

Johnson takes care of his 'boys'

□ The defensive line coach takes care of his players on and off the playing field.

By Tom Day
THE BATTALION

Bill Johnson does not view his defensive lineman as just football players; they are his "boys."

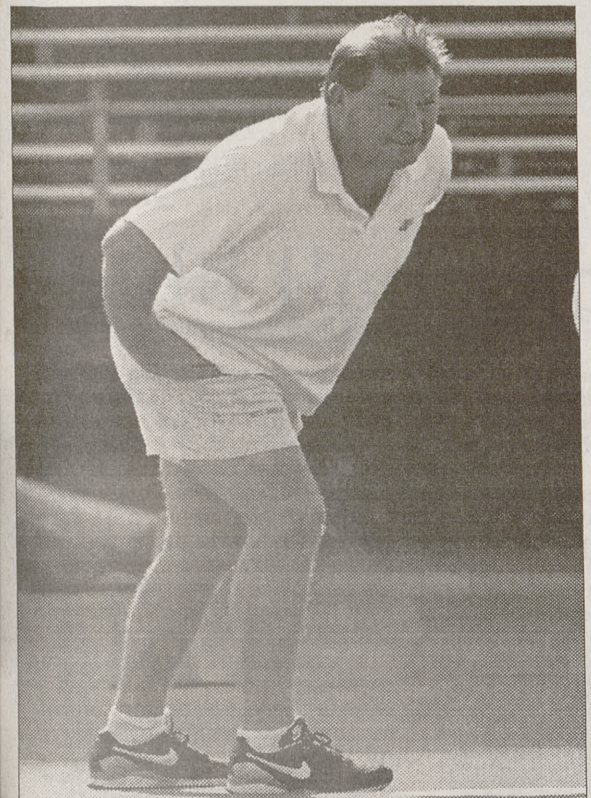
As defensive line coach for the Texas A&M Football Team, Johnson has earned the admiration and respect of his players by going beyond a typical coach-player relationship and treating them like sons.

"We're Coach J.'s boys," senior noseguard Eddie Jasper said.

"He's like a father to us," junior defensive end Brandon Mitchell said. "He cares about us as people and not just football players. There's not much wrong when you have someone like that to talk to."

In his fourth season as a coach at A&M, Johnson said he tries to make a positive influence on his players' lives and not just their football careers.

"I think we have a good relationship with every kid who plays for us," Johnson said. "You only get to coach a football player two, three or four years and when you look back 10 or 15 years from now, you like to feel you had a little bit of an effect on the direction they went in."



Evon Zimmerman, THE BATTALION

Defensive Line Coach **Bill Johnson** checks out his line at practice at Kyle Field.

"Coaching isn't so much the Xs and Os of what they do on Saturdays, but what they do in their life after they leave. You try to leave them with something other than just football."

A well-travelled football man, Johnson brings a wealth of coaching knowledge to A&M. After earning four letters as a player at Northwestern State in Louisiana, Johnson graduated in 1980 and began his coaching career there.

In 1985, he moved on to McNeese State as an offensive and defensive line coach before heading east to the University of Miami for the Hurricanes' national championship season in 1987. Following two-year stints at Louisiana Tech and Arkansas, Johnson came to A&M in 1992.

"He's taught us everything," Mitchell said. "All of our success on the field is because of his coaching."

"We watch a lot of film," defensive end Marcus Heard said. "He points out things we miss, and that helps our technique."

Coaching in a program of national prominence with high expectations of its players and coaches, Johnson said he feels comfortable with his role.

"I don't really feel the pressure of my players having to play well," Johnson said. "You build a relationship with your players long before you get to the game field on Saturdays, and you trust them to do their best to learn what we want to do defensively."

"I'd rather try to do it at a place like A&M that has good players, athletic ability and tradition rather than someplace else. In that aspect, I feel it takes a little bit of the pressure off."

The last couple of weeks have been a roller-coaster ride of sorts for Johnson. He was taken completely by surprise last Wednesday, when he was forced into emergency surgery to remove his infected gall bladder.

"I had been feeling bad the last couple of weeks, but I didn't know I was sick," Johnson said. "Obviously, it was something that was lingering and made me a little bit sluggish, and the doctor said that was probably from the infection."

Forced to stay off the sidelines last week against Baylor while recovering, Johnson missed being a part of the Aggies' big victory.

"It was real tough (not being on the sideline)," Johnson said. "The game was sort of another starting point for our season."

"We were challenged, and the team and my kids in particular responded. It made me feel good that the effort was there even though I wasn't there."

When it comes to describing Johnson's coaching style, Jasper and his teammates on the line give a joking description.

"It depends on what kind of mood he's in," Jasper said. "Some days he comes out there and he's the greatest guy in the world, the next day — look out. He's a handful to deal with."

"I think to coach football, you have to let those kids go out there and have fun," Johnson said. "I guess I can be considered a guy who likes to go out and have fun and goof around with his players. But, at the same time, we have a sternness about us that we get what we want to get done on the field."

Jasper said Johnson's relationship with and treatment of his players brings out the best in them.

"He's helped us through a lot of hard times on and off the field," Jasper said. "That makes you believe in him and want to make him happy by doing good on the field."

Astros officials deny rumors of imminent sale, move to Virginia

□ Owner Drayton McLane has expressed interest in selling the team after losing \$65 million in three years.

HERNDON, Va. (AP) — The Houston Astros denied Thursday there is a handshake deal to sell the baseball team to a group of investors who plan to bring the team to Virginia.

Several news reports had said an agreement is imminent to move the money-losing team from the Astrodome.

"Preliminary discussions have been held, but there is absolutely nothing final to call an agreement," Astros spokesman Tyler Barnes said Thursday, repeating what team owner Drayton McLane has said for a week.

The Virginia group, led by telecommunications executive William Collins III, had hoped to complete the deal and make an announcement next week. The Washington Post reported Thursday.

"I think Mr. Collins might have something to say after the World Series and before Thanksgiving about baseball in Virginia," Virginia Baseball Club spokesman Mike Scanlon said. "We don't have anything to talk about at this time."

Barnes, too, said the Astros may have an announcement after the World Series.

On Wednesday, acting baseball commissioner Bud Selig said McLane is negotiating with Collins to sell the franchise but hasn't applied to the owners' group to move the team.

"No applications or formal intent to do anything has been presented to us," Selig told KRIV-TV of Houston. "I know Drayton is a native Texan and he wants to do everything in his power to keep the team in Houston."

"Drayton has some problems and he is con-

fronting those problems."

ESPN also reported there is an agreement to sell the team, which has lost an estimated \$65 million over the past three seasons.

McLane and Collins reportedly haggled over a purchase price of about \$150 million.

Baseball officials told The Associated Press no deal will happen quickly, and major league owners will insist McLane exhaust investment options that would keep the team in Houston before he could make a deal with Collins.

Meanwhile, the stadium authority picking a site for a possible Virginia baseball stadium planned Thursday to endorse Collins' group.

The group's chairman, George Barton IV, contradicted his statement in the Post that the Astros and Collins have "an agreement in principle." Barton told the paper, "There has been a handshake."

On Thursday, Barton said he was not involved in negotiations between Collins and the Houston team and does not know if an actual handshake took place.

"What I did ask, because obviously it affects the work of the authority, is if negotiations with the Houston Astros were in fact serious negotiations — is this, you know, a serious offer," Barton said. "I was assured by the Virginia Baseball Club that it was."

The Virginia group wants to bring a team to the Washington area as soon as next season. The new team would play for two years at Washington's RFK Stadium, while a new 40,000-seat stadium is built in the Virginia suburbs.

Any deal would have to be approved by 10 of 14 National League owners and eight of 14 American League owners. Selig said McLane also would need permission from the ruling executive council for the deal.

Friday's Forum Schedule



Speaker: Dr. Peter Kreeft
7:30-8:30 a.m. MSC 206, "Are there Moral Absolutes?"

Speaker: Dr. Henry Schaefer
11:30-12:30 MSC 201, "The Way of Discovery"
- No meal provided at session.

7:30-9:00 Wehner 159, "Searching for Truth in the Cosmos: The Big Bang, Stephen Hawking, and God"

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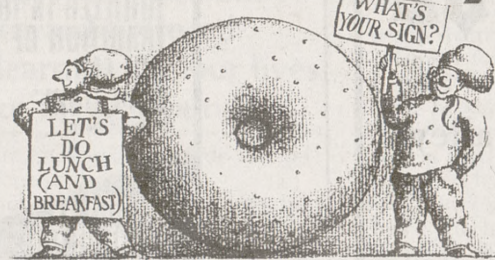
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