

SPORTS

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"Can I Have Your Autograph?"



A&M football players took a break from two-a-days and spent Saturday morning autographing memorabilia for fans

By Ross Hecox
THE BATTALION

There were no bonecrushing tackles or thrilling touchdown runs — in fact, no game was even played. But fans who showed up at Kyle Field Saturday morning still had a lot to be excited about at the eighth annual Texas A&M Picture and Autograph Day.



Gwendolyn Struve, THE BATTALION

Jared Harris, of College Station, watches sophomore wide receiver/defensive end Jason Bragg sign his football.

For an hour, fans were allowed to walk on the new grass field, take pictures and receive autographs from Aggie coaches and players. Hundreds of people, young and old, showed up for the occasion.

"It's a great opportunity to give something to the fans," Coach R.C. Slocum said. "We like to create an opportunity for them to see the good young men of our program."

Recorded music of the Aggie Band was played over the speakers as anxious fans with pens in hand waited to meet their favorite player or coach. Meanwhile, hundreds of children ran and played on the new playing surface, throwing and kicking footballs with their fathers.

Terri Vogel, who came with her husband Jamey and son Joshua, said it was a memorable time.

"This is very fun, especially for our son," Vogel said. "It gives kids a chance to meet the players, because otherwise they wouldn't. [Joshua] likes just getting to play on the field."

Players scribbled on caps, shirts and footballs, and also posed with teen-agers and grinning toddlers for pictures.

A&M strong safety Rich Coady said the event was enjoyable for the players as well as the fans.

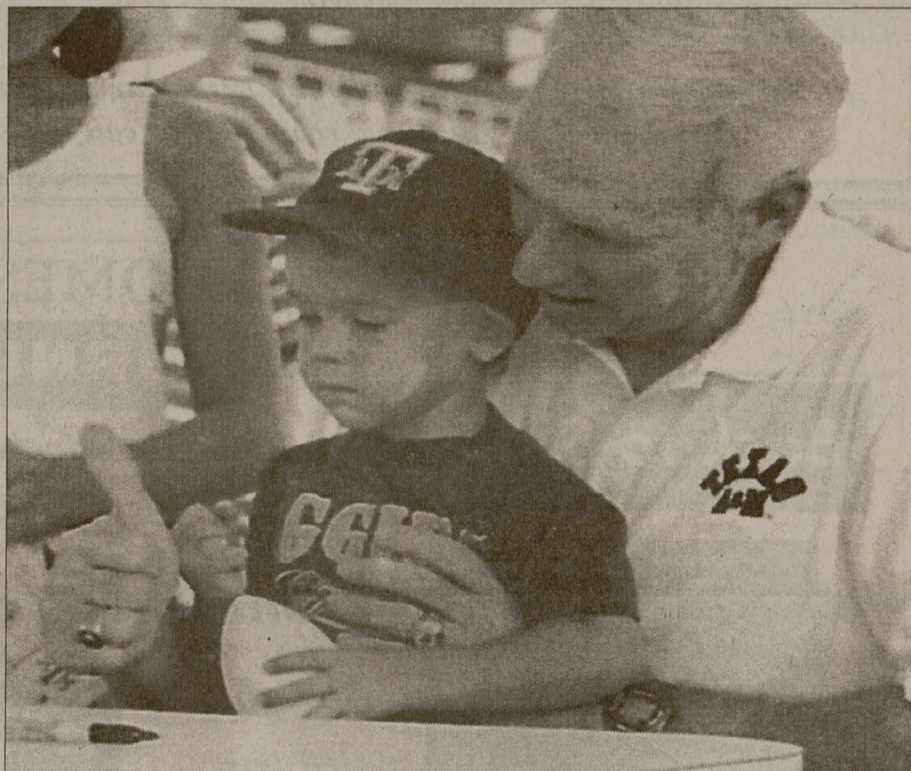
"Everybody on the team enjoys doing this," Coady said. "It's a chance [for fans] to get face-to-face with us. We can just sit out here and talk with them, and they can see us as people."

Slocum said the event is beneficial to the players.

"I believe athletes do have a responsibility to be role models," Slocum said. "Sometimes this can get to be a hassle, but it's a chance [for the players] to relate to people. It helps them realize that the true joy in life is giving."

Coady said players need to be aware they have a strong impact on young fans.

"When I was a kid, it was a dream to get to meet players," Coady said. "You can tell it's a big deal for them. A lot of times we just feel like college students, but it's more than that. They really look up to us."



Gwendolyn Struve, THE BATTALION

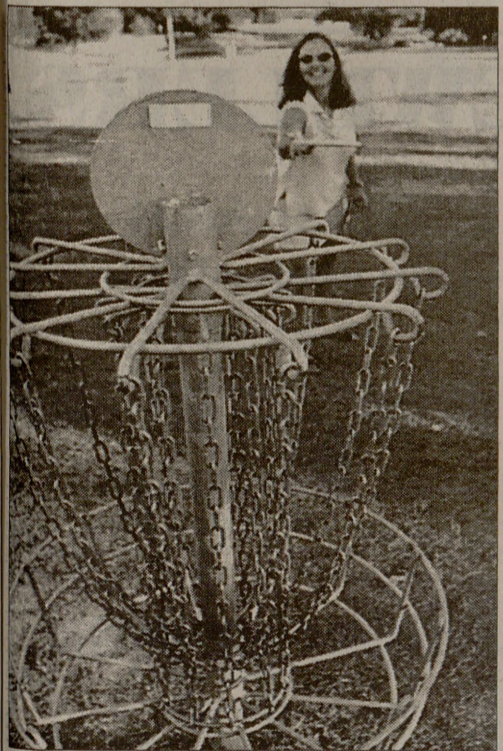
A&M coach R.C. Slocum shows Dustyn Pledger, of Bryan, how to gig'em after autographing his football on Saturday.

PAR FOR THE COURSE

Disc golf, a combination of frisbee and golf, has emerged at Research Park and has gained a loyal following

By Tom Day
THE BATTALION

The scene at Texas A&M's Research Park is a familiar one — joggers hitting the pavement, students studying, dogs being walked and kites flying through the air.



Pat James, THE BATTALION

Sacha Troxler, a senior environmental design major, tosses a putter into the hole.

But hidden among the trees and behind the ponds lies a different world — one that is attracting more and more A&M students — disc golf.

The up-and-coming sport's popularity is soaring, and the Research Park course on West Campus is stormed by Aggies on a daily basis.

"I've been playing a couple of months," Chris Hobson, a senior bioenvironmental sciences major said. "I saw a disc golf course in Austin and had an interest in it, so I found out about the course here."

Disc golf has the same rules and etiquette of regular golf. Courses consist of the standard 18 holes and tee boxes, and the landscaping designs resemble those on regular golf courses.

However, instead of swinging at a golf ball out of the box, players tee off by throwing one of a wide selection of frisbee-like discs. And rather than shooting into a tin cup buried in a putting green, players toss the discs into a round, metal basket with a chain serving as a back-board device.

The Research Park course, set up by the A&M Recreational Sports Department, is a par-3 design where players use a variety of discs. Like golf clubs, there is a disc for every situation — long-, short- and medium-range drivers and putters, all varying in weight and dimension.

And like golf courses, the Research Park course has its share of hazards for players to overcome.

"You come across areas you're not too sure you want to be in," Mark Ballenger, a junior business major said. "Sometimes your disc might land in real swampy, muddy areas and up in trees. The last time I played, one got away from me and landed

in the [pond]."

It is a common practice for disc golfers to label their discs with their name and phone number. Since proper disc golf etiquette calls for players finding labeled discs on the course to contact the discs' owners, Ballenger is not ruling out recovering his disc.

"That's one good thing about this sport — people are pretty good about being honest when they find discs," Ballenger said.

Hobson said he was fortunate to recover a lost disc.

"I had my name and number on it, and a week later a guy called me and said he had found it and I went and picked it up," Hobson said.

While people of all experience and skill levels play on the A&M course, Ballenger said he views his participation as strictly a leisure activity.

"Right now, I only own one [disc], but I've seen people out on the course with a whole bag of discs," Ballenger said. "It's just something to get out in the open, walk around and have fun with."

Hobson said he views the sport as a challenge.

"You can challenge yourself to shoot lower than what you ever have before," he said.

Both Hobson and Ballenger said playing disc golf has advantages over regular golf.

"It's a lot easier for a beginner to go out and be able to pick it up and start playing right away," Ballenger said. "The distances aren't quite as long."

"It's as fun as playing real golf, but you can play a round in about an hour," Hobson said. "So if you have an hour to kill, you can go out and play a round as opposed to spending a whole day playing golf."



Pat James, THE BATTALION

Richard Bade, a senior environmental design major, tees off at the disc golf course at Research Park.