

Major league steals

Freeman signs with Colorado Rockies, Ambres poised to do same with Florida Marlins

BY JEFF WEBB
Sports Editor

Texas A&M recruited multi-talented athletes and now are seeing the result. The recent football class that is ranked among the best in the nation slowly might be picked apart by Major League baseball teams.

Raphael "Choo" Freeman, a wide receiver prospect out of Dallas Christian High School, signed with the Colorado Rockies for a reported \$1.4 million signing bonus, a figure he said was the minimum prying him away from college football.

Two more of the talented Aggie trio of major-league draftees have not made decisions concerning their future at A&M. The Rockies took Freeman in the supplemental draft after the first round. Chip Ambres, a quarterback from Beaumont Westbrook High School, was drafted 27th

in the first round by the Florida Marlins. Greg Porter, a tight end from Keller High School and shortstop prospect, was drafted in the third round as the 80th pick of the Cincinnati Reds.

Ambres set an August 4 deadline for the Marlins to tender him an acceptable contract. Despite the difficulty of the decision, it seems likely he will sign since he said his first love is baseball.

"You think about a lot of things," he said. "Whatever I decide, I'm going to be happy with it. I've been playing baseball since I was five, and football has grown on me, but there comes a time for change. I'd feel happy with both, though."

Ricky Williams, senior running back for the University of Texas and Philadelphia Phillies prospect, plays baseball in the summer and football in the fall for the Longhorns. However, Ambres said the Marlins do not offer

two-sport opportunities for its players. "There's no possibility," Ambres said. "On certain ballclubs, they have no problem with that. The organization I'm with doesn't like it too much. There would also be less money involved with playing both sports together."

The bonus of signing with a professional baseball team usually includes paid college education, something the Marlins said it will include in Ambres' contract.

Florida dumped a large amount of salary — and talent — in recent trades with the Dodgers and Mets. However, Ambres said that only makes him feel he has more of an opportunity to step in and play early.

"They (the Marlins) got rid of a lot of those big name players like (Gary) Sheffield, but they like young players," he said. "I feel like it's a good opportunity for me to progress. I saw a projection in the *Sporting News* for the year 2000 that had me

in right field and batting fifth in the order." Josh Booty, sixth pick of the Marlins a few years ago, was a highly-touted college recruit who chose to play baseball.

Booty, a blue-chip shortstop and quarterback recruit from Evangel High School in Shreveport, La., signed with the Marlins and saw his fortunes sink with injuries and sub par seasons.

Louisiana State University offered Booty the quarterback position, but he was unable to pay back his signing bonus in order to attend college.

"My parents are leaving the decision up to me," he said. "They want the best thing for me to do. What (Josh) Booty did, it's what he wanted to do. I can go back and get an education. They don't want to feel bad for making the decision for me, so they leave it up to me."

"If everything goes right, I'm going to take it (the chance)."

Aggies open Reed Arena schedule against UNT

From staff and wire reports

The Texas A&M Men's Basketball Coach Melvin Watkins will have to open the 1998 season with one final Aggie game in old G. Rollie White Coliseum.

Watkins and the Aggies will open their 14-game home schedule with an exhibition game against the Australian All-Stars and officially begin their Reed Arena era against the University of North Texas on November 13.

"We are very excited about our schedule," Watkins said. "Our home schedule should be very attractive to our fans as we move into Reed Arena."

Tough non-conference games highlight the schedule with home dates against the University of Alabama, Tulane University and Arizona State University.

Big 12 Conference play opens for A&M in Allen Fieldhouse for a showdown with the defending conference champions University of Kansas Jayhawks.



WATKINS

Swiss team signs Smedsrud

From staff and wire reports



BATTALION file photo

Kristie Smedsrud is the all-time kills leader at Texas A&M.

Volleyball Club Kanti, a professional team in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, signed former Texas A&M volleyball team standout Kristie Smedsrud to a professional contract.

Smedsrud, the 1997-98 Texas A&M Female Athlete of the Year, signed the contract in late June while on a two-week European tour with 19 other former U.S. collegiate players.

"When I first started playing volleyball in the eighth grade, I never thought I would be moving to Switzerland to play," she said. "After my junior year of college, I started thinking about playing professionally."

"Then after I finished my collegiate career this past season, the opportunity to travel and play in Europe for two weeks came and it was the opportunity of a lifetime."

A four-year starter at A&M, Smedsrud finished her collegiate career by becoming A&M's all-time kill leader. Smedsrud led the Aggies to four consecutive NCAA appearances during her career, including Sweet Sixteen Regional appearances in 1995 and 1997, while being named all-conference and all-region all four years.

"Kristie will be a great ambassador for Texas A&M and United States volleyball," A&M coach Laurie Corbelli said. "She is the first Aggie to sign overseas, and it is very fitting because she was the first to accomplish so many things while with the A&M program. We are very proud of all her accomplishments."

According to Smedsrud, approximately 10-15 other members of the first-ever organized American group of former collegiate players to make the tour to Europe signed with European teams, although the league limits the teams to one foreigner on the roster.

Smedsrud will meet with her new Swiss teammates for the first day of practice on August 1.

"There was no way to pass up this great opportunity," Smedsrud said, "not only to play volleyball, but to see new things and meet new people."

"I'm just glad to be playing again."

France becomes first host country to capture World Cup in 20 years

SAINT-DENIS, France (AP) — Vive la France, champions of the soccer world.

With nearly 80,000 of their fans going wild in the stands and millions more breaking out in the biggest celebrations since World War II ended, the French got two goals from playmaker Zinedine Zidane and stunned Brazil 3-0 on Sunday to win their first World Cup.

The French secured their place in the pantheon of great teams by throttling the defending champions, who were seeking an unprecedented fifth title. And France did it in its first tournament appearance since 1986 — when it eliminated Brazil in a quarterfinal shootout.

France, which created the tournament 70 years ago, is the first host to win the championship since Argentina in 1978.

Winner of all seven of its games, the French beat Brazil at its own game and did so down a man for the last 22 minutes after defender Marcel Desailly was ejected for rough play.

It was France that had the flair and Brazil that was overly cautious and sloppy. It was France that threatened from the opening kickoff, and it was Brazil that was reeling all night.

And it was France that held the trophy high as the Stade de France

rocked with cheers, singing and the frenzy that comes with winning the world's biggest sporting event.

Brazil won its titles in 1958, 1962, 1970 and four years ago. Its only previous loss in the final came at home in 1950 to Uruguay.

France has never been a power



in Europe along the lines of Germany and Italy, both three-time Cup winners. And the sport has never before been such a raging passion for the French.

But all day Sunday, in anticipation of exactly what happened at night, they were in a festive mood. People hung out of cars, the horns honking as they waved flags and shouted "Allez La France." French youngsters walked the streets, their faces painted in the blue, red and white national colors, shouting down any Brazilians who

might samba by.

One French TV station even covered — without interruption — the team's bus ride to the stadium in this Paris suburb.

Then Zidane, the son of Algerian immigrants, turned the nation's hopes into magnificent reality with one of the best performances in World Cup finals history. Midfielder Emmanuel Petit scored the third goal just before the end of the game.

The French got lots of help from the Brazilians for the victory.

Brazil didn't come out for warmups before the game, and it barely made an appearance in the first half. Except for a short flurry midway through the half, it was all France.

In the second half, Brazil came the closest to beating goalkeeper Fabien Barthez when Ronaldo had a pointblank shot from 8 yards. But the fierce-looking, baldheaded Barthez made the save.

Barthez allowed just two goals all tournament, one on a penalty shot.

The 3-0 score was indicative of how dominant the French were. They controlled the ball, they made Brazilian striker Ronaldo disappear — a sore ankle for which he was examined at a hospital in the morning certainly helped — and their star, Zidane, was unstoppable.

Bash at the Beach

Rodman finds home among WCW's elite wrestlers, ready to take on Malone, Page

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Dennis Rodman may have found just the outlet for his outrageousness: pro wrestling.

The Chicago Bulls star, who likes to shock with his hairdos, tattoos and tutus, has made the move from the world of slam dunks to body stunts in Sunday's pay-per-view wrestling match dubbed "Bash at the Beach."

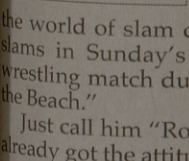
Just call him "Rodzilla" — he's already got the attitude.

"Dennis dances to a different tune," professional wrestling mainstay "Hollywood" Hulk Hogan, who worked out daily with Rodman in preparation for the match, said. "This is a forum where he can achieve and perform to his utmost. Dennis can get into the ring and do what he does best."

It isn't the first time Rodman has teamed with Hogan for a chance to thump on grown men and not get booed or fined for it. But this time he brought Utah Jazz star Karl Malone into the fray.

Representatives for World Championship Wrestling, a subsidiary of Turner Broadcasting System, Inc., planned to pay Malone and Rodman for the match, but they wouldn't say how much.

Rodman and Hogan teamed last July in Florida for Rodman's wrestling debut. And after Game 5 of the NBA Finals this year, the



RODMAN

two paired for a World Championship Wrestling event in Auburn Hills, Mich.

Rodman skipped practice, was fined, and the Bulls went on to beat Malone and the Jazz for their sixth title.

"Malone," Hogan snarled, "the guy that already is a loser on and off the court."

Malone, who is partnered with pro wrestler Diamond Dallas Page, is living out his boyhood dream to "wrastle" with the big guys.

"Him and his little coward friend will get beat in the ring," Malone predicted earlier in the week of his rumble with Rodman.

Hogan said the only plan of attack he and Rodman had for Malone and Page was to "romp and stomp them."

"We're going to go ahead and embarrass Mr. Clean Cut," Hogan said. Malone, who weighs 254 pounds to Rodman's 248, said he wasn't worried about injury. He said the Jazz didn't agree with many of the things he likes to do, like riding motorcycles, but he has to live his own life. Besides, he didn't plan on getting hurt.

As for Rodman, he said he does whatever he wants.

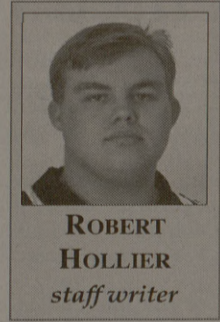
And Hogan said wrestling allows Rodman to be as bad as the crowd wants him to be.

"I think he likes it a lot better," Hogan said, noting that if Rodman tires of criticism in the NBA, he always has a place in pro wrestling and could probably make more money doing it.

"It's not rocket science," Hogan said. "The wilder he is, the more T-shirts we sell."

Alou vs. Kile: the free-agent debate

When the Astros gave up on Darryl Kile and turned their focus to Moises Alou, Houston made a decision that has them in the drivers' seat in a tough National League division



ROBERT HOLLIER
staff writer

When the Houston Astros won the 1997 Central Division title, it was a bitter-sweet accomplishment. True, they won a division title and were in the postseason for the first time since 1986, but they had drawn the Atlanta Braves in the best-of-five first round series of the playoffs.

The players and the organization believed they could surprise the heavily-favored Braves with their "Killer B" attack of Craig Biggio, Derek Bell, Jeff Bagwell and Sean Berry and they felt they had a pitching staff good enough to hold its own against the best pitching staff of the modern era.

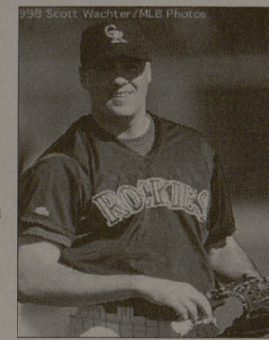
However, reality set in quickly as the team was literally swept out of the playoffs by the Braves in three games.

During the off season, the Astros knew changes had to be made if they were going to compete with the best. The two most pressing problems for the Astros were to re-sign pitcher Darryl Kile and to sign a quality power hitter to give the lineup more punch.

Kile, who went 19-7 with six complete games, four shutouts, 205 strikeouts in 255 innings and a 2.57 ERA, was asking for a contract that would pay him close to \$7 million a year.

Astros management decided that was too much money for one player and Kile eventually signed with the Colorado Rockies as a free agent.

With Kile gone, the Astros turned their attention to signing a proven power hitter. The Astros got one when they purchased the con-



Kile

tract of Moises Alou from the world-champion Florida Marlins for \$25 million over five years.

After the Marlins won the 1997 World Series, they began trading and selling their star players like pieces of property in a Monopoly game in order to reduce the payroll.

And the Astros were more than happy to take a player such as Alou off their hands.

Now, at the half-way point of the 1998 season, it is clear the Astros made the right choice by signing Alou instead of Kile.

Currently, the Astros are 20 games over .500 (54-34) after 88 games. They are in first place by six games over the Cubs, have the best record in franchise history and have one of the most potent offenses in baseball. And Alou deserves a lot of the credit for the success.

Alou is batting .315 with a club-leading 20 home runs and 75 RBI. He also has 19 doubles and has scored 50 runs. His 20 homers tie him for seventh in the National League and his 75 RBI ties him for third. He was named to the All-Star Team.

Alou brings two things to the Astros that cannot be measured with statistics. First, his presence in the lineup provides a lot of protection for Bell and Bagwell who bat third and fourth in the lineup. Second, Alou brings much-needed playoff experience and veteran leadership.

Bell is sporting a .337 batting average, second in the league, and he has 12 home runs and 62 RBI. Bagwell, despite missing 15 games on the disabled list, still has put up his usual great numbers.

He is batting .275 with 20 home runs and 57 RBI. And with Alou batting right behind him, pitchers no longer have the luxury of intentionally walking him like they do to Mark McGwire.

As a team, the Astros have one of the best offenses. They lead the league in several categories such as runs scored (487), doubles (174), stolen bases (90) and on-base-percentage. They also lead the league with a team batting average of .279.

Last year during the playoffs, Alou led the Marlins with 15 RBI and he had three home

runs, two during the World Series.

Unfortunately for Kile, a year can make all the difference. Kile is 5-11 with a 5.04 ERA and has 69 walks to only 76 strikeouts. Because of the thin Colorado air, his curve ball (considered by many to be the best in the game) does not have as sharp a break as it did in the Astrodome in Houston. Batters are teeing off on his curve balls this year as opponents are batting nearly .280 against him.

The Rockies are in fourth place in the West, 15 games under .500 (37-52) and 20.5 games behind the first-place Padres.

For the Rockies, the \$7 million they are paying Kile is not money well spent.

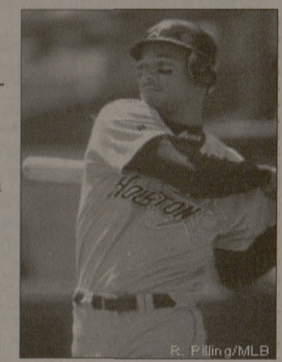
For the Astros, with the departure of Kile, the pitching staff has not missed a beat. Shane Reynolds has stepped up to the role of staff ace and has posted an 11-5 record with a 3.38 ERA and 106 strikeouts in 136 innings.

Perhaps the biggest surprise for the Astros has been the solid pitching of Sean Bergman. He has an 8-4 record which ties a career high, and a respectable ERA of 3.01.

The Astros also have one of the best closers in the game in Billy Wagner. Wagner has converted 21 saves in 22 chances and he has 56 strikeouts in 36 innings to go along with a 2.27 ERA.

If the Astros and the Braves meet in the playoffs again this year, the new-look Astros will not be the same team the Braves pushed around last year.

This time, it may be the Braves who will need a reality check.



Alou

Robert Hollier is a junior journalism major.