

Slocum, Aggie football face the music

By TOM DAY
THE BATTALION

In his eight seasons at the helm of the Texas A&M Football Team, Head Coach R.C. Slocum led the Aggies into battle 87 times. Of those games, Slocum's troops have emerged victorious in 68, a winning percentage of .793, the third highest total among active Division I-A coaches — all impressive credentials. As a four-time Coach of the Year and the third-winningest coach in school history, Slocum's popularity has skyrocketed during his tenure at A&M.

Yet the Aggie leader currently finds himself in the hot seat. In the wake of unachieved expectations in 1995 and a shocking 0-2 start

this season, many Aggie followers are calling for his dismissal.

Reeling in the aftermath of A&M's embarrassing defeat to the University of Southwestern Louisiana on Saturday, Slocum said the criticism comes with the territory.

"In this business, you can't get your self-identity or self-worth from external sources," Slocum said. "When things are going well and you're going undefeated in conference for four years, people pat you on the back and tell you how good you are, and you're probably never really as good as what they're saying at that time."

"But the same people turn around when you lose a game or two and say you don't know what you're doing and you ought to be fired."

Slocum said he does not get caught up listening to his detractors' armchair coaching.

"I don't pay any attention to that at all," Slocum said. "Everyone I've ever known who has survived in coaching has had bad things written about them. Coaches can't survive if they listen to all those things. I'm going to stay focused on what I need to do as I see it. If I do that, it will be okay."

Meanwhile, the Aggies are quietly preparing for Saturday's contest against the University of North Texas. For Aggie quarterback Brannon Stewart and the rest of the team, that involves reviewing what went wrong in last weekend's self-destruction in Lafayette.

"We were up for the (USL) game," Stewart said. "Things went wrong early that just threw us off for the rest of the game. Turnovers were detrimental. We were moving the ball well and we had good drives going, but turnovers just killed every drive and you can't put points on the board doing that."

Stewart was responsible for half of the Aggies' eight turnovers against the Ragin' Cajuns. The junior threw four interceptions, including the back-breaking pick-off pass that was returned for the game-winning touchdown.

Stewart said he is using his mistakes as a learning experience.

"I made some bad decisions against USL," Stewart said. "I went back and tried to analyze why those things happened, how the plays developed, and what caused the interceptions and learn from it. Maybe I should have kept the ball and taken the sack instead of trying to get rid of it, or maybe finding a different receiver."

Besides blaming the Aggies' meltdown at USL on Slocum's coaching and leadership abilities, critics have cited the Aggies' youth and inexperience as contributing factors.

Although A&M fields the youngest team in the Big 12 Conference, Stewart said this should not affect the Aggies' play.

"Having a young team is a point of concern, but not an excuse," Stewart said. "Regardless of what age the players are, we

Who is that guy?

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The game was just five minutes old when he streaked over the middle of the field to haul in a 25-yard pass from Brannon Stewart — a first down for A&M and a dream fulfilled for senior walk-on Barry Johnson.

After a year of paying his dues as a scout team player on the Texas A&M Football Team, Johnson's hard work and sacrifice reached fruition when he took to the playing field against the University of Southwestern Louisiana.

"After I caught that first pass, all I remembered was I had run an out route," Johnson said. "It was a dream come true."

When Johnson made a second grab in the fourth quarter —

this time with the game on the line — A&M fans were left wondering, "Who is that guy?"

Not listed in A&M's media guide, game program or depth chart, the athletically gifted Johnson rose from obscurity to lend a hand to the struggling Aggies.

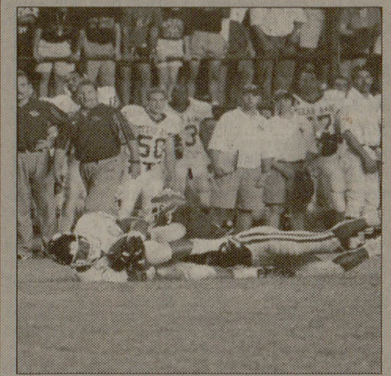
A fifth-year senior from Bay City, Johnson graduated from Cleburne High School in 1992 and was a member of the A&M Corps of Cadets his first four years in Aggieland. Although he excelled in both baseball and basketball in high school, Johnson did not play football. He had originally quit the sport in the eighth grade because "he got hit hard one day in practice and quit."

Since football was not well supported at Cleburne, Johnson gave up wide receiver to play center-field and shooting guard. At A&M, Johnson made a name for himself in the intramural program as a standout flag football player.

At his friends' insistence, Johnson tried out for the football team during his junior year and was cut. He tried again the next season and landed a walk-on position on the scout team one year ago Tuesday.

"I felt I had something to offer," Johnson said. "It was a dream I wanted to come true and I pursued it."

Johnson spent the entire 1995 season on the scout team as a wideout, impressing A&M Defensive Coordinator Phil Bennett.



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION
Senior walk-on Barry Johnson is tackled after making a 25-yard reception in the fourth quarter against USL.

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Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

A&M quarterback Brannon Stewart and the Aggie offense committed eight turnovers in the 29-22 loss to USL last weekend.

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Changing of the Guard

The A&M Softball Team is ready for the change they believe new head coach Jo Evans will bring.

By JAMIE BURCH
THE BATTALION

About every 12 hours, the changing of the Royal Guard occurs in front of Buckingham Palace in London, England. In stark contrast, it had been 15 years since fans had witnessed a changing of the guard in the Texas A&M Softball program.

But when long-time A&M Head Coach Bob Brock resigned May 29, two-time Western Athletic Coach of the Year Jo Evans was hired to fill the void.

Brock, the fifth most winningest coach in NCAA history, stepped down after 15 seasons at the Aggies' helm while capturing three national championships and numerous NCAA playoff berths.

Although Evans has a tough act to follow, she comes to A&M with an impressive resume. She left a solid program at the University of Utah, which she rebuilt after sub-.500 seasons in three of the four years prior to her arrival there in 1990.

During her seven years at Utah, the Utes posted a 222-143

record and a 84-35 mark in the Western Athletic Conference. Evans also captured two conference titles (1991 and 1992) and made two appearances in the College World Series (1991 and 1994) during her seven-year stint.

Prior to her head coaching job at Utah, Evans coached a depleted team at Colorado State University to the WAC championship in her fourth and final season in Fort Collins, Colo.

Evans said although it was difficult to leave Utah, she came to A&M for various reasons, including the A&M Athletic Department's commitment to winning.

"There were several reasons (for coming here)," Evans said. "The fact that the weather allows

us to practice outside pretty much year-round — it's a nice change from the mountains. The facilities are good, and I feel the Athletic Department has shown a commitment to women's athletics and to softball. They step up financially for athletics here. A&M's had a strong tradition in softball for many years and I was just looking for a new challenge."

Although A&M has been successful in years past, Evans does not feel any pressure.

"I don't think I come in feeling that I have to fill [Brock's] shoes," Evans said. "I come in knowing that it's going to be different for the players. I'm just going to do what I've done in the past. I want to take us to another level, get to the post-season every year and have a shot at going to the (College World) Series. I don't want to just maintain — I want to make it better."

The players must adjust to the transition as well. After having a few weeks to practice with the new coach, the general consensus is positive and upbeat.

"Everything has been positive," senior outfielder Gina Perez said. "Everybody is excited just to come to practice. There's not one unhappy person. Everybody was welcoming the change. It's work-

ing out so far. I'm enjoying it."

While Brock's coaching style was often criticized as harsh, Evans' tenure has received positive feedback thus far.

"I can't say enough positive things about the situation," junior catcher Marianne McGuire said. "She has made the game fun again. I think that's the way the whole team feels. She's made me love softball again."

When change occurs in some programs, an adverse reaction occasionally follows. But both the Lady Aggies and the new coach seem to welcome the change with open arms.

"Maybe it was time for a change here," Evans said. "If that's the case, maybe the kids are looking forward to something different. I think something new sometimes is good — change is good."

Most college teams are resistant to change but McGuire said that the team is ready to change.

"I don't think the team will miss Coach Brock at all," McGuire said. "It was a situation that I don't think any one of us ever wants to be faced with again. We welcome this change."

Now that both coach and players are happy with the situation, are the Aggies in contention for a Big 12 Conference title?

"I can't say that we're going to win the Big 12," Evans said. "I don't know that we have the depth or the experience at the skill positions. I'd say we're going to be competitive, because we're going to play hard. But if we can sign the caliber of recruits we're looking at, then the next few years look promising."

While Evans has guarded optimism, her players feel ready to win big.

"I think we have a really good chance this year," McGuire said. "She (Evans) is going to make all the difference in the world, because we're all going to want to work hard for her. We have a lot of talent on this team. Softball is

one of those sports that always comes down to who's going to work the hardest."

Perez said the team is ready to burst onto the scene and surprise some folks.

"We'll have some surprises for some people," Perez said. "This might be the type of team with little talent, a lot of chemistry, and all the heart in world — who goes on to win it all."

Lady Aggies host '96 Fall Invitational

By JAMIE BURCH
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M Softball Team made history last spring as a member of the Big 12 Conference in its inaugural season as a member of the first sport to compete in Big 12 play. Compiling a 39-21 overall record and a 11-11 mark against its Big 12 opponents, the Aggies had to grow accustomed to competing in an organized league, because the old Southwest Conference did not have softball play.

Senior centerfielder Gina Perez said it is nice belonging to a conference.

"I love having a conference," Perez said. "Before, we really never had somebody that we played every year. We had the rivalry with Texas, but we never played them. I liked the traveling that resulted from being an at-large (team), but I like belonging to a conference more."

This offseason, the Lady Aggies will compete in scrimmages with non-Big 12 schools in addition to playing in two tournaments. In October, the team will travel to Independence, Mo., to compete in a tournament to showcase the teams in the Big 12.

The Lady Aggies begin their offseason conditioning this weekend by hosting the Aggie Fall Invitational at Central Park. The one-day tournament consists of two pools of eight teams each. The team with the best record from each pool will compete in a championship game that evening.

The teams competing this weekend range from Big 12 opponent Texas Tech to NAIA



Dave House, THE BATTALION

Senior first basemen Mya Truelove practices Tuesday.

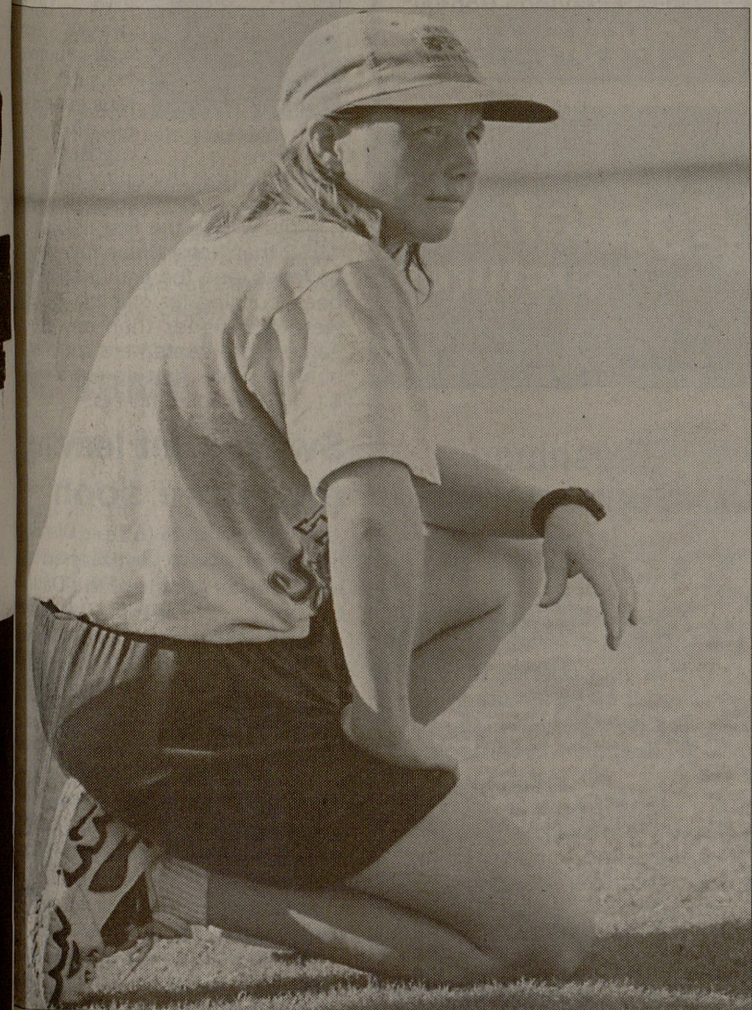
rivals Abilene Christian University and the University of Mary-Hardin Baylor.

Even though few of the colleges and universities participating in the tournament are national Top 25 programs, Perez said the competition will be tough.

"While all these teams are smaller schools, they all play A&M like it's their World Series," Perez said. "In any underdog team situation, the teams who are supposed to win come in prepared, but sometimes overlook their weaker opponent."

You also have to live up to the hype if you're a top team."

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Dave House, THE BATTALION

Evans, who came from the University of Utah, succeeds Bob Brock as the new A&M Head Softball Coach.