

AGGIES

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By JEREMY FURTICK
THE BATTALION

It has been a tough year for Texas A&M. The struggles of the football team were just the kick-off to what has been a dismal year for A&M athletics. But stationed outside Olsen Field is the long-forgotten bandwagon preparing to be bombarded by victory-hungry Aggies.

The Texas A&M Baseball Team is poised to make another run at Omaha, Neb., and the College World Series. The Aggies, who finished last year unranked with a 37-21 record, open this season with a No. 8 ranking by Baseball America.

Texas A&M Head Baseball Coach Mark Johnson said it is unusual for a team to finish a season unranked and start the next in

the top 10.

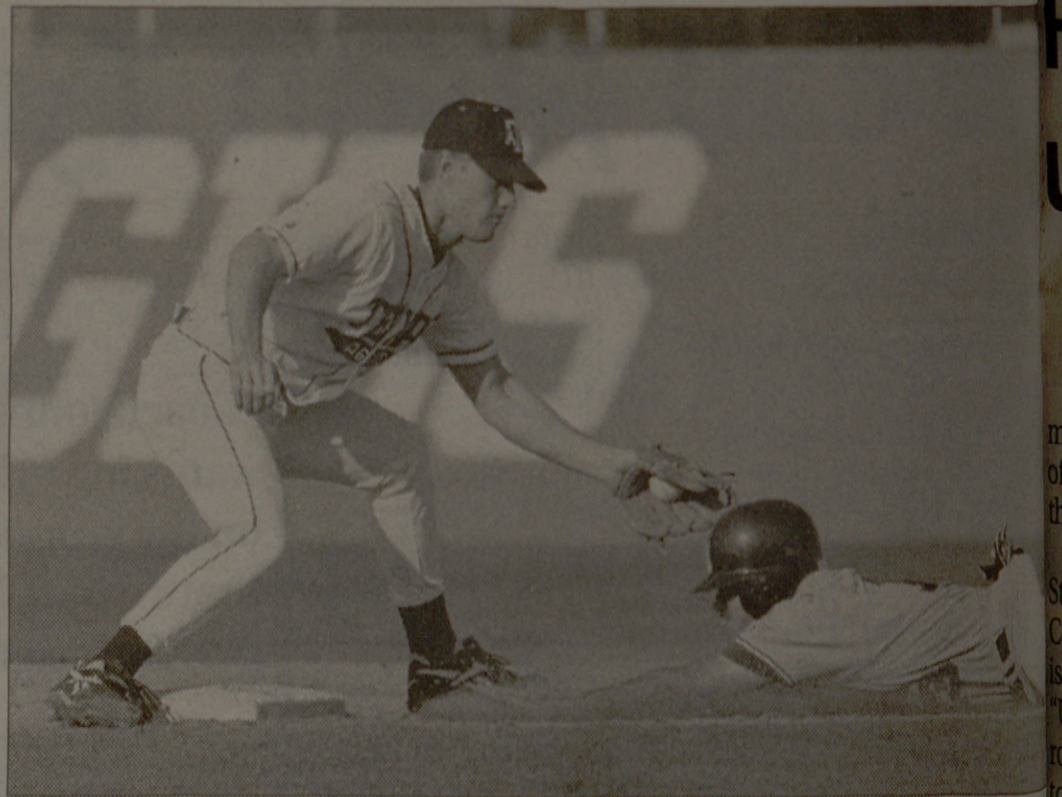
"Preseason rankings usually come from your team's performance from the previous year," Johnson said. "Our ranking says something about what we've done in the off-season to help our team."

What the Aggies have done is bring Collegiate Baseball's No. 1 recruiting class to College Station. They also return eight players who started last season and reload a pitching staff with two starters coming off injuries.

Johnson said he expects the 11-man recruiting class to provide the team with the talent needed to fill holes and strengthen the pitching staff.

"Scott Sandusky, our only junior college transfer, Casey Fossum, Steve Scarborough and Sean Harvey are the new guys I would highlight right now as players who will probably see significant playing time," Johnson said.

Sandusky will split time behind the plate with junior Matt Garrick, while Harvey is



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Junior **Brian Benefield** tags out Arizona's **Diego Rico**, who was trying to steal base Saturday at Olsen Field.

1997 Aggie Baseball

Date	Opponent	Time
Feb. 25	Sam Houston State	2 p.m.
Feb. 28	Baylor*	7 p.m.
Mar. 1	Baylor*	2 p.m.
Mar. 2	Baylor*	2 p.m.
Mar. 4	Rice	7 p.m.
Mar. 7	Missouri*	3 p.m.
Mar. 8	Missouri* (dh)	2 p.m.
Mar. 11	Penn State	7 p.m.
Mar. 12	Houston	7 p.m.
Mar. 14	Oklahoma St.*	7 p.m.
Mar. 15	Oklahoma St.*	7 p.m.
Mar. 16	Oklahoma St.*	1 p.m.
Mar. 18	Lamar	7 p.m.
Mar. 21	Oklahoma*	6:35 p.m.
Mar. 22	Oklahoma*	2 p.m.
Mar. 23	Oklahoma*	1 p.m.
Mar. 25	UTSA (dh)	5 p.m.
Mar. 28	Kansas State*	7 p.m.
Mar. 29	Kansas State* (dh)	1 p.m.
Apr. 1	Sam Houston State	7 p.m.
Apr. 5	Iowa State* (dh)	4 p.m.
Apr. 6	Iowa State*	1 p.m.
Apr. 8	SWT	7 p.m.
Apr. 11	Nebraska*	7 p.m.
Apr. 12	Nebraska*	7 p.m.
Apr. 13	Nebraska*	2 p.m.
Apr. 15	Houston	7 p.m.
Apr. 18	Texas*	7 p.m.
Apr. 19	Texas*	7 p.m.
Apr. 20	Texas*	2 p.m.
Apr. 22	Sam Houston State	7 p.m.
Apr. 25	Kansas*	7 p.m.
Apr. 26	Kansas*	7 p.m.
Apr. 27	Kansas*	1 p.m.
May 9	Texas Tech*	7 p.m.
May 10	Texas Tech*	7 p.m.
May 11	Texas Tech*	2 p.m.
May 15-18 Big 12 Tournament (All Sports Stadium, Oklahoma City)		
May 22-25 NCAA Regional Tournament TBA		
May 30-June 7 College World Series		

*Big 12 games
BOLD denotes home games
(dh) — doubleheader
All games central time

RUPE

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Despite being out last season, Rupe was drafted by the New York Mets, but opted to come back to A&M.

"They (pro scouts) are all here watching him," Johnson said. "His size, his velocity, his long arms—those are all qualities that reek of being a major leaguer. He's not an accomplished pitcher yet, but you certainly can dream on it."

For now, Rupe's dream is to lead the Aggie pitching staff. His coaches, however, are taking things a little slower.

"I just want him out there winning games for us," Lawler said. "I would love to have him be No 1. The key for us is having him in the rotation. I just want him to win when he goes out there."

FOSSUM

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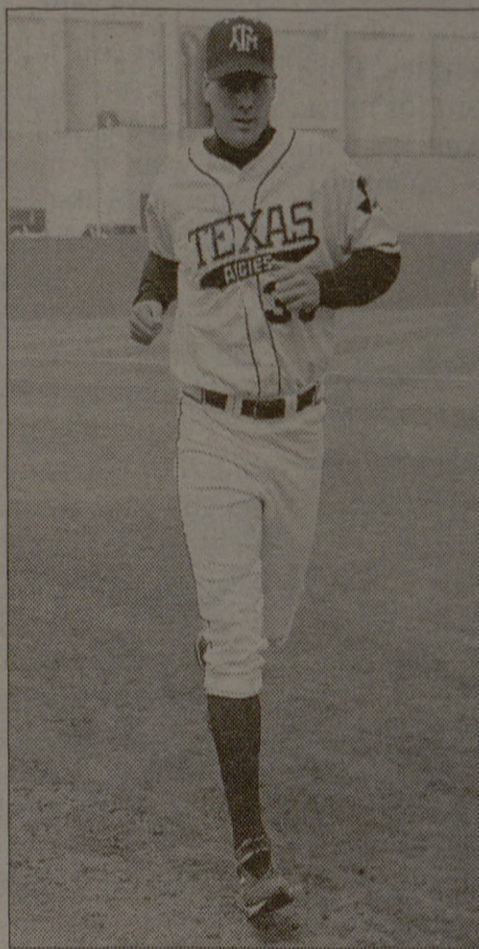
"He has quality pitches," he said. "His best is his slider and he has an above average fastball. He just needs to work on his straight change up."

Last season, the Aggie pitching staff was hit hard by injuries. However, Johnson said Fossum would most likely earn a spot on even the most talented staffs.

"Whether we had injuries or not, we would have to have a pretty good staff not to add a good pitcher like him," Johnson said. "If he has success I think he will give the staff a run."

Next season, Fossum's brother Clancy will join the Aggie pitching staff. Fossum said he is excited about the chance to play with his brother.

"It is interesting to have two brothers pitching Division I baseball," Fossum said. "It is definitely going to be different level of baseball."



Dave House, THE BATTALION

Junior pitcher **Ryan Rupe** jogs off the field after practice.

TYNER

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"It's funny to me, because they never looked at me before," Tyner said. "I just like talking to them. They're pretty interesting guys because they know everybody in the nation, baseball-wise."

Whether Tyner downplays his chances of playing professionally, Johnson said the scouts cannot ignore him.

"Scouts like speed," Johnson said. "He's got a tremendous speed out of the box. I think they're going to have to go after him. He's had too much success."



Tyner

BIG 12

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By MATT MITCHELL
THE BATTALION

To use a phrase that has become almost cliché in Texas A&M athletics, the A&M Baseball Team faces challenges and, for that part, new competition in its inaugural season as a member of the Big 12 Conference.

The Aggies' move to the conference offers exciting opportunities with the scheduling of non-conference opponents to make room for the Big 12's core of teams. Some of these include A&M Head Coach

"I think it's going to be tough to win the Big 12 — harder than the SWC."

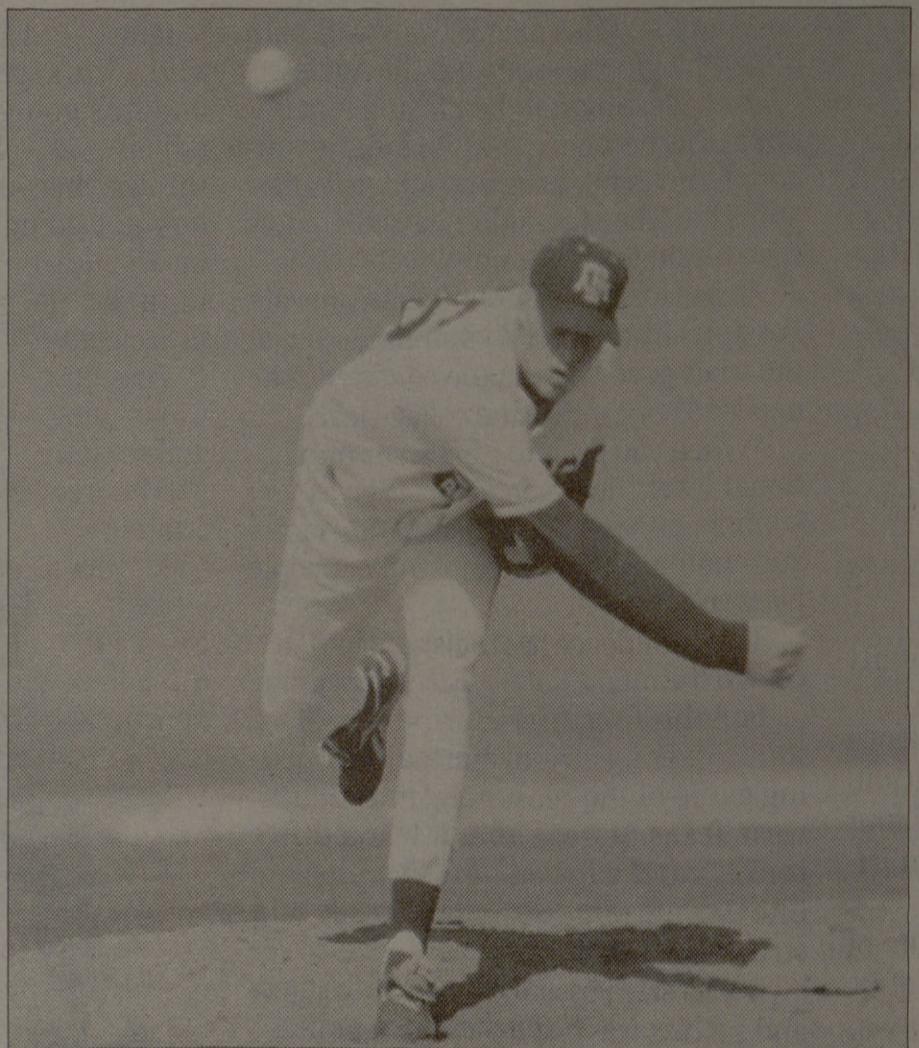
Mark Johnson
A&M head coach

Johnson, are not sure to expect, aside from good competition.

For the Aggies, picked by many to win the Big 12, the question is that competition will consist of

"Just history will tell you Oklahoma State is going to be the hunt," Johnson said. "They had a great season last year. I think they have all nine spots back. I think Baylor's got a team back.

"Texas Tech is a team that is interesting in that they have pitchers back, but they have new position players, so they can come in and play. I think they're going to be a good team. However, being good



Dave House, THE BATTALION

Junior pitcher **John Sneed** warms up before a game at Olsen Field.