

Texas coaches assess season chances

HOUSTON (AP) — Coaches from five of the eight former Southwest Conference schools made their annual high school convention appearances Tuesday, each brimming with summertime pre-season optimism.

Yet each team must overcome its demons, whether it's fan apathy, NCAA troubles, inexperience, a crumbling league or pro baseball.

Pro baseball? That's Texas A&M coach R.C. Slocum's biggest obstacle to winning the services of star high school quarterback Chip Ambres, who must decide between Aggeland glory or minor-league riches in the Florida Marlins system.

"I think he's a rare talent in that he's got an excellent arm and excellent mobility," Slocum said of the Beaumont West Brook product. "And he's a winner."

Ambres, a first-round pick by the Marlins, has said he'll choose baseball if Florida makes the right offer. Ambres is expected to take a few cuts in batting practice Wednesday at the Astrodome while the Marlins continue a series against the Astros, Slocum confirmed.

Slocum said all he can offer Ambres is a football career, an education and preparation for his future. Slocum added the minors are littered with men in their late 20s with no higher education and no fu-

ture in the majors, and he doesn't want to see Ambres on that path.

"If they're going to ask (a player) to make that kind of gamble, they dang sure better pay them a whole lot of money to do it," Slocum said.

"We've got a good, good component of players, not a lot of fluff."

— Spike Dykes
Texas Tech Football Coach

Even without Ambres, the Aggies are favorites to win the Big 12 South for the second straight year. At the other end of the scale is Baylor, which went 2-9 under rookie coach Dave Roberts.

The Bears' porous defense returns just one senior out of 14 regular players, Roberts said. But he expects improved size and an experienced group of young players should make it an improved unit.

Despite the assertion last week by Spring star running back Ben Gay that he's academically eligible to play at Baylor, Roberts said Tuesday that he's not, but the school is appealing. However, Roberts refused to say to whom Baylor is appealing or what it entails, citing student confidentiality rules.

Speaking of rules, Texas Tech's inability to follow NCAA eligibility requirements has stripped the Red Raiders of 14 scholarships in the next two seasons. The NCAA is expected to announce any day whether further sanctions will come down.

In the meantime, coach Spike Dykes is confident he's making the most of his remaining slots.

"We've got a good, good component of players, not a lot of fluff," Dykes, who believes he's got more players than ever that he thinks can contribute, said.

The coaches' news conferences are held each year in conjunction with the Texas High School Coaches Association convention, which alternates between Houston and Fort Worth every other year.

Southern Methodist coach Mike Cavan and Texas Christian coach Dennis Franchione didn't attend because of WAC media day in Las Vegas. New Texas coach Mack Brown was scheduled to appear but did not.

Sprewell sentenced to home detention

MARTINEZ, Calif. (AP) — One day before his trial was to begin, Latrell Sprewell pleaded no contest to a reckless driving charge and was sentenced to three months of home detention.

Sprewell, who was originally suspended for one year and had his \$24 million contract terminated by the Golden State Warriors last season for choking coach P.J. Carlesimo, also was placed on two years probation, fined \$1,000 and ordered not to have a gun in his possession.

Sprewell swerved out of an exit-only lane on a Walnut Creek freeway on March 1 and struck another car, injuring a couple. Motorists had reported seeing Sprewell's car speeding and weaving in and out of traffic.

The couple escaped with cuts and bruises and have said they intend to sue Sprewell.

Defense attorneys suggested the plea bargain to avoid gavel-to-gavel coverage on Court TV.

Last week, Municipal Court Judge Bruce Mills allowed Court TV's request to televise the trial as long as it did not interfere with the proceedings. Because the charges were misdemeanors, however, Sprewell would not have been required to attend the trial.



BATTALION file photo
A&M's R.C. Slocum said recruit Chip Ambres is undecided on a professional baseball career.

A&M's Barnes suspended by world organization

NEW YORK (AP) — Track and field's national governing body is incensed over the drug suspensions of shot putter Randy Barnes and sprinter Dennis Mitchell by the sport's world organization.

"USATF is concerned and dismayed that the IAAF chose to temporarily suspend two American athletes on the basis of unproven allegations that they have committed a doping offense," Craig Masback, executive director of USA Track & Field, said Monday night. "USATF objects to the IAAF suspensions and will not enforce them."

"U.S. athletes are entitled to a full and fair hearing prior to being declared ineligible to compete. USATF has on several occasions informed the IAAF of its obligations under the Amateur Sports Act. Therefore, we are outraged that the IAAF knowingly breached our confidentiality rules, which were put in place to protect those ultimately determined to be innocent."

The International Amateur Athletic Federation disclosed the indefinite suspensions Monday. Masback said that Barnes and Mitchell would receive the full support of USATF until such time it is determined that they have committed a doping offense.

IAAF spokesperson Giorgio Reineri said Tuesday he could not comment specifically on Masback's remarks. But he said IAAF rules could not be adjusted for different national federations.

"We know what the problems and laws are in the U.S.," Reineri said. "But we are the governing body of track and field for all countries in the world, and we have to apply the rules for everybody."

He said it was now up to the U.S. federation to act on the Barnes and Mitchell cases.

Barnes, the 1996 Olympic gold medalist and world indoor and outdoor record-holder, and Mitchell, the 1992 Olympic bronze medalist in the 100 meters, were cited by the IAAF for failing out-competition drug tests April 1.

Barnes, who could face a life suspension for a second offense, was tested in Charleston, W.Va., and Mitchell in Gainesville, Fla.

Mitchell is president of USATF's Athletes Ad-

visory Committee, the athletes' voice in the national governing body, which has taken a strong stance against drugs.

His suspension was handed down last week and represents his first drug offense.

The IAAF did not officially announce the suspensions, and the precise terms of the punishment have yet to be determined.

These are two of the most prominent suspensions in track and field, following Ben Johnson at the 1988 Olympics, Butch Reynolds in 1990 and Mary Slaney in 1997.

Johnson is banned for life after two suspensions, but has requested reinstatement. Reynolds served a 27-month suspension and now is competing. Slaney was found innocent after several months and also is running again.

The suspensions come at a time when IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch has suggested some performance-enhancing drugs be stricken from the list of banned substances.

They also come as U.S. track and field is seeking to regain its prestige and reputation but has had difficulty attracting sponsors and television coverage.

In determining an athlete's drug test, the IAAF examines a urine sample twice. Reineri said from Monaco that only the A sample from Barnes and Mitchell have been tested. However, that is sufficient to levy a suspension.

If the B samples are positive, the IAAF then rules on the severity of the punishment pending a hearing by USATF. If the B sample is negative, the athletes are cleared.

Barnes was first suspended for two years starting in 1991 for the steroid methyltestosterone at a meet in Malmo, Sweden, in 1990. This time, the substance is androstenedione, a banned nutritional supplement.

Mitchell tested positive for testosterone. If found guilty following the B sample, he probably would receive a two-year ban.

Reineri did not know the testosterone level in Mitchell's sample. The allowable ratio of testosterone to epitestosterone (another natural sub-

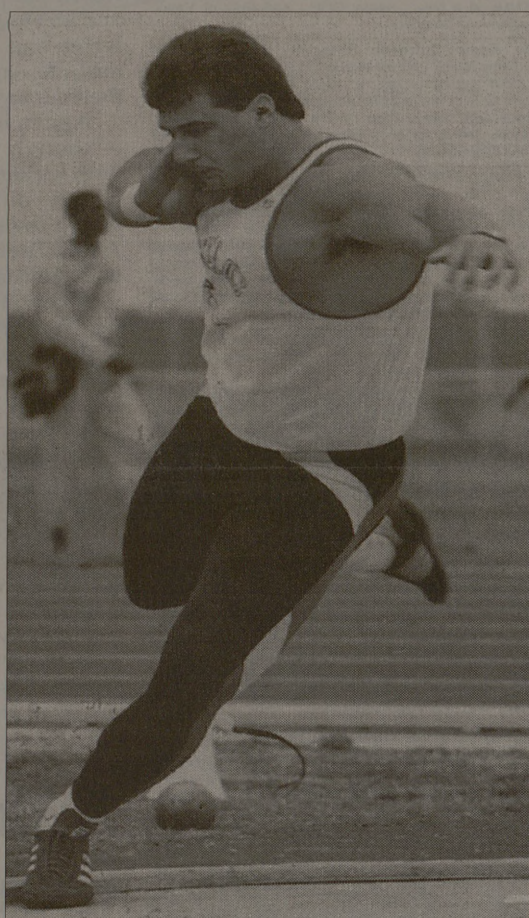


PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS A&M SPORTS INFORMATION
Former A&M Track and Field standout Randy Barnes set the world indoor shotput record in 1989.

Aikman says he enjoys Cowboys' open offense

WICHITA FALLS, Texas (AP) — It's blast-furnace hot, but Troy Aikman seems not to notice.

He has decided to run a few laps after two practices on a day when the mercury bubbled up to 106 degrees. He jokes with teammates. He signs some autographs. He gives a few interviews.

Football is a joy again for the Dallas Cowboys quarterback, and it seems as though he hates to leave the Midwestern State University field.

"I sense we're getting better every day," the sweat-soaked Aikman said. "We're having more peaks than valleys. This is a new philosophy for me and it's exciting."

Aikman and new coach Chan Gailey have a relationship of respect, and it's obvious in the way they work together.

Gailey demands discipline and tolerates no nonsense on the field. They're the very two things Aikman found lacking in the departed regime of Barry Switzer.

"I think the offense we had been running was a pretty good one," Aikman said. "Those in football know it (the problem) was not the system. We won three Super Bowls with it. It wasn't the system. It was the execution."

Now Aikman has a brand-new offense that sometimes features the shotgun, four-wide receiver sets and Michael Irvin in the backfield or in the slot.

"Chan has a lot of confidence in his ability to attack a defense," Aikman said. "He has some really good ideas. It all boils down to if we execute we will win. Everyone believes in what we are doing and it makes it exciting to come to practice."

And, yes, contrary to popular misconception, Aikman doesn't hate the shotgun.

"I've never said I didn't like the shotgun," Aikman said. "It has its good points. I'm more than willing to give it a chance. It gives you a little extra time to get rid of the ball."

Aikman caught a lot of the blame last year in the Cowboys' 6-10 season. He was sacked 33 times and served up 12 interceptions.

Then, to prove things could get

even worse for the quarterback, part of his new burned down. And he had an operation to take a cancerous mole off his neck.

Along came Gailey, the former offensive coordinator at Pittsburgh, who immediately earned Aikman's respect.

"He's got a way he does things and doesn't vary from them," Aikman said. "He's definitely in control."

Aikman, now a 10-year-veteran, feels so good he's even joking about his age.

"As long as John Elway, Dan Marino, Warren Moon, and Steve DeBerg are playing I really feel like a young buck," he said.

Gailey has confidence and respect in his "young" quarterback.

"Troy thinks he should complete every pass," Gailey said. "I'm willing to concede that's not possible although I seek perfection."

"He's just a great person. All you have to do is play golf with him to find that out. I doubt we'll ever go on vacation together, but he is a perfectionist and there's nothing wrong with that."

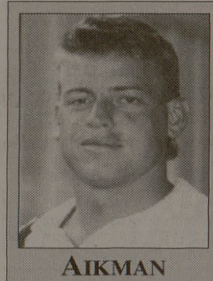
Asked if he was having fun, Aikman said, "Yeah, for now. But we know the only fun is winning. Last year wasn't. Now, I think we have a chance again to get back to the playoffs."

Aikman has shown he can do wondrous things in the playoffs — he's 11-2 in the postseason, and 3-0 in Super Bowls.

"Right now we're trying to get our confidence back," he said. "We need to get comfortable with what we're doing."

On Tuesday, the rejuvenated Aikman did the unthinkable for someone who has had seven career concussions. He scored on a quarterback sneak during a live scrimmage.

Asked what he thought of that, Gailey said, "Well, he scored."



AIKMAN

Manning's agent agrees to terms

ANDERSON, Ind. (AP) — Peyton Manning's agent and Indianapolis Colts president Bill Polian agreed on contract terms for the top pick on Tuesday, the club announced.

Team spokesman Craig Kelley said no details were available on the agreement between Polian and agent Tom Condon. He said final details on the agreement would be completed Wednesday. ESPN reported the contract was worth \$45 million over six years with an \$11.6 million bonus. Negotiations to get Manning, who has missed eight practices since workouts began at Anderson University on Friday, were conducted for most of the day at the team's headquarters.

Polian and Condon weren't available for comment. They didn't immediately respond to telephone messages.

The agreement came two days after quarterback Ryan Leaf, the second overall pick, reached agreement on a five-year, \$31.25 million deal with the San Diego Chargers that included an \$11.25 million signing bonus. Although Polian and Condon didn't say so, it was believed they would wait for the Leaf deal to be finalized to give them a better framework for negotiations.

Polian had said while he had been seeking to tie Manning for longer, Leaf's contract made the Colts more willing to accept a five-year contract. Manning has said he wasn't determined to get Leaf's deal.

NFL owners unanimously approve McCombs' purchase of Vikings

GRAPEVINE, Texas (AP) — Red McCombs will be the new owner of the Minnesota Vikings.

NFL team owners today unanimously approved the Vikings' \$250 million purchase by the San Antonio businessman and decided how to stock the expansion Cleveland Browns.

The new Browns, who will begin play in 1999, will get at least 30 veteran players from other teams and 14 extra draft choices in their first two years, commissioner Paul Tagliabue announced.

Tagliabue and several owners said the plan will allow the Browns to be competitive immediately much like the Carolina Panthers and Jacksonville Jaguars, the last two expansion teams.

No decision was made on picking an owner for the Browns. At least seven groups have publicly expressed interest in buying the team, which could go for \$500 million or more.

Tagliabue said owners will meet again Aug. 19 to consider bidding for the Browns, which he said will result in a sale by mid-September.

Approval of the Vikings' sale to McCombs had been expected after the league's finance

committee unanimously endorsed it Monday night. McCombs' partner, Gary Woods, said the sale should close by mid-August.

"I think this team has a very good chance of winning every game on the schedule," McCombs said.

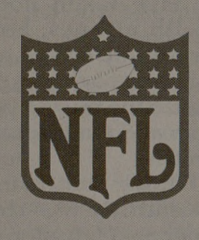
McCombs said he will spend a month evaluating the team but does not anticipate a shake-up. He reiterated his promise to keep the team in Minnesota but said he understands fans' concerns about an owner who wants an NFL team in south Texas.

On Monday night, the league's finance committee unanimously approved McCombs' bid. That committee recommended accepting the bid to the rest of owners.

McCombs, who first bid \$187 million for the Vikings in February, paid a reported \$250 million for the club. His bid was accepted by the Vikings ownership group July 2.

"I'm very excited about it," McCombs said. "I expected it to go that way, but it is a very necessary step in the approval process and I'm glad we got past it."

The author originally outbid McCombs and Vikings president Roger Goodell, but Clancy skipped the required finance committee meeting when it became apparent he didn't have the \$200 million to back the bid.



Valderama fined record amount

NEW YORK (AP) — Miami Fusion midfielder Carlos Valderrama was fined a record \$10,000 by Major League Soccer Tuesday for refusing to train with his American club.

The 36-year-old midfielder refused to participate in practice on Friday, hours after Argentine coach Cacho Cordoba was fired and replaced by Ivo Wortmann. He also failed to show up for Saturday morning's training session and Wortmann did not take the disgruntled player to Boston for Sunday's game against the New England Revolution.

The fine was double the previous largest fine issued by MLS, a \$5,000 sanction to Tampa Bay goalkeeper Thomas Ravelli earlier this month.

Ravelli also was suspended six

games for kicking a ball which struck referee Ruben Rodhas in the Mutiny's 3-2 loss to New England on July 4.

Miami won Wortmann's debut 2-1 against the Revolution. Wortmann was to meet with Valderrama later Tuesday to discuss his status for Miami's home match Wednesday night against Columbus.

Valderrama, voted MVP of the last two MLS all-star games, is scheduled to start for the World team versus the United States in this year's contest on Sunday at Orlando, Fla.

The MLS' 1996 season MVP and one of three finalists for the award last year, Valderrama had played in two league and one U.S. Open Cup matches since his return from the World Cup on July 18.