

Q&A with Mark Johnson

By Mark Smith
THE BATTALION

Q: Jeff Granger and Kelly Wunsch were two of your ace pitchers last year, but both of them were first round draft picks in the Major League draft. How big of a loss was it to lose both of them?

A: "I think both of those players were outstanding for us.

"Any time you lose blue-chippers it's going to have an effect on your ball club.

"We feel like we've got some pretty good players returning so that's going to help us. But, we're going to miss those pitchers, no doubt about it."

Q: What type of pitching rotation do you think you will

have during the season?

A: "We've had some injuries occur and everything will revolve around whether they're going to get healthy. "Justin Atchley and John Codrington both had bone spurs removed in the fall. They're both starting to throw now.

"How quickly they can get recovered and up to full speed will determine how we set our rotation.

"Moore will be our Friday night starter if he's healthy. Atchley and Codrington were both in the hunt to be a starter. If they're healthy then you have Clemons and Parker as relief. If not, then those guys are both very capable pitchers, so they would become

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— Mark Johnson,
head coach

starters. You just have to wait and see."

"Donnie Fowler is a guy we recruited out of Spring High School who was a sixth round draft choice. He hasn't been healthy since the summertime. He had otoscopic surgery (Feb. 2). Now what you have is three of what you thought were your top seven pitchers as a little bit of a question mark. We're anticipating Atchley and Codrington being healthy and ready to go, but at this time I can't set a rotation."

Q: Brian Thomas was one of your team leaders last year, both on and off the field. What effects are there now that he is gone?

A: "That was a big loss for us in not only the numbers that he brought to us, but also the intangibles that he brought to the ball park. He was always ready to play, a 100 percent player, a big-time hustle guy, never intimidated by anybody. When you have guys like that it's really contagious. I'm not saying we don't have some guys that can pick up that load, but those kind of guys are hard to replace. We'll have a hard time replacing him not only because of his physical talent, but also his approach to the ball game."

Q: How do you feel about the quality of the schedule?



A: "I feel real good about it. It's a tough schedule. It's one we think will be very challenging to our team. There's a lot of teams in there who aren't as big of names because they're not football powerhouses and basketball powerhouses. Indiana State is a good example. They're an outstanding baseball program. "Then you look at Southeast Louisiana. They won big, McNeese won big, Sam Houston is always good. Lamar was in regionals last year. Mary Hardin Baylor has been a dominant factor in their division. Dallas Baptist is ranked sixth in their division in the nation. When you couple that with Penn State, USC, Kansas, Arizona and Pepperdine you may have bit off more than you can chew."

Q: The Pepperdine game is after the Southwest Conference tournament. Why did you pick it up on the schedule?

A: "We're going to try that.

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