

Best pitching staff will buoy Dodgers to top

LOS ANGELES DODGERS

When you combine the best complete pitching staff in the league with four former Rookies of the Year (not to mention two of this year's leading candidates), you should at least win the division, if not the whole thing.

That's the situation for Los Angeles and there's no reason they shouldn't contend with Atlanta for the NL's top position this season. Los Angeles should make the playoffs, either by winning the division or as the NL Wild Card.

The pitching staff has no holes. Ramon Martinez and Hideo Nomo are good enough to be the ace on most teams and Ismael Valdes has the stuff to overtake those two as the Dodgers' No. 1 pitcher. Chan Ho Park will probably be No. 4 in the rotation with Tom Candiotti rounding it out. The middle relief will include Scott Radinsky, Mark Guthrie and Antonio Osuna, among others, who will almost surely replace Candiotti in the rotation by July. Todd Worrell nailed down 44 saves last season and is back as the closer.

The Rookie of the Year parade has yet another chance to run through Los Angeles again this season with Wilton Guerrero at second and Roger Cedeno stepping in for Brett Butler in center. One of those two could follow Eric Karros (first), Mike Piazza (catcher), Raul Mondesi (right), Nomo and Todd Hollandsworth (left) as LA's sixth consecutive rookie award winner. The left side of the infield will have Todd Zeile at third and Greg Wagner at shortstop.

It's tough to pick anyone but the Dodgers in this division. Tommy Lasorda may be gone, but Bill Russell will "bleed Dodger blue"

Sportswriter



Jeremy Furtick
Senior journalism major

all the way to October in his first full season. **Projected Record: 90-72**
Key Series: Aug. 28-29 vs. Oakland Athletics; Aug. 30-31 vs. Seattle Mariners; Sept. 2-3 @ Texas Rangers: The Dodgers should be in a tight division race down to the wire. It will be interesting to see how this late-season interleague play affects them. They can't afford to overlook

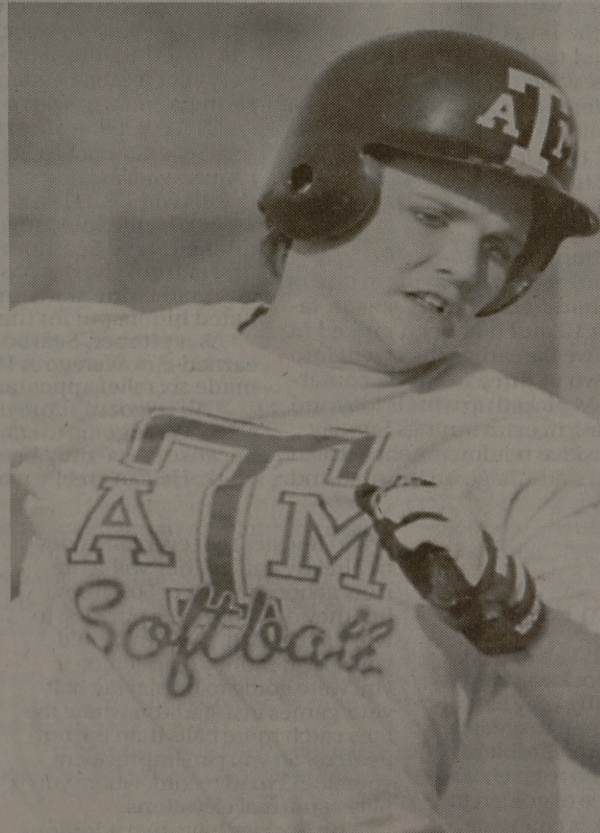
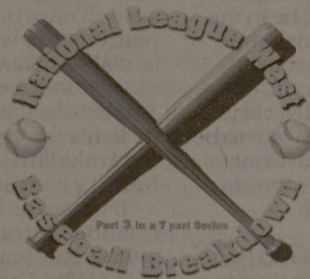
these three series against American League teams or they could fall out of the playoff mix.

SAN DIEGO PADRES

Last year's joy ride is over. Ken Caminiti isn't good enough to repeat last year's fluke, and guys like Steve Finley have no business hitting 30 home runs. Their pitching isn't good enough to carry them and the bats won't be on fire like last year. But with the perpetually underachieving Los Angeles and road-inert Colorado in their division, the Padres might just pull it out again.

The lineup will look the same as last October's. Tony Gwynn, Finley and Greg Vaughn will be in the outfield, with Caminiti, Chris Gomez, Quilvio Veras and Wally Joyner (third to first) in the infield. John Flaherty will return as catcher. This team is full of people who could have good years, but most of them had career-years last season. Veras is unproven at second, Caminiti may never recover his Gold Glove form after rotator cuff surgery and Joyner is too weak at the plate for a NL first baseman. The rotation is in the same boat as the lineup — potential big years that must occur for the Padres to win.

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Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Sophomore third baseman **Kami Tucker** rounds the bases at practice Monday.

'The hick'

Tucker continues to adjust to A&M

By NICKI SMITH
THE BATTALION

Along with being known as a gifted athlete on the Texas A&M Softball Team, sophomore third baseman Kami Tucker has also earned a title that distinguishes her from the other members of the team — "the hick."

One would not have to wonder very long how she got the name after finding out she graduated from Ooltewah High School in the small town of Ooltewah, Tenn.

Although many people take offense to being called a hick, Tucker said she does not mind the nickname.

"Of course, being from Tennessee, I have an accent," Tucker said. "I think it is funny because last year my teammates couldn't pronounce 'Ooltewah,' but they finally got it right this year. I don't mind the nickname because I have a mouth and will definitely be heard when I want to."

The 5-foot-7 standout established a name for herself in Ooltewah by leading her high school team to four consecutive district championships and a 137-24 record during her career.

She was a two-time All-American, an all-state selection and on a summer league team

that played in the top 10 in the nation five times between 1987 and 1993.

Senior pitcher Lori Gioco said the secret to Tucker's exceptional athleticism is her ability to maintain her concentration.

"She is one of the most focused athletes on the field," Gioco said. "If you look at her on defense, you will see her talking to herself and reminding herself what she needs to do to improve. She is always concerned about her hitting and has really improved her defense."

If raw talent does not account for Tucker's softball ability, genetics do.

Tucker's dad played for the Miami Dolphins, while her brother played football for the United States Air Force Academy. Her older sister plays softball for 18th-ranked Louisiana Tech University.

Last year, Tucker saw limited playing time after breaking her hand when she was hit by a pitch in the middle of the season. However, she still was able to rack up a .234 overall batting average while starting and playing in 39 games.

Assistant Head Coach Joy Jackson said Tucker is more confident on the field now than she was at the start of the year.

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Catcher overcomes pressure to lead Lady Ags

By LARA L. ZUEHLKE
THE BATTALION

Some people say life goes in full circle. For junior Amy Schmaltz, a catcher on the Texas A&M Softball Team, this definitely holds true. Schmaltz has faced many obstacles during her career as a Lady Aggie, most of all, the pressure she places on herself.

Schmaltz was a standout player at Alvin High School and thrived on her accomplishments, including being named a three-time all-district selection, Most Valuable Player and an all-greater Houston first-team selection. When A&M began recruiting Schmaltz, she immediately accepted the offer because she had dreamed of becoming a Lady Aggie as a young girl.

Schmaltz saw limited playing time her freshman year, sharing catching

duties with junior Marianne McGuire. Schmaltz said after coming to A&M, she realized college softball was more competitive, and over time she began losing confidence in herself.

"There was a lot of outside pressure my first two years, and I also put a lot of pressure on myself," Schmaltz said. "I'm more confident now. My ability has always been there, but I lacked confidence in myself."

Schmaltz credits the Lady Aggie coaching staff for helping her change her game.

"The coaches helped me a lot," Schmaltz said. "Coach Evans is a very positive person. She understands the players, and she's come in and made a great impact on a lot of people."

A&M Head Coach Jo Evans said she is pleased Schmaltz overcame her struggles, because her play has



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Junior catcher **Amy Schmaltz** bats at practice Monday.

stepped up a notch.

"In the fall, she struggled with her confidence, but now she has all of the confidence in the world in

herself, and that's changed her level of play," Evans said.

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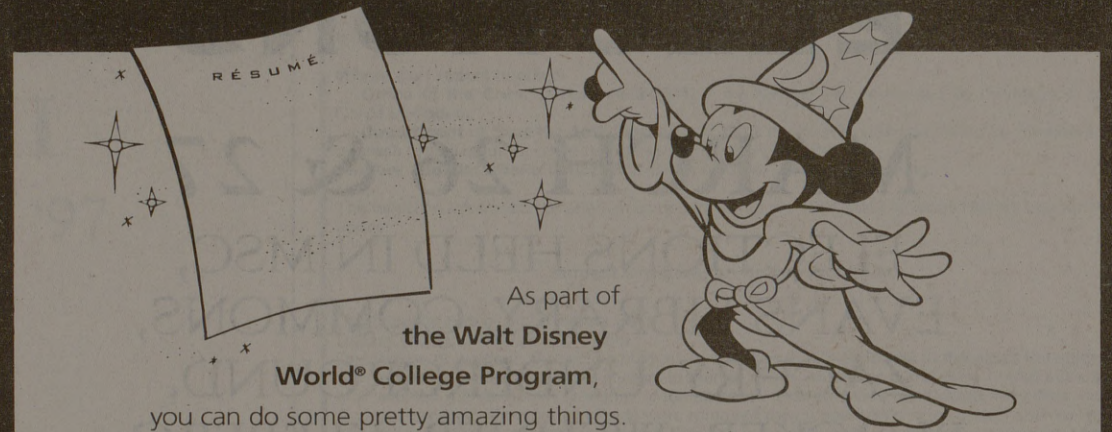
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