

sports  
GLANCE

49ers address big need, sign Hampton

SANTA CLARA, Calif. (AP) — New York Giants running back Rodney Hampton and the San Francisco 49ers have reached agreement on an offer sheet which would give the free agent \$16.4 million over six years, including a \$3.6 million signing bonus, the San Francisco Chronicle reported today.

The newspaper, quoting sources familiar with the negotiations, said Hampton, 27 and with five straight 1,000 yard rushing seasons, would sign the offer sheet as soon as it is prepared, probably by Friday.

The 49ers will have to make some moves to keep the deal under the NFL salary cap. Players vulnerable to release include defensive end Dennis Brown, left tackle Steve Wallace and center Bart Oates.

Hampton was classified by the Giants as a transition player, which means New York will have a week to match San Francisco's offer to keep him.

Although Giants coach Dan Reeves has said he wants Hampton to stay, the 49ers are betting New York won't want to spend the money.

They drafted running back Tyrone Wheatley in the first round and also have veteran Herschel Walker under contract.

Jets land free agent quarterback O'Donnell

HEMPSTEAD, N.Y. (AP) — The man who took Pittsburgh within a drive of winning the Super Bowl is now the quarterback of the team with the NFL's worst record.

Neil O'Donnell made it official Thursday. He took \$25 million over five years, including a \$7 million signing bonus, from the New York Jets, returning to the area where he grew up rather than staying with the team he nearly led to a championship.

He joins a team that has spent the first fortnight of free agency in an uncharacteristically aggressive style.

The Jets, 3-13 last season, enticed O'Donnell by signing tackles Jumbo Elliott and David Williams to shore up an awful offensive line. They are likely to take wide receiver Keyshawn Johnson of USC with the first pick in the draft to augment a receiving corps whose leader was Wayne Chrebet, a rookie free agent.

Cotton Bowl attempts to woo Haggard Corp.

DALLAS (AP) — The Cotton Bowl Athletic Association, which last year lost Mobil as sponsor of the annual New Year's Day football contest, is talking with Haggard Corp. about taking up the slack.

Frank D. Bracken, Haggard's president and chief operating officer, said it was premature to say whether an agreement would be reached. But he said his company could be a good marketing fit with the Cotton Bowl.

"We were interested (last year) and we liked the concept," Bracken said. "First, we are heavily into cotton products. Second, we are heavily into the Dallas community."

Haggard designs, manufactures and markets men's apparel.

Cotton Bowl executive director Rick Baker acknowledged the talks with Haggard: "We have had discussions with many companies about our title sponsorship...but at this time, no formal agreements have been reached."

Rangers' Wagner to retire after 36 years

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Texas Rangers business manager Charles Wagner, who joined the franchise when it was known as the Washington Senators, will retire on Oct. 1 after 36 years on the club, it was announced on Thursday.

"Charlie has played a major role in the history of this franchise and we plan to recognize his contributions later in the season," said Tom Schieffer, Rangers president and general partner, who promoted Wagner to a senior vice president post.

General manager Doug Melvin was promoted to executive vice president-baseball operations in other announcements made by Schieffer.

SCORES ROUNDUP

NBA

Orlando 114, New Jersey 98  
Indiana 94, Golden State 85  
Cleveland 95, Milwaukee 86  
Houston 109, Philadelphia 95  
San Antonio 120, Toronto 95  
Dallas 137, Denver 120  
LA Clippers 122, Sacramento 110

Rolling Aggies look to gun down Black Bears

□ The A&M Baseball Team will play a three-game set against Maine this weekend.

By Kristina Buffin  
THE BATTALION

The Aggies are on a roll. After winning three of its last four games, the 13th-ranked Texas A&M Baseball Team is hoping to sweep the Maine Black Bears this weekend at Olsen Field.

"Maine will bring in a good ball club," A&M Head Coach Mark Johnson. "It is fun to have intersectional play and play against teams from the Northeast. It is a chance to see other ball clubs."

Bad weather forced a change in the scheduling for the series. Instead of three single games, the series will begin Saturday with a doubleheader beginning at 2 p.m., and conclude with a single game Sunday at 2 p.m.

The Aggies have a 10-4 record which the offense is primarily responsible for. The team is hitting .347 with 23 home runs, while the pitching staff is struggling to find some consistency.

"This should be a good series, but it is

consistency that we are looking for," Johnson said. "We need pitchers with two good pitches who can locate their pitches. We have people who don't have that yet."

We are hitting the ball well but we can't rely on that alone."

The pitching problem was exacerbated by the loss of junior pitcher Ryan Rupe for the entire season. Rupe underwent surgery for a bone spur in his elbow 10 days ago and he will be lost for the season.

However, the Aggies will fall back on sophomore sensation Matt Blank who threw a no-hitter against UT-Arlington. Blank is 2-1 on the year with a 1.71 ERA and leads the team with 19 strikeouts.

The lefthander is scheduled to start the first game.

Sophomore John Sneed is scheduled to pitch the second game on Saturday. Sneed is 2-0 on the season with a 6.86 ERA.

Senior third baseman J.J. Matzke said the team is striving to improve every weekend and the team will reach its full potential.

"It is obvious that we are looking to win this weekend," Matzke said. "These games are leading us up to conference play but we are not taking Maine lightly."

ly. It should be a positive weekend as long as we do all the little things right."

Matzke is tied with senior catcher William Shiflett with four home runs on the season and said the batting averages may be inflated now but the team does not expect to be hitting .600 at the end of the season.

"It is pretty much what we expected," Matzke said. "But we were taught to hit the ball down the middle or to the side. Overall, this season we will do fine."

One thing Johnson is happy about is the maturity of the team. In the four games the Aggies have lost, three were lost in the bottom of the ninth inning.

"We want to win those kind of games," Johnson said. "We are playing really well so far this year because the team is working very hard."

The Aggies have a 6-1 record against the Black Bears. The Black Bears opened their season at nationally-ranked Clemson and dropped all four games.

Matzke said although the makeup of the 1996 squad is different from the one in 1995, there is definite chemistry among this team.

"The team is always going to be different," Matzke said. "There are different characteristics, but we have good team togetherness."



Evan Zimmerman, THE BATTALION  
Texas A&M second baseman Paul Barber makes the toss to first baseman Jeff Bailey at Olsen Field.

Blast from the Past

□ Catcher William Shiflett has returned from Blinn to challenge for a starting job.

By Kristina Buffin  
THE BATTALION

Senior catcher William Shiflett had every intention of playing baseball at A&M. He practiced on the team in the Fall of 1992, but then Head Coach Mark Johnson received a phone call from Blinn Junior College.

"Blinn had lost both of their catchers in December," Johnson said. "William was a potential red-shirt for us. I told him that if

he wanted to play his freshman year, he should play for Blinn. He would still keep his scholarship with us and he elected to go to Blinn."

Shiflett ended up staying at Blinn for two years before returning to A&M last year. At Blinn, he hit .315 in 1994 with five home runs and was named All-Conference. Shiflett said this playing experience has helped him at A&M.

"It has helped improve my game more than anything," Shiflett said. "It gave me the opportunity to play in more game situations. Unlike other sports, the JC program in Texas is really good and not really any lower than Division I. By staying another year, I got to play 50 out of 60 games and playing in a game is the best experience. I would of not gotten that here."

Baseball is a tradition in the Shiflett family. Shiflett grew up with four older brothers. His brother Matt played for the Montreal Expos and the Atlanta Braves, his brother Robert played four years at Southeastern Oklahoma and his brother Taylor is currently playing for McMurray State.

"We used to play all the time in the backyard," Shiflett said. "Baseball is sort of a family tradition because it is big in my family. I enjoyed it so I keep playing."

Shiflett has not played any other position than catcher. He said he enjoys the position of catcher because he is in on every play.

"The catching position is different from any other position because you have a view of the entire field," Shiflett said. "You have to be in charge. You're in on every play and you get to hit if you are a pitcher and you are in the ball game constantly."

The A&M catching situation is unique. The Aggies have two quality catchers in Shiflett and sophomore Matt Garrick. Both share playing time but Johnson said with two reliable catchers, it will only make the team better come May.

"It is tough on both, but it is a good problem to have," Johnson said. "In late May we will have a fresh catcher because it is such a physically demanding position. They have to crouch a minimum 170

times a game but it will be a major plus in May."

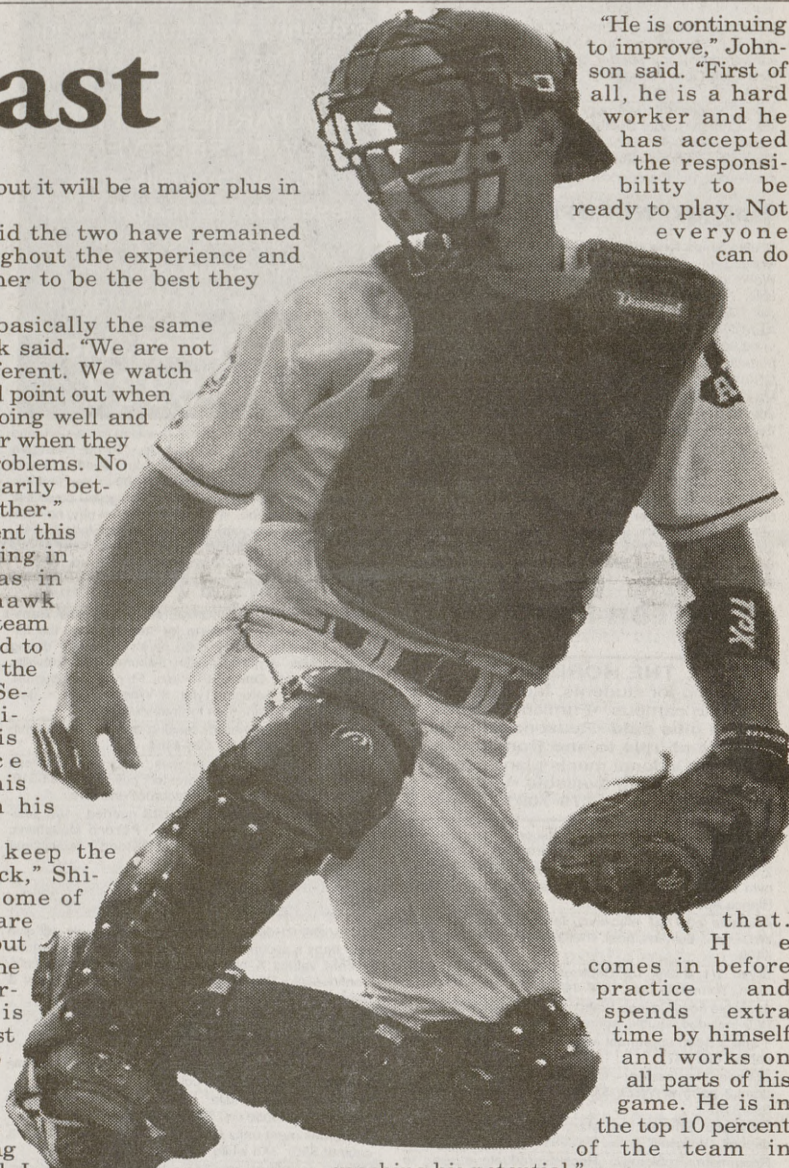
Garrick said the two have remained friends throughout the experience and push each other to be the best they can be.

"We have basically the same skills," Garrick said. "We are not too much different. We watch each other and point out when the other is doing well and help each other when they are having problems. No one is necessarily better than the other."

Shiflett spent this summer playing in Hays, Kansas in the Jayhawk League. The team finished second to Team USA in the NBC World Series and Shiflett said this experience helped his loosen up in his game.

"I try to keep the team laid back," Shiflett said. "Some of the players are real uptight but I try to keep the game in perspective, it is just game. Last year I used to carry my game problems off the field but during summer ball I was just there to play, there was no pressure of competition. I made the decision to just have fun this year."

So far, this season Shiflett has been having fun. On Feb. 12, Shiflett was named the Mizuno National Player of the Week and through last weekend, he was second on the team with a .444 hitting average and is tied for the team lead with four home runs.



"He is continuing to improve," Johnson said. "First of all, he is a hard worker and he has accepted the responsibility to be ready to play. Not everyone can do

that. He comes in before practice and spends extra time by himself and works on all parts of his game. He is in the top 10 percent of the team in

reaching his potential."

Above all, as a senior, Shiflett has assumed the responsibility of being a player that the younger players can look to for advice.

"It is just the way the system works," Shiflett said. "The seniors had to pay their dues when they were freshmen and by their junior year they are starting. Everyone respects that, it is just the way the program is set up."

Lady Aggies face tough competition at NCSA tournament

□ The Texas A&M Softball Team is coming into the Leadoff Classic with a 13-2 record for the year.

By Nicole Smith  
THE BATTALION

To say that the Lady Aggie Softball team is on a winning streak would be an understatement.

While tallying up an overall record of 13-2, the Lady Aggies have won eight consecutive games including going 6-0 last weekend's Aggie Mini-Tournament. Now the team is preparing to play in the NCSA Lead off Classic in Columbus, Ga. beginning today and lasting through Sunday.

Despite the fact that the Lady Aggies are pooled with some widely-known teams including UNLV, Illinois-Chicago and Connecticut, the players and coaches are confident that they will be ready for the tough competition.

"We have already established our-

selves as a team that can play ball," Head Coach Bob Brock said. "All we need to do is maintain our momentum and win our pool."

Ironically, the biggest worry about this weekend is the weather. The Lady Aggies were supposed to play a doubleheader against the Sam Houston State Lady Kats on Wednesday, but because of inclement weather, the

time in," Brock said. "For the most part, though, they are really fired up and are confident that they will handle things the way they are supposed to."

"At best, we see this as a time to get more rested," senior shortstop Kendall Richards said. "We all play for the sake of the team and do whatever is needed to stay focused, so we should be ready when it comes down to game time."

This weekend's action is one of the biggest tournaments of the year for the Lady Aggies because teams competing are by invite only. Brock said he can picture a tournament win, but the going will not be

"The key to our success will be to come through as a team and not zero in on certain players."

— Bob Brock  
A&M Softball Head Coach



games were canceled. When asked if his team would be hurt by the lay off, Brock said he was not all that concerned.

"We did get to work out in the gym so the girls could get some playing

easy. "The key to our success will be to come through as a team and not zero in on certain players," Brock said. "Kendall is hitting well, but the rest of the lineup is also."

Overall, the Lady Aggies feel that



Dave House, THE BATTALION  
Texas A&M shortstop Kendall Richards leaps to take a throw at second base during last weekend's action.