game on December 1, 1988 at Kyle Field. Though Alabama dominated the game and won 30-10, Venetoulis noted that the A&M fans stayed through the entire game, singing and cheering.

"Nobody left, nobody booed," he says. "I thought, this is a really neat place."

It reminded him, he says, of playing in the Europe Cup when he was 13 and seeing the crowded stands of soccer fans singing and cheering on the 13-, 14- and 15-year-old players. "The stadium was packed, people dancing and drinking and hollering," he says.

Venetoulis says he'd like to work around the A&M football schedule and practices to play soccer for the U.S. when he can. If forced to choose, though, he says, "I'd definitely stay here with football."

# NFL owners, players adjust to changes in free agency system

By MARK SMITH

The Battalion

As football training camps start to get underway, National Football League owners try to make last-minute free agency acquisitions to fill the holes in their roster.

For example, former Texas A&M fullback Doug Carter became familiar with free agency with an invitation to the Houston Oilers training camp in San Antonio on July 21.

"Doug came in as an undrafted rookie free agent," said Bob Schranz, assistant director of media relations for the Oilers. "The rules for that are slightly different (than for veterans.)"

Carter will not be eligible for unrestricted free agency until he achieves veteran status, Schranz said. "Once he acquires veteran status he gets unrestricted free agency," Schranz said. "For example, if Doug signs a one-year deal now, then next year he becomes a free agent again, but the club has the option to match any offer he gets."



Carter

The NFL Players Association and the owners continued to negotiate over free agency after the strike. U.S. District Judge David Doty, who has overseen the case since then, ruled in mid-1988 that the play-

ers be eligible for some form of free agency.

In February 1989, the NFL introduced a form of limited free agency called "Plan B." Under Plan B each team could protect 37 players from free agency, allowing the remaining majority of a team's roster free agent status.

In April 1990, Freeman McNeil and seven other players restricted by Plan B sued the NFL. In September 1992, a jury struck down Plan B on the grounds that it violated antitrust laws. Two weeks later, four of the eight players in the McNeil case were awarded unrestricted free agency.

"The victory in the McNeil case changed the way the owners looked at the players," Duberstein said. "It meant that the owners had to accept more change."

In December 1992, the Players Association and the NFL reached an agreement in principle concerning free agency and other issues.

Duberstein said, "The agreement that the owners and players reached is a partnership. An arrangement like this has never existed before. It's a mature

relationship between them.

"In a real essence it's a win-win situation. The owners are guaranteed a profit and as revenues increase the players get more money."

Greg Avola, director of communications for the NFL, said, "It's a very exciting time. We're out of the courts and the years of strife with the players are over."

"We've forged a new partnership with the players and everything looks very positive."

The seven-year contract provides free agency for all players in the year their contracts expire, called their option year, as long as they have been in the league for five years. However, this rule will not apply if a salary cap is in effect. The players have approximately 19 weeks, from March 1 until July 15 of their option year, to come to terms with another team, or they have to return to their original team.

Each team can protect one star player from free agency for the life of his career as long as he is

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