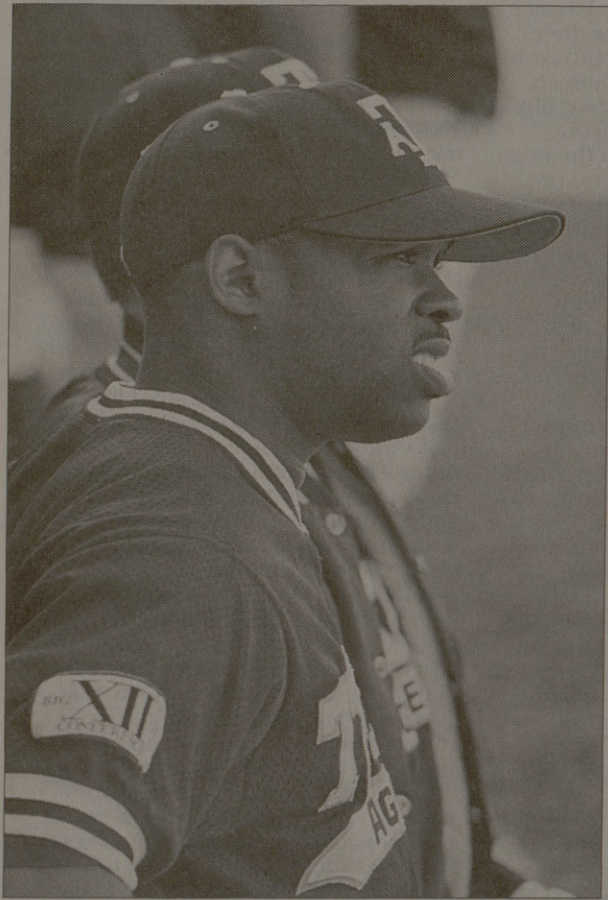


Blazing Difficult Trails

Sophomore outfielder William Gray overcame a serious injury along with campus racial tension to break into Aggie line



ROBERT MCKAY/THE BATTALION

Sophomore **Will Gray** worked hard to rehab from a serious injury in order to contribute to the baseball team.

By COLBY MARTIN
Staff writer

Adversity is something Will Gray is acquainted with quite well. Gray is the only black player on the Texas A&M Baseball Team, and, thanks to a knee injury, he came close to not being a player on the team at all.

Gray, a sophomore outfielder, was bitten with a torn anterior cruciate ligament last season that ended his year on the team. One night when the team was in the waning moments of taking batting practice, Gray went back on a fly ball like he had done thousands of times before.

"I just remember being on the warning track and trying to find the wall," Gray said. "I remember jumping up, and the ball ricocheted off the wall and into my knee causing me to land funny."

Before Gray knew it, he was out for the season and in the middle of a grueling rehabilitation process.

"I was out there every day busting my butt, and for some reason it was not getting any easier," Gray said. "The rehab was supposed to be for four months, but I am just now starting to feel like I am back to normal."

Most athletes stricken with the same type of knee injuries are only out of action for three to four months.

For whatever reason, Gray is just now returning to top game-playing shape.

"I think that Will is finally back to normal, and that is big for us because we need him to be at 100 percent," Coach Mark Johnson said. "He is going to be an important part of this team."

Coach Johnson explained that Gray had come from a small high school where baseball is not a year-round thing like it is for some players that play on the elite summer teams.

"I am going to go play ball this summer in the Ar-

lington area, and I think it will only help me next year," said Gray.

Gray has tried to use this year as a learning experience, taking advantage of watching fellow outfielder Jason Tyner on the offensive side of the game.

"I feel like I could have started on this team if I would not of sustained this injury, but I will still be ready when

"I feel like I could have started on this team if I would not have sustained this injury"

Will Gray
Texas A&M outfielder

the time comes for me to step up," said Gray.

What separates him from the pack is his blazing speed, and now that it has returned, nothing can stop him.

Aside from his blistering speed, there is another attribute that Gray has that sets him apart. He is the only black player on the team.

"It has never been an issue with us, and I do not think it has been an issue with his teammates as well," Johnson said.

Gray acknowledges that many black baseball players do not attend college because of high-dollar contracts tendered to them by professional teams. However, he said that families that stress education will encourage their children to snare the opportunity of a first-rate education when the chance arrives.

"I think a lot of the time it has to do with being poor

rather than being black," Gray said. "I'm not really enough to come from an educated family, stressed academics."

"Even though I got offered plenty of money, it was really important to both my parents and me to get an education."

Gray stressed that he had never had any problems with teammates, and he does not feel weird being on a team that is predominantly white.

"Almost all of my friends could not believe why I chose Texas A&M, and they just could not believe it when I told them that all of the things that were not true," he said. "Even other black athletes asked me what it is like playing baseball here, and I tell them that it is fine."

Gray said he was recently on a bus riding back to school when another student sat down next to him and introduced himself.

The first question he asked Gray was whether he played.

"The thing is, the guy asked that because he was black, I must be an athlete," Gray said. "I've never had any problems with teammates, and I don't think we have not been just another student on campus. People just make assumptions some times, but it does not mean that they are racist."

Gray also plans on staying for the full four years unless the money is impossible to pay for.

"Will's parents feel like his education is the most important thing," Johnson said. "He has a lot of respect for his mother and father, and what is important to them is important to him."

Gray has faced the challenge of overcoming racial differences in an environment that is divided by color among black baseball players.

However, Gray said he does not pay attention to the differences that seem so apparent to outsiders. "I really haven't noticed it."

Class of 1997: Playoff Payoff?

Last season's rookie draft produced high-class talent that is leading NBA teams into the playoffs — and the next age



JEFF WEBB
sports editor

NBA teams that find themselves lucky enough to have lottery picks in the draft usually don't see a return on their investment until their contract expires if they are traded to another team.

Then the team that so faithfully invested a first-round pick can watch their player carry another team to the promised land.

During the Houston Rockets-Utah Jazz radio broadcast on Saturday night, Jim Foley and Gene Peterson, notoriously-biased Rockets announcers who regularly call officiating that doesn't go the Rockets way "crap," suggested that this is a disappointing season for the rookie class of 1997.

"There are only, what, 16 rookies on playoff rosters, and there are 16 teams," Foley said.

This is the first season in a long time when that statement rings through as moronic.

Taking a look at what has become the best draft class in a long time, we see four potential superstars that have led their teams to the playoffs.

This is a tale of three teams, the Cleveland Cavaliers, the San Antonio Spurs and the New Jersey Nets.

The Spurs were no surprise to anyone. They locked up the first pick in a lucky draw of the ping-pong balls and selected can't-miss prospect Tim Duncan.

San Antonio soon found itself in the hunt for a division title and now are sitting in a pretty position in the first round with the Phoenix Suns as they head home with a 1-1 tie in the series.

Some feel that David Robinson should turn over his "Top-50 Players of all-time" jacket over to the young Duncan, who will almost certainly be considered for the honor in a few years.

The younger of the towers simply willed the Spurs to victory with his clutch fourth quarter performance, looking more like a battle-tested war-horse than a nervous rookie on the firing line.

Duncan scored six consecutive baskets over an assortment of defenders and was the reason the Spurs now have the home court advantage in the series.

Cleveland benefits from the presence of two outstanding rookies. Brevin Knight has run the show quite admirably as a Mike Fratello disciple and center Zydrunas Ilgauskas gave Indiana's Rick Smits all he could handle in the two Cleveland losses.

Knight wasn't highly-touted coming out of Stanford and many maligned him because of his diminutive size, however he has proved worthy of leading a team to the playoffs and Ilgauskas is the perfect complement.

The Cavaliers also have rookies Cedric Henderson and Derek Anderson (who was drafted ahead of Knight) coming off the bench to add defensive pressure and a fast-break threat to the game's landscape.

New Jersey would not be in the playoffs if Keith Van Horn had not played. It's that simple. Van Horn was a scoring machine in the regu-



lar season and played in the first half of The Nets' overtime loss to the defending champion Bulls. Van Horn had to sit out the second half because of a virus, and only after Coach John Calipari urged him to do so. Give Van Horn the nod for the Runner-Up-to-Tim-Duncan Award for Rookie of the Year. In a season with so much young talent, that honor has more meaning.

Without the contributions of these outstanding rookies, it is likely the playoffs would look a bit different this season.

It also might be noted that the rookies who have done so well in leading their teams to the playoffs this season all stayed in school for four years. Experience is something that cannot be taught, it can only be learned.

So, Gene and Jim, before you applaud the Rockets one more time, before you criticize the officiating for not seeing phantom fouls on opposing players and before you call one more game with that flavor of the home team that Rockets fans adore and the rest of the public lament, please reconsider your thoughts.

If the Rockets make it to the second round of the playoffs, it might be a rookie, Duncan, that sends your team home, and into retirement, for the season.

— Jeff Webb is a junior journalism major.

AGGIE SPORTS BRIEFS

from staff and wire reports

Wade takes gold at Penn Relays

Texas A&M senior All-American hurdler Larry Wade has earned the reputation as one of the best college hurdlers in the nation over his four-year career.

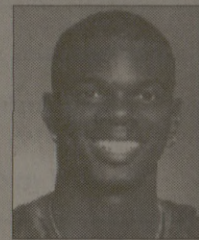
This past weekend at the Penn Relays he showed why. Wade brought home the championship in the 110-meter hurdles for the second straight year and he also led the men's shuttle relay team to a second-place finish.

Wade crossed the finish line in 13.49 seconds to beat freshman phenom Terrance Trammell of South Carolina. Wade's time is an NCAA automatic qualifier and is a season best for him. In the shuttle hurdle relay, Wade teamed with junior Desmond Powell and freshman Kris Allen and Bashir Ramzy and finished second behind Clemson in 55.84 seconds.

Senior Rosa Jolivet finished second in the women's 400-meter intermediate hurdles with a season-best time of 57.62. Jolivet's time is an NCAA provisional qualifier. Senior Adrien Sawyer and Jolivet along with sophomore Chimika Carter and freshman Christina Ohaeri teamed up to finish fourth in the women's shuttle hurdle relay with a time of 54.60.

The men's 4x400-meter relay ran their best time of the season in 3:08.99.

The Aggies will be competing next weekend at the New Orleans FourWay meet in New Orleans, La.



Wade

Baseball sweeps Kansas Jayhawks

The Texas A&M Baseball Team (37-15, 19-8) swept a three-game series from the Kansas Jayhawks in Lawrence, Kan., this weekend.

The Aggies destroyed the Jayhawks 12-1 Friday on Ryan Rupe's strong pitching performance. Rupe had eight strikeouts and no walks in his complete game victory. John Scheschuk and Steven Truitt clubbed their 13th and sixth home runs respectively.

On Saturday, the Aggies hit a school-record seven home runs en route to first place in the Big 12 Conference with a 17-12 victory over Kansas. Homering for the Aggies were Scott Sandusky (his first), Craig Kuzmic (15), Scheschuk (14), Daylan Holt (5), Truitt (7), Erik Sobek (8) and Scarborough (4).

The Aggies outlasted the Jayhawks 10-9 in the final game on Sunday. Matt Ward threw seven and two-thirds innings and struck out seven batters. Homering for the Aggies were Kuzmic (16), Scheschuk (15), Holt (6) and Sobek (9). Sean Heaney hit two home runs to give him a total of seven for the year.

Men's team wins Big 12 over Texas

The 1998 Texas A&M Men's Tennis Team has accomplished what no other team before them could ever do.

The Aggies have won the Big 12 Tennis Championships with a 4-0



Scheschuk

win over No. 5-ranked Texas.

In the finals of the conference tournament for only the third school history, the Aggies won the title and had only one loss in the conference tournament.

For the second straight year the Aggies were out to make a statement as they won their first six sets.

The Aggies now await the national team selection. The event will be hosted by Texas on May 15.

Golf wins its fifth crown since 1993

Led by medalist Isabelle Rosberg, Texas A&M captured the 1998 Big 12 Women's Golf Championship in Norman, Okla., on Sunday.

The Aggies, who led by seven strokes over host Oklahoma entering the day, shot a final-round 308 and finished four strokes better than runner-up and 1997 champion Texas. It was the Aggies' sixth conference title (they won the west Conference crown in 1993).

A&M's title came after runner-up in conference action each of the last years (Big 12 Conference East and Southwest Conference previous two years).

A&M's final scores 299+312+308=919. Tournament champion Isabelle Rosberg finished second with an 8-over-par 227.

Additionally, Rosberg was Big 12 Player of the Year by coaches.

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Class of 1999

Boot Dance

Who: Everyone in the Class of 1999
Date: May 16, 1998
Time: 10 p.m. to 1 a.m.
Where: Rudder Exhibit Hall
Attire: Formal
Tickets: \$10 Each, available at the MSC Box Office starting April 27th

Also Available: Boot Dance T-shirt (\$10)
Picture Package (\$13.50 & \$18.50)
2 oz Boot shaped collector glass (\$5)

Questions: Contact Dana Devlin (Social Secretary) at 845-1515 or Devlin@tamu.edu