

Lady Aggies open season with new players, coach

BY NICKI SMITH
THE BATTALION

Not only did the Texas A&M Softball Team engage in spring competition last year, but it did some spring cleaning along the way.

Despite the loss of former Head Coach Bob Brock, All-American pitcher Erin Field, and All-American and Big 12 Co-Player of the Year Kendall Richards, this year's Lady Aggies have cleaned their slate and are prepared to enter the 1997 Big 12 Conference season.

With new Head Coach Jo Evans and 11 returning lettermen, the Lady Aggies hope to improve on last year's 39-21 overall record, while re-evaluating something they feel was put on the shelf in the years past — team unity.

Senior captain and starting first baseman Mya Truelove said the Lady Aggies do not want to consider this a rebuilding year.

"This year, coach Evans is helping us to become more of a unit," Truelove said. "We want to continue where we left off, because we have always had a good team. It is just that now the team has someone who is positive and has helped us to get closer than before."

The team has six returning starters including Truelove at first base, senior outfielders Heather Hayden and Gina Perez, junior outfielder Mabelle Weldon and sophomore infielders Jessi Cady and Kami Tucker.

Additionally, there are five newcomers, two of whom are projected starters. Infielder Angie

Long is expected to take the second base position, while Jamie Smith is slated to fill the short-stop position.

Evans feels the team is ready, for the most part, to begin conference and tournament play, and has what it needs to go farther than last year's NCAA regional performance.

"Although I don't know the players really well, we have a hard-working group of players who are anxious to start playing," Evans said. "The only way I will be able to see our strengths and weaknesses is to see them at game time, but we have spent a lot of time on hitting and conditioning, and we feel like we are ahead in those aspects."

"We have a hard-working group of players who are anxious to start playing."

Jo Evans
A&M head coach

"From a coach's standpoint though, I always feel like we need more time to spend on fine-tuning."

Although the Big 12 is missing two participants, Kansas State University and Colorado State University, this season will be the first all 10 teams will have softball programs to play in the Big 12 Conference. The University of

Texas and Baylor University joined the group after spending their inaugural softball season as independents.

Senior Lori Gioco, expected to fill the starting pitching position, said the Big 12 competition will be tough and will leave no room for error.

"There are very strong teams in this conference, but we can be up there with everyone else," Gioco said. "We have the defense and overall depth, so all we have to do is work on our lack of concentration. I think that if we discipline ourselves, we have the talent to bring it all together."

Evans said the Lady Aggies have their work cut out for them in Big 12 competition, but still have set many goals, including winning an away tournament and their two tournaments at home.

"There are three teams in the Big 12, in the top 20, so it is going to be a real challenge for us," Evans said. "We are a very young, untested team with only four seniors."

"We understand the caliber of the teams and athletes we will be up against, especially because the University of Nebraska, Oklahoma State University and the University of Oklahoma are all in the same conference as us. However, we still have our goals in mind and want to be a threat to anyone we play."

Perhaps two of the biggest threats in the Big 12 are OU and Nebraska.



Rogge Heflin, THE BATTALION

Truelove lends vast experience to young 1997 team

BY NICKI SMITH
THE BATTALION

As a 5-foot-10 senior on the Texas A&M Softball Team, Mya Truelove has the height to fit the typical first-baseman mold. However, the athletic abilities she possesses go beyond what is considered the typical mold of an outstanding softball player.

Not only is Truelove a team captain and three year letter winner, but she has been the Lady Aggies' starting first baseman since her freshman year.

Head Coach Jo Evans said Truelove is one of the integral parts of the Lady Aggie team.

"She is very vocal during games, and has done a good job of taking the

freshmen under her wing," Evans said. "Once you understand her better, you realize that she is a competitor who has high expectations of herself and her teammates. She demands it of herself to do whatever it takes to win a game."

"At the same time though, she can be laid back and humorous; she is famous for rolling her eyes while giving the 'oh, brother' expression."

Aside from playing first base, Truelove is slated to take the No. 3 position in the batting line-up, a position considered to be given to the best hitter on the team.

In addition to returning with a .304 batting average and placing third best on the team last year and highest among returning players, Truelove missed only four of 192

games the Lady Aggies have played since she arrived. As if that is not impressive enough, Truelove has started 180 of those games.

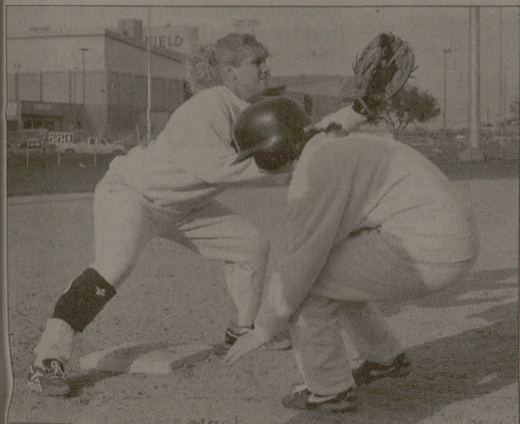
Junior catcher and Truelove's roommate, Mari McGuire, said Truelove is a confident player who plays the joker on the team.

"She is definitely not the quiet type," McGuire said. "She has an outgoing personality and is always fun to be with. Her attitude and her talent make her an overall good player."

Originally from Deer Park, Truelove does something that few softball athletes can do — she bats left-handed and throws right-handed.

Evans said this attribute helps Truelove to be a solid overall player.

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Rogge Heflin, THE BATTALION

Sophomore third baseman Kamie Johnson waits for the ball to tag freshman Emmie Melancon.

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Aggies hope to continue successful home stand with win over UTA

BY CHRIS FERRELL
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M Baseball Team (4-1), fresh off a weekend sweep of University of Texas-Pan American, will look to stay on the winning track as they welcome University of Texas-Arlington (1-3) to Olsen Field today for an afternoon doubleheader.

A&M will look to push their home record to 3-0 and current winning streak to four. The Aggies, ranked 14th in the latest Collegiate Baseball poll, are in the midst of a season-long 13-game home stand.

A&M Head Baseball Coach Mark Johnson said weather set the team back slightly, but he is encouraged by A&M's early season play.

"The hustle, the want to, the desire to work hard, those things are all there," Johnson said. "I think that we're going to be a better defensive team than what we've shown. The ingre-

redient that I look for now, at this time of year, is adjustments."

The Aggies were able to make the necessary changes to come from behind and pick up a 4-3 victory over UT-Pan American this weekend.

"I think we were better this weekend than we were against [SWT]."



Mark Johnson
A&M head coach

The Aggies have also scored 42 runs in their first five games.

"We've put the ball into play," said Johnson. "Our batting average is pretty good. We've struck

out too much (34 times compared to 24 by their opponents)."

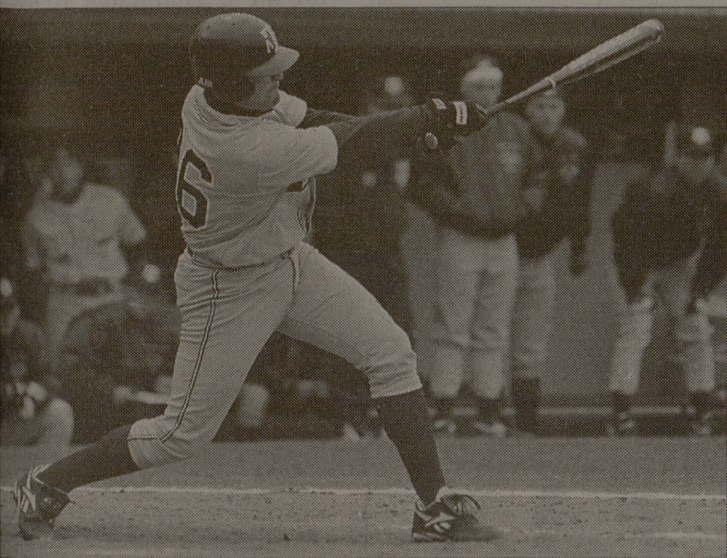
The Aggies look to get over their strikeout woes against a UTA staff, which has struck out only 13 batters this season.

The UTA staff is led by senior right-hander Roger Lancaster. Lancaster was shelled in his last outing against Texas Christian University, losing 24-2. However, he helped UTA beat the University of Texas on opening day and pitched well against the Aggies last season.

"They have Lancaster, who pitched against us, and pitched very well against us, last year and I think he's going to start against us the first game," Johnson said. "We'll have our hands full with him."

UTA is batting .283 as a team and is led by junior outfielder Michael Kopecky, who has started the season by batting .600. UTA is batting .283 as a team.

To combat the UTA Maverick hitters, A&M will send junior right-hander John Snøed (1-0) to the mound in the first game and freshman right-hander Chris Fulbright in the second. Fulbright will make his first start for the Aggies.



Ryan Rogers, THE BATTALION

Senior first baseman Jason Stephens bats against the University of Texas-Pan American this weekend. The Aggies took all three games from the Broncs.

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