

# It's not quite a perfect world for baseball

MARK SMITH



Sports Editor

A bright September sun shines down onto north Texas. The still-new seats of The Ballpark in Arlington are filled with thousands of fans cheering for their first place team that will venture into the playoffs in October.

Tom Henke is on the mound, with the bases loaded and Chicago White Sox first baseman Frank Thomas is up to bat. The Rangers lead 12-9.

Henke takes his hat off and wipes the sweat from his forehead. He winds up and pitches. Thomas launches a deep shot into deep right field. Rusty Greer goes back to the warning track. He jumps, but in keeping with the tradition set by Jose Canseco, goes into a Pele-style bicycle kick, sending the ball into the bleachers for a home-run. The crowd goes wild. The Rangers lose. They're 10 games under .500 and they're going to the playoffs.

Meanwhile down in Houston A few hundred miles south of Arlington, another Texas baseball team plays underneath artificial lights inside the world's first domed stadium. John Hudek is on the mound for the Astros, facing Fred McGriff with David Justice taking a comfortable lead off first. The Astros lead 4-3.

Hudek pitches and McGriff hits his rising fastball into left-center. Center fielder Steve Finley dives through the air to snag what surely would have been extra-bases for McGriff. The Astros win. But, so do the division-leading Cincinnati Reds who lead the Astros by 1/2 game. The Astros are 21 games above .500, but will have to wait another year to be the "boys of October."

Doesn't seem fair does it?

Realignment goes astray With the inception of the Major League Baseball's realignment, regional rivalries can develop and the divisions make much more sense. But it might let mediocre teams into the playoffs and keep other teams that deserve the post-season more out.

The Texas Rangers are, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the worst first place team in the majors. They are three games ahead of the second place Oakland A's while being three games under .500.

Their record is 42-45. They have the worst fielding percentage in the league.

The Astros are 11 games above .500 and still trail the Reds by three games. They sent five

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By Mark Smith  
THE BATTALION

To be a high quality athlete today requires two important qualifications. One, the athlete must have natural ability in the sport that he or she wants to participate. This could include speed, agility or strength.

Two, the athlete must train and train and train. Karl Kapchinski, head athletic

## Part two of three

trainer for the Texas A&M Athletic Department, said athletes today require a great deal of training to meet their potential.

"If a kid has God given talent, then the coaches and trainers take that kid and refine his talent," Kapchinski said. "We take that raw talent and train it."

But that training can take on many forms and deals with many avenues of science from psychology to engineering.

In order to obtain the best output for an athlete, these disciplines must work in conjunction to fully utilize the athlete's capabilities.

Possibly the most obvious part of the training process is the actual physical exercise that athletes perform to strengthen their bodies. However, even these exercises have been tailored to best suit particular athletic needs.

A long-distance runner does not need the bulk obtained from power-lifting, where those types of exercises would be ideally suited for linemen for a football team.

The United States Olympic Committee uses exercise physiologists to monitor an athlete's performance during exercise. In their physical conditioning lab they perform tests which include maximum oxygen consumption (VO<sub>2</sub>), lactate, body composition and heart rate.

From these tests the coaches and

athletes determine the athlete's strengths and weaknesses and indicate strategies for future training programs.

In order to design the best possible workout for an athlete, specialists called biomechanicists are employed to monitor an athlete's technique and recommend changes in form to maximize potential.

Dr. Stephen Gordon, the director of musculoskeletal research for the National Institute for Health, said even a slight change in an athlete's form can make a difference.

"By studying the way the body works we can optimize the way the body works," Gordon said.

"Hypothetically, if by lifting a knee 15 degrees will give the athlete a better angle then we'll tell them. It just puts the athlete in a better mechanical position," he said.

To study an athlete's technique, the biomechanicists use computers and high-speed video cameras to film the athlete performing their sport. The computer then places the activity onto the screen, showing the athletes movements as a series of stick figures.

Coaches and trainers can then evaluate the motion and recommend changes to help the athlete's performance.

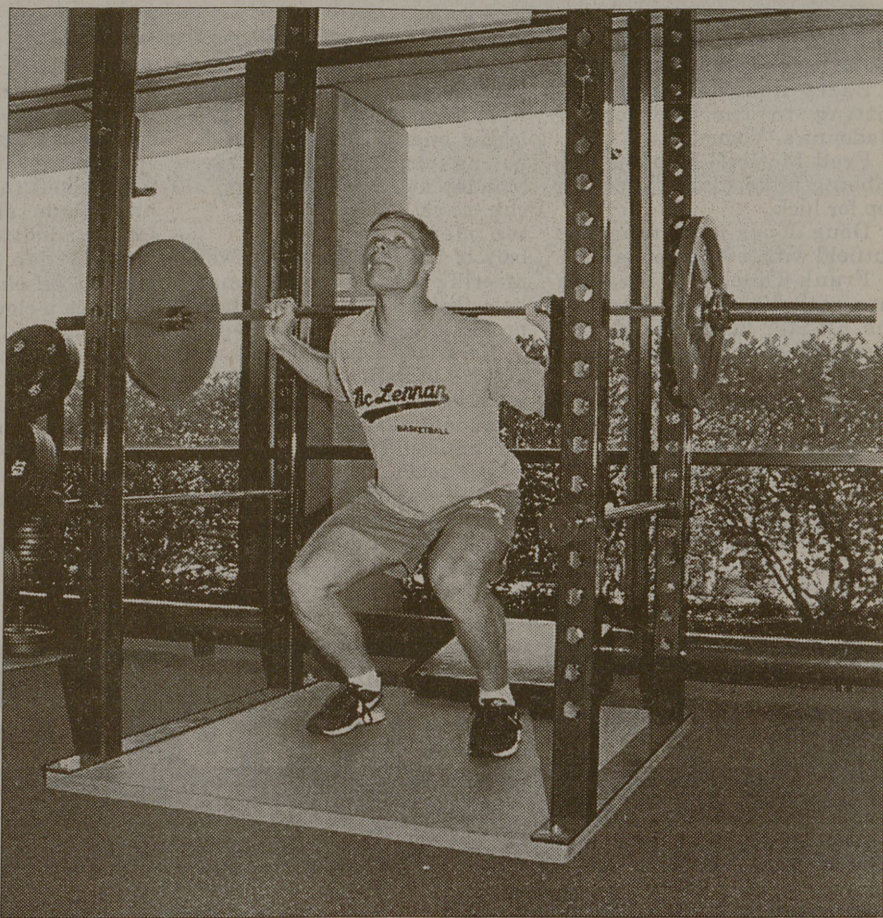
However, not all performance is physical. The mind plays a large role in athletic performance.

Because of this, the field of sports psychology has been developed since the 1920s to help athlete's performance.

Dr. Arnold Luenes, a researcher and professor in the psychology department at Texas A&M, said that although the area of sports psychology is rather old, its use has only been a recent development.

"It started in the 1920s in Illinois," Luenes said. "In the mid-60s there was an organization created for sports psychologists, but it's wide-spread use has been fairly recent. It's really only a 15-year-old discipline."

Sports psychologist use a number of



Stew Milne/THE BATTALION

Kyle Thompson, a student trainer, does squats at Netum Steed Laboratory.

techniques to help athletes enhance their performance and relieve the stress that competition can sometimes create.

Dr. Nicholas W. Dobrovolsky, in the A&M Student Counseling Center, works with some of the A&M athletes and described some of the ways psychologists can help athletes stay relaxed.

"Athletes sometimes are apprehensive or have anxiety," Dobrovolsky said. "We use anti-anxiety techniques to help them out."

Those anti-anxiety techniques, Dobrovolsky said, include progressive

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# A&M graduates try for U.S. bobsled team

Constance Parten  
THE BATTALION

The bobsled competition at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Japan will feature some new participants.

They won't be the Jamaicans or any other Caribbean nation. They will be from none other than the United States.

The first ever U.S. Women's Bobsled team will be chosen in September, and among those competing may be two A&M graduates.

Sisters Michelle Powe and Alexandra "Alex" Powe-Allred graduated from A&M in 1986 and 1991 respectively. Neither sister was involved in varsity sports during their college careers, but both have been very active in sports since childhood.

"I have always loved the Olympics," Powe-Allred said. "Michelle and I were always joking about how we had to think of some way to get into the Olympics. Now it could actually be a reality."

Powe and Powe-Allred are among 32 semi-finalists vying for eight positions on the new team.

"I'm very confident I'll make the team," Powe-Allred said. "I've placed second all-around after the initial testing, so I think my chances are really good."

The semi-finalists will participate in the final competition in September to determine who will be on the team. They are now going through some very rigorous training.

The testing includes performances in 30-meter, 60-meter and 100-meter dashes as well as shot put, vertical leap, long jump and weight and power tests. The most grueling part of the testing is pushing a 375 pound training sled, Powe-Allred said.

"The two-person sled for competition weighs 625 pounds," Powe-Allred said. "We push the 375 pound training sled all alone, on what looks like a roller coaster track."

Michelle and Alex have to be inventive while training on their own. Aside from running and weight lifting, they have come up with an interesting surrogate sled.

**"I'm very confident I'll make the team. I've placed second all-around after the initial testing, so I think my chances are really good."**

— Alex Powe-Allred, candidate for 1998 U.S. Women's Bobsled team

"I have a shopping cart the local Kroger gave me that I weighted down. I put my daughter Kerri in and push her around the neighborhood as part of my training," Powe-Allred said.

Michelle only recently joined Alex in training for the tryouts.

"I had a car accident a year ago last May," Michelle said. "I was laid up for a year and was in a lot of pain. I finally just told myself, 'I can go on if I can see myself past this pain.'"

"Everyone has to overcome something," Michelle

said. "I finally realized I was going to have pain whether I was laying there or up doing something, and working with Alex has really motivated me."

"The training alone will have a positive affect on my life regardless of whether I make the competition or not," she said.

Alex is certain Michelle will make the cut.

"We are very similar physically," Powe-Allred said. "I've done well so far, and even though Michelle hasn't tested yet, she will too. If I place second, she will be third, or vice-versa."

Michelle will not actually be getting into the bobsled until next year sometime when she is fully recovered from her accident.

"The sled is moving at around 90 miles per hour, and the possibility of my helmet slamming into the other crew members helmet is really high," Powe said. "A minor accident like that now could ruin my chances of competing at all."

The sisters will spend the rest of the summer training for the final cut at the Push Track Championship in Lake Placid in September.

If they make the cut, the sisters will be on their way to Calgary in October to begin training for their first competition against the top two teams, the Canadians and the Swiss.

"Lake Placid is the only track in the U.S.," Powe-Allred said. "It's also the toughest track in the world. A lot of Europeans refuse to run it at all."

Powe-Allred believes the coaches want the team to run this course so everything else will seem easy.

"I've met some of the Canadians," Powe-Allred said. "They're six feet tall and weigh 200 pounds. We have a lot of work ahead of us."

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