

Freshman pitcher has Chance to perform

Chance Caple will get his second start of the season against the Sam Houston Bearkats tonight

BY CHRIS FERRELL
THE BATTALION

When the 21st-ranked Texas A&M baseball team takes on the Sam Houston Bearkats today at Olsen Field, they will look to a freshman right-hander to give them a chance.

Chance Caple (0-1) will make his second start of the season for the Aggies (22-4, 7-8) as they look to avenge last season's loss at Sam Houston.

"I want to get Chance Caple back out here," Head Coach Mark Johnson said. "I think he's [the kind of] guy that the more innings he pitches, the better he's going to be. We'll probably get some pitchers out there that haven't thrown a lot."

As has been the pattern, Johnson will use a variety of pitchers for the midweek game to evaluate pitchers for the weekend, a formula which came up big for the Aggies last week.

In the Aggies' series with Kansas State this past weekend, Johnson used four of the seven pitchers who faced University of Texas-San Antonio batters last Wednesday.

"I was really impressed with (freshman Courtney) Weller and I was impressed with (senior John) Codrington out of the bullpen," Johnson said. "Those guys were huge for us. They kept us in the ballgame and both of them pitched well. And (junior Robert) Keens had probably his best relief performance where he had stuff going. So I think we got some encouragement there and (freshman Chris) Fulbright gave us a good start."

Johnson wants to get a look at some other pitchers against the Bearkats, hoping the Aggies will stay true to recent forms.

"I think we can get (freshman Steve) Scarborough out there," Johnson said. "I think we can get (junior John) Sneed out there for a few. Playing Saturday and Sunday gives us a little better chance than what we had last week. I think the

Wednesday game would be a better chance to get guys that pitched during the weekend. Casey Fossum is a guy that could go Tuesday or Wednesday because we had him in a relief role and he didn't throw a lot of pitches."

"I think he's (Caple) [the kind of] guy that the more innings he pitches, the better he's going to be."

Mark Johnson
Head Coach

The Aggies won two of three from Sam Houston last season, winning both games at Olsen Field and losing on the road.

Johnson said the Aggies will have their hands full with the Bearkats again.

"Sam Houston brings to the table a team that was in the regionals last year and has everybody back," Johnson said.

"They obviously have reason to believe they can compete. They just swept UTA (the University of Texas at Arlington) this past weekend, so they have some pretty good encouragement coming into this series. They've always played us tough. I see them as a tough opponent for us."

The Bearkats are keyed by a strong pitching staff which has stood strong all season. Bearkat pitchers have fired four shutouts while posting a 3.89 ERA. Sam Houston pitchers have compiled a strike out-walk ratio of better than 2-1 (153 strikeouts and 78 walks).

The Aggies, winners of six of their last eight games, will try to stay hot as they begin a stretch which will see them play 10 of their next 11 games at home. Johnson said the Aggies are back in a position to compete for the conference crown.

"I don't know how much turn around we've had, we've got a few more wins," Johnson said. "I never thought we were playing bad. We've lost so many close ballgames. Now we're winning some close ballgames. We're encouraged."

"We've won six of our last eight ballgames and we've won four of those on the road. That's a big time improvement over what we were doing. We've got seven conference games at home in a row, and 10 of our next 11. It's easier to get on a run when you're in your own house instead of the road."



Dave House, THE BATTALION

Junior **Scott Sandusky** tries to slip past the catcher to score against Baylor but was called out.

Heaney, Benefield part of 'Angels in the Infield'

Freshman Heaney fields comparisons to *The Natural* 'What's on second?' — Mr. Consistency

BY MATT MITCHELL
THE BATTALION

If you happen to pass Olsen Field on a gray afternoon, and catch a glimpse of the Aggies' No. 9 taking extra batting practice, you almost might think Sean Heaney was a fair-haired farm boy whose exploits became the stuff of legend.

But despite his Redford-esque resemblance to the wonderboy-wielding Roy Hobbs in *The Natural*, the Aggie third baseman insists the uniform number is merely coincidental. "I don't know if I'm a natural, but I guess it's a good number to have," Heaney said. "I didn't notice it until people started telling me it was Roy Hobbs' number also."

Coincidence or not, Heaney has

made a splash as a freshman, starting 16 games and batting .298 for the Aggies while starting at third base for the first time in his career.

"He's come in and he's really a second baseman, and we've converted him to third just for this year," Head Coach and Wilford Brimley disciple Mark Johnson said. "I think his future is at second base, but he's come in and given us some good innings and we're really seeing a lot of improvement [in him] as a third baseman right now."

Heaney has his preference, of course, but insists playing time is the only issue.

"They stuck me over there, and it was a lot different at first, but I'm used to it now," Heaney said. "I still prefer middle infield, but as long as

I'm playing, third base will be fine."

Heaney was recruited heavily, most notably by Texas Tech University and Tulane University. And while his high school stats were impressive, in the summers, he garnered most of the recruiter's attention.

"I think a big part of it was that J.J. Pearce (High School) didn't have a real big baseball tradition, and we had a good team, but we didn't have a lot of hitters to protect me when I went to the plate," Heaney said, quickly apologizing for sounding cocky.

"Then in the summer, we had outstanding (Connie Mack) teams — we won back-to-back national championships. And you couldn't really pitch around anyone on those teams. They came right at me and I just did what I could."

Heaney played two summers with the Dallas Mustangs, a Connie Mack team he helped lead to back-to-back national titles as a second baseman. Heaney led the team in 1995 with a .430 batting average and, along with Aggie freshman shortstop Steve Scarborough, set the AABC record for double plays. In addition, he won the Golden Glove Award at the national World Series and went 4-for-5 with a home run and six RBIs in the national championship game last year.

"I think he's a guy that, in the summer leagues, is where he really improved and got it going," Johnson said. "He was surrounded by a lot of good players to where they couldn't pitch around him. That's where he got our attention — in the summer leagues."

Once Heaney signed with the Aggies, old and current teammates were quick to follow suit. In addition to Scarborough, freshmen hurlers Chance Caple and Casey Fossum completed the Mustang flavor.

Heaney's partner in the pivot, Scarborough, said if he were to pick a team, Heaney would be at or near the top of his list.

BY JAMIE BURCH
THE BATTALION

Baltimore Oriole's shortstop/third baseman Cal Ripken Jr., the definition of consistency, broke Lou Gehrig's record for consecutive games played at 2,131. As an everyday player, Ripken provided stability for the Oriole infield.

Texas A&M second baseman Brian Benefield has done the same for the Aggies. Starting 35 of 36 games this season, Benefield has been an instrumental part in the Aggies stingy .960 fielding percentage.

Benefield attributes his regimen to his coach at Mesquite High School.

"It goes back to my high school coach," Benefield said. "He always taught consistency and persistence. Even though there's going to be tough times, just stick with what got you there. In times of adversity, a lot of people start trying to change things."



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Junior second baseman **Brian Benefield** and senior shortstop Rich Petru have turned 15 double plays.

See **HEANEY**, Page 8

See **BENEFIELD**, Page 8

Arizona wins battle of Wildcats, 84-79

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Now there's only one No. 1 left for the Arizona Wildcats — themselves. Arizona, the team that was supposed to be a year away, just needed an extra five minutes to win its first NCAA basketball championship.

Led by the backcourt of junior Miles Simon and freshman Mike Bibby, Arizona kept Kentucky from repeating as national champion with an 84-79 overtime victory Monday night. With three juniors, a sophomore and a freshman in the starting lineup, next year was supposed to be the one for Arizona. Instead, the Wildcats (25-9) made their first championship appearance a thrilling one in a game featuring 20 ties and 18 lead changes.

Fourth-seeded Arizona became the first team in tournament history to knock off three No. 1 seeds — Kansas, North Carolina and now

Kentucky, the winningest programs in college basketball history.

Kentucky was trying to become the second repeat champion since UCLA's stretch of seven straight titles ended in 1973. Duke repeated as champion in 1992.

Instead, Arizona won the first overtime championship game since Michigan beat Seton Hall 80-79 in 1989. Arizona reached the Final Four with an overtime win against Providence in the Southeast regional.

Simon, who missed the first 11 games of the season because of academic problems, finished with 30 points. Bibby, the son of former UCLA star Henry Bibby, who won three college championships himself, had 14 of his 19 points in the second half.

Arizona became the losingest team to win it all, since Kansas was 27-11 in 1988.

Braves, Indians meet in October, Atlanta prevails



WORLD SERIES CHAMPION — ATLANTA BRAVES

After last season's offensive explosion, the major league bats should cool down a little this year. The league is five years removed from expansion so the pitching staffs should be about rebuilt. Not that single-season pitching records are going to be falling left

and right, but this should be a more respectable year for the hurlers.

This season will see some players finally reach their peak performance level and others will return to their former greatness. Greg Maddux will bounce back from his first non-Cy Young award season since 1991 to be the best pitcher in baseball. Frank Thomas will slightly benefit from Albert Belle in Chicago's four-hole and put up some inhumane numbers and win the Triple Crown. Gary Sheffield will step into his own this season and lead the Marlins to the playoffs, while Tony Gwynn will snag yet another batting title.

It's ironic that the biggest trade in

Sportswriter



Jeremy Furtick
Senior journalism major

recent memory included the two teams which will meet in October. Atlanta has a statement to make this season and they have reloaded to win the World Series. Cleveland put themselves into this position with the trade, but Atlanta is too tough.

Remember though, it's easy to sit at this computer and make these picks — anyone can do it, but nobody really knows what's going to happen.

That's why they play the games.

NATIONAL LEAGUE

East
Atlanta Braves
Florida Marlins
New York Mets
Montreal Expos
Philadelphia Phillies

Central
Houston Astros
St. Louis Cardinals
Cincinnati Reds
Pittsburgh Pirates

POSTSEASON AWARDS
MVP — Gary Sheffield, Florida
Cy Young — Greg Maddux, Atlanta
Rookie of the Year — Trey Beamon, Pittsburgh
Manager of the Year — Larry Dierker, Houston

STATISTICAL LEADERS
Batting Average — Tony Gwynn, San Diego
Home Runs — Barry Bonds, San Francisco
RBI — Jeff Bagwell, Houston
ERA — Greg Maddux, Atlanta
Wins — Greg Maddux, Atlanta
Saves — Trevor Hoffman, San Diego

NL CHAMPION
Atlanta Braves

AMERICAN LEAGUE

East
Baltimore Orioles
New York Yankees

See **FURTICK**, Page 8