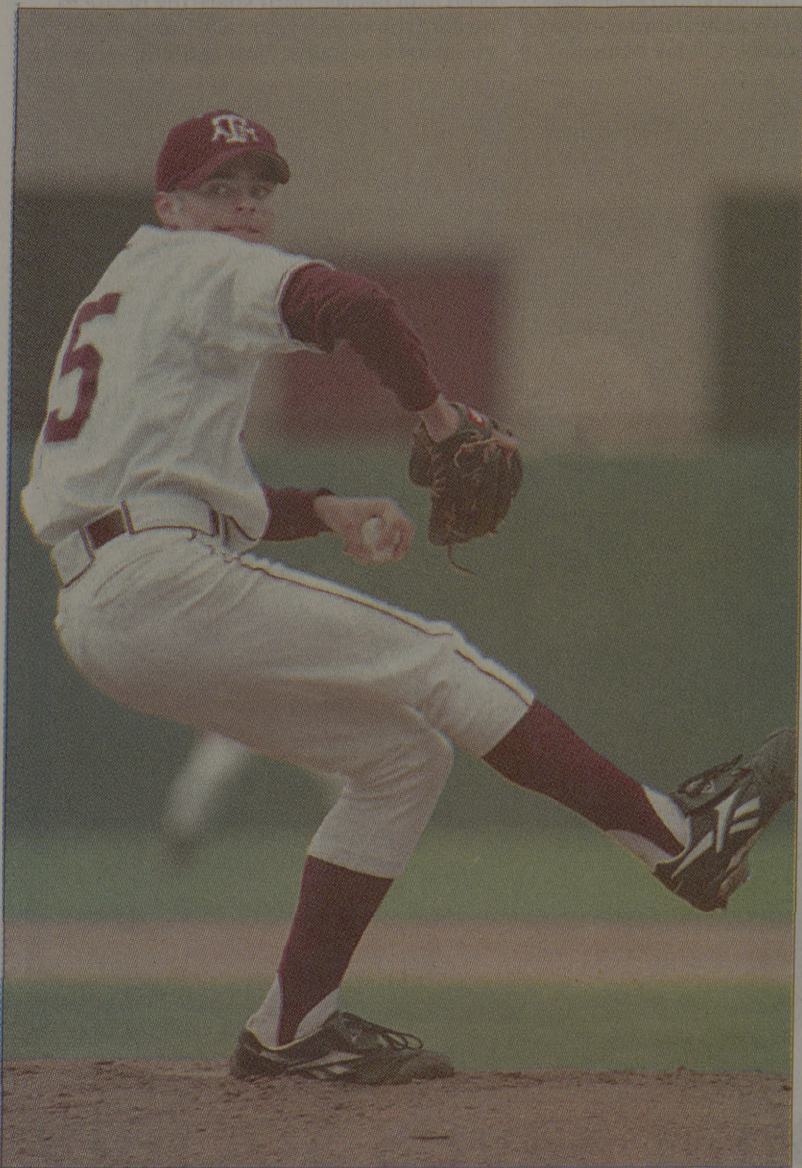


**6** Fossum, Tyner represent Aggie best on USA Baseball team



FILE PHOTOGRAPH

Pitcher Casey Fossum pitches against the University of Arizona Feb. 14 at Olsen Field.

BY MATT MITCHELL  
THE BATTALION

The phrase "Boys of Summer" doesn't quite fit the athletes of collegiate baseball teams.

After grueling fall drills, which last virtually the entire semester, the players' regular season starts early in the spring and, unless the team is fortunate enough to be invited to a regional, is usually over by the time the sweltering Texas heat hits town.

But for two members of the Texas Aggie Baseball Team, the summer and baseball are in full swing. Sophomore centerfielder Jason Tyner and freshman pitcher Casey Fossum are in Viera, Fla., as members of the 24-man roster of the 1997 USA Baseball National Team.

The team practices at the spring training home of the Florida Marlins, and by all appearances, Tyner and Fossum are thrilled to be a part of it.

"This has kind of been a dream of mine for a long time," Tyner said in a phone interview from Florida. "I've been to the Olympics before, and I've always wanted to play for Team USA. It's like nothing I've ever experienced. When they play the national anthem, it's just the best feeling in the world."

The fact that the original 40 invitees were pared to just 24 players leaves the two Aggies among the best underclassmen in the country.

"It's just a great thrill to know you're one of the best out there right now," Fossum said.

Team USA's travel schedule has been hectic, to say the least. After a six-game series against Nicaragua in Florida, Team USA traveled to Japan for a five-game series, before a stop in California for a five-game set with Korea.

"I guess it's a lot like professional baseball in that we're traveling to

different hotels every day; we're never in the same place very long," Tyner said. "It's fun being in all these different places. We've been to Japan, we've been to Spain, California, Florida. But it takes its toll on you; you're always tired."

Fossum and Tyner both agree about the most obvious thing they've learned from their experience so far—the rest of the world is not far behind the USA in terms of baseball talent.

"The teams we're playing are definitely as talented as we are," Tyner says. "You'd think the USA would be able to just walk all over everybody, but we're playing against 30 or 40 year-old guys and they've been doing it for a while. They know how to play baseball, I guarantee you that."

Fossum's perspective is somewhat different, but he says every nation's team has a certain style of play.

"As a pitcher, I've found out that the Japanese, the Koreans, all of them have different swings and different ways of hitting the ball," Fossum said. "Japan has some real good pitchers, some with deliveries like the [Los Angeles] Dodgers' Hideo Nomo. Korea had a real good pitcher that was kind of like [fellow Dodgers pitcher] Chan Ho Park."

"They have real different deliveries. They're slow and twisting, and it is sometimes tough on the hitters."

The conglomerate of talent assembled on Team USA is indeed formidable, but as is customary in baseball, Tyner and Fossum say a camaraderie has developed among the players.

"It's been fun meeting all these guys," Tyner said. "You kind of get an idea of what other schools are like, because you're with some of the best players in the country."

"Everybody's getting along pretty good, there's just a lot of different backgrounds. But we have a lot of fun."



FILE PHOTOGRAPH

Outfielder Jason Tyner attempts a bunt against the University of Texas last season at Olsen Field.

Fossum even goes so far as to say that, in addition to getting to know former and future foes, he's seen a few weaknesses that may be exploited in seasons to come.

"We've played against these guys all year, and you finally get to meet some of these players and they're not your enemies anymore," Fossum said. "We've made some pretty good friends."

"You get some idea of what they struggle with, what they can't handle, so if we play them next year, I'll have some idea what to throw them."

As for the effects of the Team USA experience in terms of next season, both players see many positives in participating in such a highly-regarded program.

"It drives you to try harder," Fossum said of being in the company of so much talent. "You're really not a standout here and you have to work hard to pitch, which builds your confidence. The pitching coaches here are great, and they've really helped me a lot, both with the mental side of baseball and the physical side."

Tyner added the need to take a leadership role next season will be aided by his summer sojourn.

"I just think I'm maturing," Tyner said. "I think it's going to help me a lot next season, help me become a leader. And more than anything else, the thrill of playing for your country is just an unbelievable feeling."

**'HOTTEST RUGBY IN TEXAS'**



PHOTOGRAPHS: Tim Moog

Above: Members of the Texas A&M Rugby Team are in a scrum down Tuesday as they practice for Saturday's tournament which will be held at the A&M Polo Fields.

**Rugby team to host 45-team tournament**

The Texas A&M Rugby Team will host the 21st annual Hottest Rugby in Texas Saturday at the A&M Polo Fields.

A&M has hosted this tournament each year and will welcome 45 college and men's teams Saturday. The tournament will take place on nine fields with A&M playing their games on the nearest field.

Games will begin at approximately 10 a.m., and each team will play close to seven games.



Rugby team member Jim Nelson hands off the ball after a line-in at practice Tuesday.

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