

Aggies come home Big 12 champions

Record crowds at Olsen, Ferrell Fields witness Texas A&M complete its improbable run for the conference title

By Travis Harsch
Staff writer

A&M rode the pitching of its ace to the Big 12 title this weekend, as the Aggies took two of three from the Baylor Bears. Ryan Rupe and Casey Fossum combined to strike out 28 Baylor batters on Saturday and Sunday.

Baylor coach Steve Smith said the opposition his team faced was playing at a higher level.

"I think we saw two guys the last two nights that'll pitch in the big leagues," Smith said.

Rupe got the Aggies the win on Friday night, working a complete game and striking out 13 in an 8-1 win before an all-time record crowd of 9,151. There were 7,351 paying attendees and 8,800 in the left field Aggie Alley. They all saw A&M jump out to an eight-run lead, thanks to five runs on five hits, including a triple by John Scheschuk and solo home runs from Craig Kuzmic and Steven Truitt.

Scheschuk said he felt the early lead allowed a little relief from the stress that had been building all week.

"The ball happened to fall for us, to jump out to a 5-0 lead in a game of this caliber is huge because it takes so much of the pressure off you," Scheschuk said.

The wind began picking up in the bottom of the first, as a thunderstorm approached and after

Baylor hit in the top of the second, the rain began to fall, causing a 19-minute rain delay.

When action resumed, Jason Tyner singled and stole second. Scott Sandusky then drew a walk and Daylan Holt followed Sandusky with a single to score Tyner. John Scheschuk hit a bases-clearing triple to make the score 8-0 after two innings.

That was all Rupe would need, as he allowed only one run, on an Eric Nelson homer in the fourth, the rest of the way.

Smith said the strikeouts for the Bears were key in deciding the outcome.

"You're not going to win many baseball games striking out 13 times," Smith said.

Or striking out 15 times, either. Fossum sent 15 Baylor players back to the bench Saturday night, going the distance in the 8-4 win that clinched the title for A&M before a record crowd of 4,456 at Baylor's Ferrell Field, including many Aggie fans that were able to turn the bleachers behind the Aggie dugout into a northern version of Olsen Field. Fossum, who pitched for Midway High School in Waco said the homecoming win was made sweeter by the fans.

"I'm just glad I had the opportunity to pitch here, and being at home made it more enjoyable, to share this with all my friends and all our fans," Fossum said. "I'm glad the fans came out and saw us;

I just couldn't ask for anything more."

Kuzmic, on his 21st birthday, gave A&M a 5-0 lead with home runs in the first and in the third. The two blasts gave Kuzmic a total of 21 homers on the season, eclipsing Mike Scanlin's mark of 20, set in 1986.

The five-run lead would hold up until the fourth, when Baylor got on the board, on a single, a two base error and then another single by Bear slugger Charley Carter that plated a run.

Baylor struck again in the fifth, as catcher Brian Loeb hit a two run homer to cut the lead to 5-3. Fossum then struck out the next two batters before giving up a solo homer to Eric Nelson that made the score 5-4 and gave Baylor hope.

With the game hanging in the balance in the eighth, A&M came through. Steve Scarborough doubled with one out, bringing up Kuzmic. Kuzmic was intentionally walked, bringing up Scheschuk. On the first pitch from Baylor starter Jason Jennings, Scheschuk took a change-up off the wall in center field for a triple, scoring Scarborough and

Kuzmic. The throw from the shortstop to third went wide and Scheschuk scored to put the Aggies up by four. A&M coach Mark Johnson said he was expecting Scheschuk to come through.

"John's been a clutch hitter all season long, I would have bet on him," Johnson said. "I don't know how well we would have done had we not been able to get that cushion."

The 8-4 score gave Fossum six outs to keep the Bears from scoring five runs, something Smith was not optimistic about.

"If you try to come from four runs down against Casey Fossum with the conference championship on the line, you're asking for a miracle," Smith said.

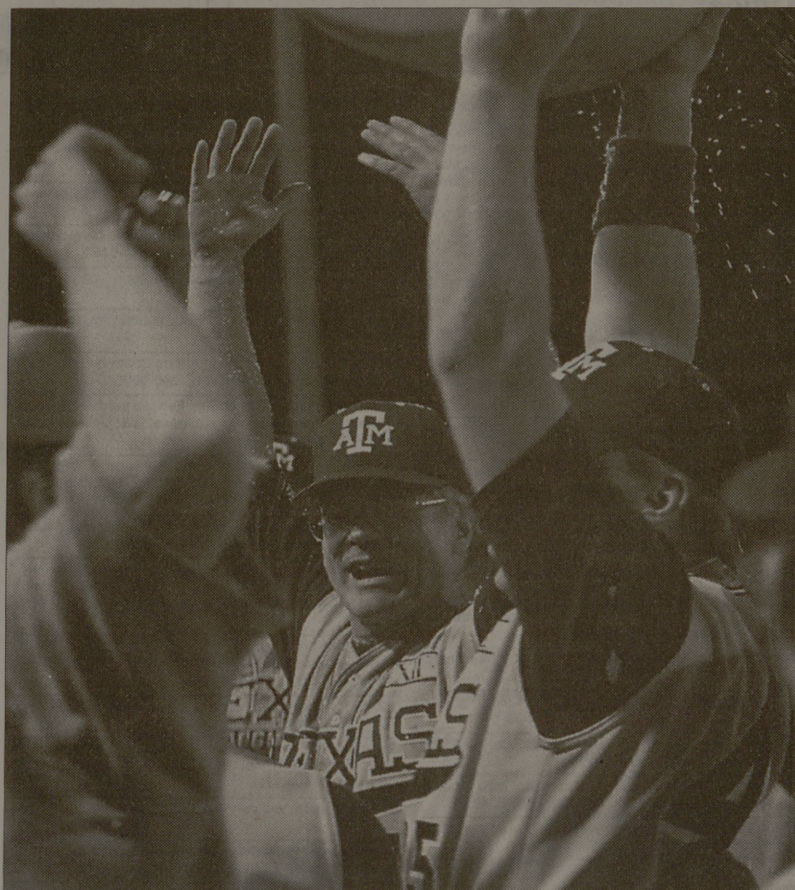
Fossum denied that miracle to Baylor, striking out Preston Underdown to give A&M their first Big 12 title and first championship since 1993.

Scheschuk said consistent play led to the title.

"This is probably one of the top three conferences in baseball," Scheschuk said. "To come in, week in and week out and get wins over quality opponents, it's a difficult task, but one we took heart to and we got it done."

Johnson said the start the Bears got off to led A&M to focus on their own games.

PLEASE SEE BASEBALL ON PAGE 7.



GREG MCREYNOLDS/THE BATTALION

Aggie Head Coach Mark Johnson celebrates with his team after having a water jug dumped on him Saturday. The Aggies beat Baylor Friday at home 8-1, and in Waco Saturday 8-4 to clinch their first Big 12 title. The conference championship was Johnson's fourth overall, dating back to SWC competition.

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FINALS SCHEDULE

SCIENCE		MON May 4	TUE May 5	WED May 6	THU May 7
PHYS 218	2-4 PM	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4
PHYS 202	4-6 PM	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4
CHEM 101	6-8 PM	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4
CHEM 102	8-10 PM	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4
CHEM 107	10 PM-MID	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4
PHYS 208	9-11 PM	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4
PHYS 208	11PM-1AM	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4
SCIENCE		SAT 9-May	SUN 10-May		
PHYS 201	4-8 PM	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4
SCIENCE		MON May 4	TUE May 5	WED May 6	THU May 7
BIOL 113	8-10 PM	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4
BUSINESS		MON May 4	TUE May 5	WED May 6	THU May 7
FINC 341	6-8 PM	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4

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