

Just call Jason Tyner 'Mr. Single'

BY JAMIE BURCH
THE BATTALION

College students avidly watch dateless wonders try to hook up on MTV's *Singled Out*. Texas A&M sophomore outfielder Jason Tyner, a self-admitted Jenny McCarthy admirer, would be the show's perfect contestant, because he is "Mr. Single." Last season, while hitting an impressive .407, Tyner hit 93 singles with no home runs.

Tyner has never been and never will be mistaken for a power hitter. In 267 career-at-bats, the 6-foot sophomore has hit 103 singles and no home runs. Though he has hit a phenomenal .419 through 63 games, Tyner has only connected nine times for extra base hits (eight doubles, and one triple).

Aware of his knack for hitting singles, Tyner said he is not bothered by his lack of power.

"I just like hitting," Tyner said. "If I ever hit a home run, I'd be pretty excited. I did hit one home run in batting practice last year, and everyone dogpiled me. Practice was stopped for about five minutes."

(Head Coach (Mark) Johnson wants me to hit it on the ground, so that's what I mainly focus on. Who knows, I might hit one out if the wind is blowing out one day."

Johnson said Tyner needs to take advantage of his strengths and not worry about going deep.

"He (Tyner) won't be as good a hitter if he tries to hit for power," Johnson said. "He's got to use his talents. His talents are speed, getting out of the box well, putting the ball in play, and keeping the ball on the ground.

"That's the most impressive thing. He doesn't try to do more than he should do. He knows what his role is, what his weapons are, and he stays with it."

Senior outfielder Johnny Hunter, acknowledging that the team constantly kids Tyner about not going long, said he respects the sophomore's ability.

"He's hard on himself," Hunter said. "He's a competitor. He brings a lot of competitiveness to the team. He's a great player and a lot of fun to watch."

Singles are just part of Tyner's game. The sophomore is also a threat on the basepath. Last year as a freshman, Tyner set a single season record for most stolen bases with 41. Clocked at 4.5 in the 40-yard dash, Tyner was caught just five times in 46 attempts.

The speedster said he was excited about breaking the record.

"It was a real big thrill for me to come in and contribute right away," Tyner said. "I like stolen bases, so it was a lot of fun."

Johnson respects Tyner's speed, and said the sophomore changes the outlook of the game when he is on the basepaths.

"When he gets on base, it's a major problem for the pitcher and catcher," Johnson said. "They have to change up a little bit. The catcher probably won't locate the pitches as well to the next hitter because he's concentrating on Tyner getting a jump."

"When the catcher's focus is taken away, the hitter has an advantage at

the plate."

Prior to his sophomore year at A&M, Tyner was invited to try out for the United States Olympic Baseball Team (Jan. 10-12). Tyner turned in an impressive performance, hitting .500 (7-of-14), while scoring seven runs in four games. He was also perfect between the bases, successfully stealing base twice.

Reminiscing about past Olympic teams, Tyner said he would love to represent his country.

"[Trying out] was one of the biggest thrills of my life," Tyner said. "Playing for Team USA would be the ultimate amateur accomplishment, besides winning the national championship."

"I went to the 1984 Olympics and watched (Will) Clark, (Mark) McGwire, and (Rafael) Palmeiro. I just love the uniform, the hats, and everything about it."

Though Tyner is only a sophomore, he said he has thought about one day playing Major League Baseball.

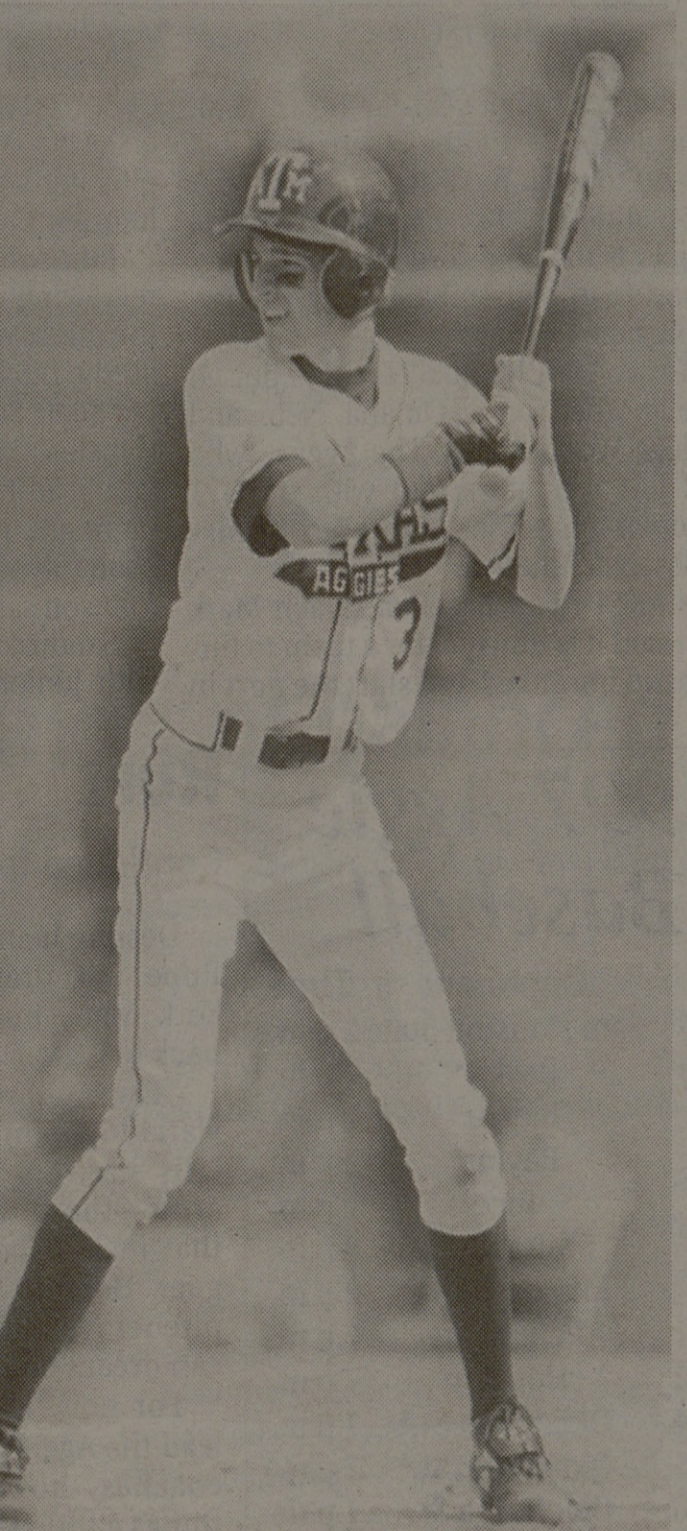
"I would like to get drafted," Tyner said. "But, education is No. 1 for me. I'm not going to rely on it, until it happens. Right now, I'm just enjoying college baseball and hoping the Aggies can win the national championship this year."

Tyner said his downplay of the 'Big Show' stems from the fact that he was not drafted out of high school. He said he can only laugh that the scouts are now knocking down his door.

"Coach Johnson wants me to hit it on the ground, so that's what I mainly focus on."

Jason Tyner
Sophomore outfielder

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Fossum thrives on pressure to perform

BY KRISTINA BUFFIN
THE BATTALION

Freshman pitcher Casey Fossum knows a little something about pressure.

A Baseball America All-American pitcher his senior year at Midway High School in Waco, Fossum was highly recruited by both college teams and professional teams.

Despite being drafted in the seventh round by the Arizona Diamondbacks, Fossum made the choice to attend A&M and play college ball.

"There is the money but I wanted an education," Fossum said. "The money was not enough to miss the opportunity of an education."

Fossum had gained enough experience both in high school and elsewhere to join the Major Leagues. He was one of four A&M players invited to the USA Team Trials in Tampa, Fla., in January.

Fossum threw the most strikeouts of any pitcher with eight in four innings of relief. He only walked one and earned a win for the White team.

A&M Pitching Coach Jim Lawler said

Fossum's success at the trials will help him in his first season with the Aggies.

"As a freshman to be playing in a national tournament gives him inner-confidence and to be successful adds a feather to his hat," Lawler said. "I have definitely seen his on the field confidence."

A&M Head Coach Mark Johnson said Fossum's experience this summer and at the trials gave Fossum the confidence he needs to compete at the college level.

"When you get into a big arena on a national level," Johnson said. "It gives you confidence to compete against other guys and compare himself against other people his own age."

This confidence has translated into success in the infancy of the baseball season.

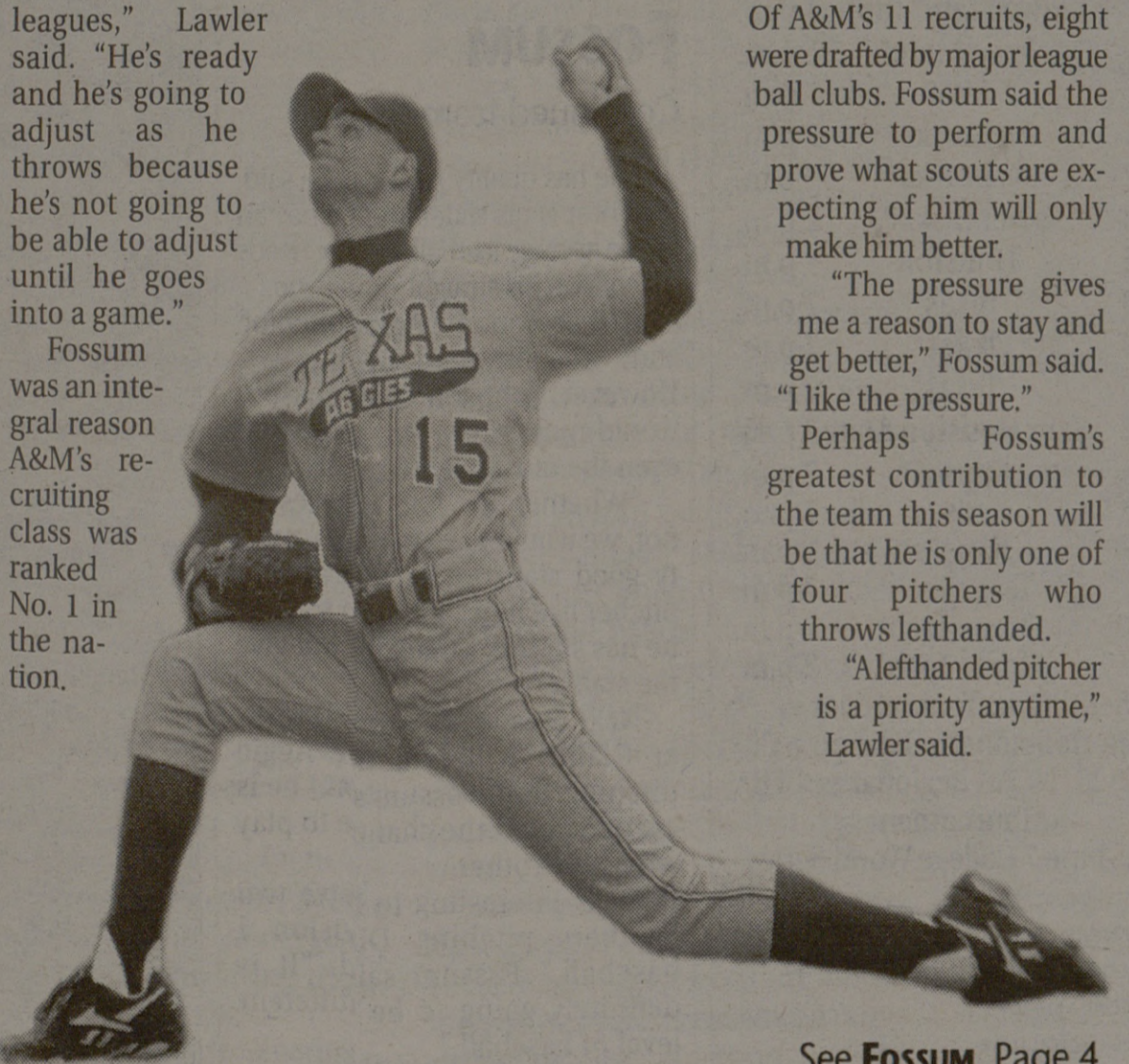
For the first time during the Mark Johnson era, Fossum started the opening game of the season. Against Southwest Texas State, Fossum worked five innings and allowed only five hits and one earned run. He walked three and struck out three.

Lawler said Fossum will be able to adjust and get better as he pitches more games.

"He's a focused kid who had a high level of success in the summer

leagues," Lawler said. "He's ready and he's going to adjust as he throws because he's not going to be able to adjust until he goes into a game."

Fossum was an integral reason A&M's recruiting class was ranked No. 1 in the nation.



Of A&M's 11 recruits, eight were drafted by major league ball clubs. Fossum said the pressure to perform and prove what scouts are expecting of him will only make him better.

"The pressure gives me a reason to stay and get better," Fossum said. "I like the pressure."

Perhaps Fossum's greatest contribution to the team this season will be that he is only one of four pitchers who throws lefthanded.

"A lefthanded pitcher is a priority anytime," Lawler said.

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