

Medical Miracle

Senior pitcher Ryan Rupe saw his professional fortunes fall after numerous surgeries, but finds himself back as staff ace

By Chris Ferrell
Staff writer

Watching senior Ryan Rupe take the mound, it's easy to see why he was a first-team All-Big 12 pitcher a year ago. All you have to do is take a look at his 6-foot-6, 225-pound frame to see why professional scouts have been swooning over his talent since he was in high school. Watching batters stand frozen like a deer in headlights as his 90-plus mph fastball comes bearing down on them shows what kind of talent he possesses.

But for all of Rupe's physical attributes and abilities, what's inside (or not inside as the case may be) which sets Ryan Rupe apart from the rest of the crowd. If you were to look inside him, the first thing you would see would be his heart. A heart which has persevered through so much during his career.

No one expected Rupe to be pitching for the Aggies this season, especially not Rupe. By now everyone figured he would have been well on his way to millions of dollars and a long professional career. And why should he be? The scouts love the fact that he is a big, strong guy who can throw in the 90's for an entire game. He has three pitches—a devastating fast ball, a slider and a change up—and he can throw all of them for strikes.

But over the past three seasons, Rupe has been hit with a rash of injuries which could have derailed even the longest of careers.

My arm swelled a good four inches and the bicep started turning purple. We figured out there was a circulation problem around there. I went into the hospital here and they diagnosed it. Then I flew to Denver. They removed my top rib to allow for circulation into my arm.

The surgery was similar to that of former Houston Astro pitcher John Hudek, except for the fact that Rupe had already developed a blood clot, which further decreased the chances of a full recovery.

"It's really unique," he said. "I had already developed a blood clot. The big part of my surgery was if the blood clot would dissolve. If the blood clot didn't dissolve, my arm wouldn't go down. But the clot did dissolve. They don't have too many surgeries like that, especially not with a guy who throws, so there was some doubt as to whether or not I could come back. After the surgery, when the doctor told me I may never pitch again, that changed everything. I went ahead and got my degree. That particular time in my life was a set back. I've had several."

In fact no one knew for sure if he was going to return until this past fall when practices began and Rupe started throwing again.

"The past two years I went into the draft expecting to be a high pick and something has happened," Rupe said. "After last year's surgery, I'm just happy to be pitching again. I was upset my junior season with the bone spurs, but that's a surgery you can bounce back from. The last surgery was somewhat different. It was unique and I wasn't sure that it was one I could bounce back from. So for me to throw again is an accomplishment."

PLEASE SEE RUPE ON PAGE 12.

Bone spurs in his pitching arm caused him to miss all of the '96 season. He returned in '97 to earn first-team All-Big 12 honors. He led the staff in victories and was set to lead the team into regionals when tragedy again struck. A blood clot in Rupe's right arm ended his season early and almost ended his career.

"There was the closing of a vein called the subclavian which runs from your arm to your heart," Rupe said. "The blood would go into my arm but it wouldn't come back

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Texas A&M senior pitcher

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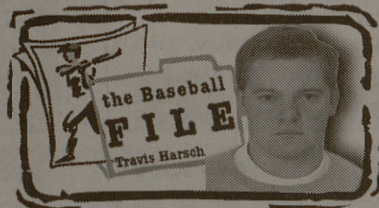
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PLEASE SEE RUPE ON PAGE 12.

Bears, Aggies showdown in Waco for Big 12 title; team ranked 10th



As the season winds down, the Aggies find themselves fighting for the top spot in the Big 12 race.

Lock, Stock and Barrel
Texas A&M will play their last conference and regular season home game Friday night in what could be the biggest series of the year against Baylor before the set heads to Waco for games Saturday and Sunday.

The Aggies, with a 19-8 conference mark, have a .023 percentage point lead on the Bears, who have compiled a 17-8 Big 12 record.

A sweep by either team would guarantee that team the title. How-

ever, Oklahoma State, with a 13-8 Big 12 mark, could take the title.

If neither A&M nor Baylor sweeps and the Cowboys win all six of the games remaining on their conference schedule, Oklahoma State would take home the trophy.

The road is not exactly clear for the Cowboys, who would have to sweep both rival Oklahoma in three neutral-site games and Missouri in three at Columbia.

Both the Sooners and the Tigers are likely headed to Oklahoma City for the conference tournament.

Stadium Runneth Over

With two teams battling for a Big 12 title, there are sure to be several thousand fans of both schools in Waco on Saturday and Sunday.

How many of them actually get in to see the game is anyone's guess, something that could upset a lot of people as the Bears have adopted a policy that is less than friendly to A&M fans.

The Baylor ticket office is pre-selling tickets for the game, but a ticket may not guarantee you a seat. Baylor's Ferrell Field has a regular capacity of 1,700, the third smallest in the conference, but the athletic department is still adding bleacher seats down both the baselines for the expected crowd of 4,500.

Fans will need to get in line early, as the gates open at 5:30 on Saturday and 12:30 on Sunday, and prepare for close quarters; Baylor plans on packing as many fans in as possible.

Baylor will begin renovation and expansion on Ferrell Field soon after the conclusion of the series.

The expansion, which will bring capacity to around 3,500 was planned to give Baylor a better chance of hosting an NCAA regional, but even if the plan been carried out last summer, the Bears would still be scrambling to find seats for this weekend.

PLEASE SEE HARSCH ON PAGE 12.

Master Thief

Junior Jason Tyner uses his speed along the basepaths to blaze a trail to professional scouts and the major leagues

By Michael Taglienti
Staff writer

You probably walk by him every day on campus and don't even know it. At 6'1" and 167 pounds, Jason Tyner does not exactly fit the mold of a world-class athlete. In Tyner's case, looks can be very deceiving. The junior centerfielder from Beaumont is a walking

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Mark Johnson
Texas A&M Baseball Coach

contradiction to the stereotypes of college baseball and the star athletes who play the game.

College baseball today is a game dominated by the long ball. With suped up bats, 5'8", 170-pound infielders are able to hit 20 home runs in a season and be the cleanup hitter for their ball club. Tyner is an exception to this rule in that he dominates games like few players in college can, and he does it without hitting any home runs.

In baseball, a lead-off hitter is supposed to get on base and give his team a chance to score runs. Tyner does this better than any other lead off hitter in the Big 12. He leads the Big 12 in hits and stolen bases.

With such great credentials, one would think that Tyner was recruited by hundreds of colleges out of high school and that Texas A&M had to sweat it out while he decided to accept the Aggies' offer of a scholarship or join the exodus of high school players who accept

million-dollar bonuses to play pro baseball. However, this was not the case. Tyner was not drafted by a major league team out of high school and was only offered scholarships by Baylor and A&M.

Aggie Coach Mark Johnson said that he recruited Tyner because of his speed.

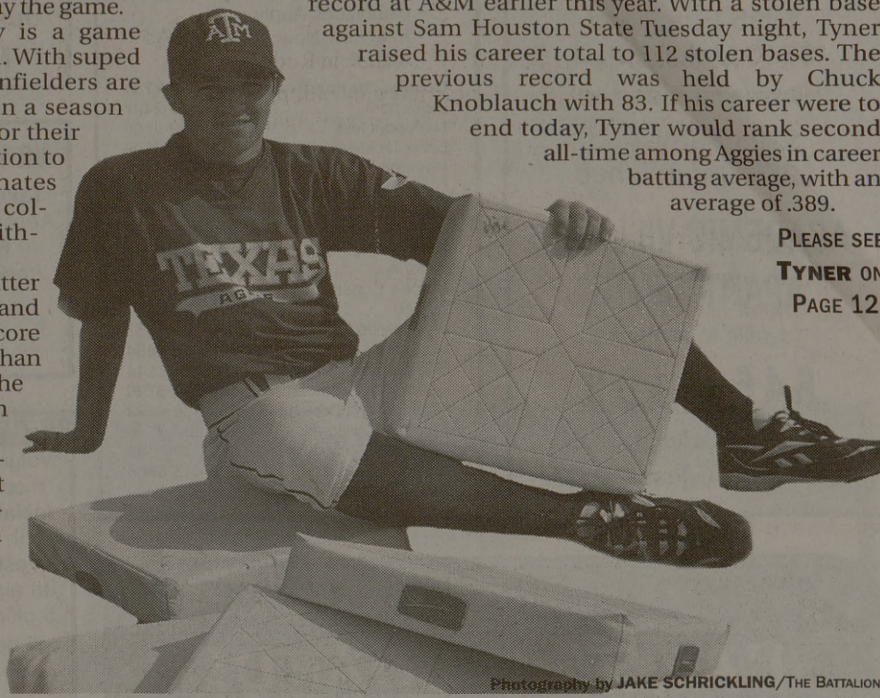
"The speed was the defining factor with him," Johnson said. "The whole package was speed." Speed is definitely something that Tyner does not lack. He has been timed in the 40-yard dash in 4.42 seconds and in the 60-yard dash in 6.4 seconds. Tyner and backup outfielder William Gray (4.38 in the 40) are the fastest baseball players on the Aggie squad.

As a freshman at A&M, Tyner surprised his coaches and his teammates by batting .407 and setting the A&M season stolen-bases mark with 41 in 46 attempts. Johnson said that he did not expect Tyner's success at the plate.

"Nobody expects anybody to hit .400 as a freshman," Johnson said. "I don't expect juniors and seniors to hit .400."

Tyner continued his hot-hitting as a sophomore and a junior and shattered the career stolen-bases record at A&M earlier this year. With a stolen base against Sam Houston State Tuesday night, Tyner raised his career total to 112 stolen bases. The previous record was held by Chuck Knoblauch with 83. If his career were to end today, Tyner would rank second all-time among Aggies in career batting average, with an average of .389.

PLEASE SEE TYNER ON PAGE 12.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAKE SCHRICKLING/THE BATTALION

Jordan tears down Nets with 39 points

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) — Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls made sure the New Jersey Nets ended their first playoff appearance in four years with nothing more than a little respect.

Jordan hit 15 of his first 18 shots and scored 38 points Wednesday night as the Bulls swept the best-of-5 series from the Nets with a 116-101 victory.

The first-round sweep was the third straight for the two-time defending NBA champions and it gave them a 24-1 record in the opening round since 1991.

Scott Burrell supported Jordan hitting 9 of 11 shots from the

field and scoring 23 points, including 11 in the third quarter when Chicago opened a 93-76 lead. Dennis Rodman added 17 rebounds as Chicago outrebounded New Jersey 35-21, limiting New Jersey to 10 boards in the first 36 minutes.

Rodman also put an exclamation point on the win, hitting a 3-pointer on a pass from Jordan in the waning seconds. He then raised his arms over his head, drawing catcalls from the sellout crowd.

Sherman Douglas, again filling in for Sam Cassell, led the Nets with 19 points. Chris Gatling and Keith Van Horn each had 18 and Kendall Gill 17 for New Jersey, which lost despite outshooting Chicago from the field.

The Nets had rallied from big deficits and made the Bulls struggle in the first two games in Chicago, and they thought that playing before a home crowd would make a difference.

It didn't, even though the fans booed Jordan and Co. more than they had in the past.

On the court, nothing changed and the Nets problems were compounded by Jordan's sizzling shooting. He opened with a 3-point basket and then proceeded to sink one jumper after another, most of the time with a defender not too far away. He finished 16-of-22 from the field.

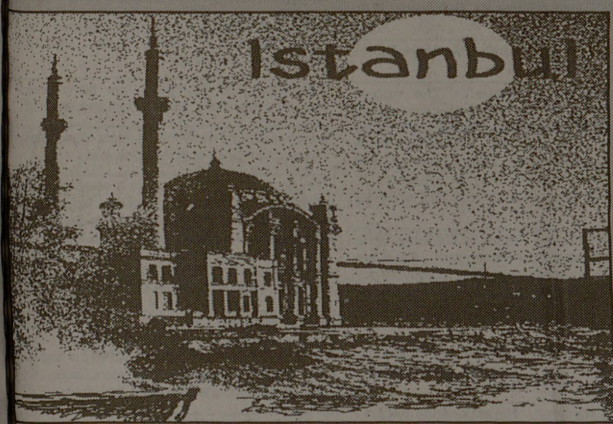
Both teams shots about 65 percent in the opening half, but the Bulls opened a 61-52 lead. Chicago broke the game open midway through the third quarter with a 14-6 spurt that included nine straight by Burrell.

The Nets made one desperate run in the fourth quarter, closing to 97-85.

However, Jordan make several fakes on Kerry Kittles on the left wing and hit another jumper. As the crowd groaned, Jordan put his finger to his lips and mouthed "shhhhh."

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