

2001

# TEXAS A&M Baseball



Mitchell

Himes

Howell

Strelitz

Sepulveda

Finch

Schindewolf

Shallock

Ballouli

French

Russ

Evans

Pollak

Lang

Reed

Parcus

Alexander

Farnum

Stephenson

Ramsey

Meyer

Wardinsky

Porter

Gremminger

Freeman

Hart

Moore

Theiss

Warpinski

Ponder

Petru

Deiningner

Wong

Garner

Dixon

## Ags look to rebound from first losing season in 40 years

By DOUG FUENTES  
The Battalion

The old adage is that you are only as good as your last performance.

The 2001 version of the Texas A&M baseball team hopes to dispel that notion as they look to make a dramatic improvement.

The Aggies followed up their 1999 World Series appearance with their first losing season in 40 years, and the first in A&M baseball coach Mark Johnson's career.

A&M lost eight starters from the '99 team and was forced to retool its starting lineup with youngsters.

The inexperience of the team showed, as the Aggies limped out of the gate and staggered home to the finish.

A&M lost five of their first seven games and finished up the season by losing 20 of 23 games.

Johnson said he hopes the adversity his young team faced last year will turn into positive results on the field this year.

"The problem is sometimes you throw young guys out and they have negative experiences and never get out of the cellar," Johnson said. "That's where our question marks are. Whether we'll be strong enough in our beliefs."

"Talent wise, I don't have a problem with our talent. It's just going to be how strong we are when we face adversity. Our guys are questioning themselves a little bit because they don't know either. We just

need to get out there and get playing."

With the young players having a year of experience under their belt, and only losing two starters from last year's team, there is no shortage of competition for starting positions.

Johnson is going into the season with at least two players fighting it out for most positions.

Behind the plate, freshman Rusty Meyer and senior Jason Gremminger will handle the catching duties.

Gremminger got the majority of starts at catcher last season, starting 33 games before a back injury forced him to miss the final part of the season. Meyer also missed last season because of injury and was red-shirted.

At first base, Johnson will go with the platoon that he used last year — senior Jeff Freeman and sophomore Travis Wong.

Freeman hit .345 last season to lead the team. He also led the team in on-base percentage at .448.

Wong had a decent freshman season, starting 33 games and hitting .286.

Replacing the departed Sean Heaney at second base will be a quartet of players.

Junior co-captain Ty Garner is the front-runner for the position after a good fall workout.

Junior Ryan Wardinsky will get a shot to break in at second base after leading the team with 21 errors from the shortstop po-

sition last season.

A pair of newcomers will get a chance as well — freshman Eric Schindewolf and sophomore junior-college transfer Tim Petru.

"I would think before two weeks are over, everybody is going to play and get a shot to do their thing," Johnson said. "I like Schindewolf's left-handed bat. He's not as

**"I don't have a problem with our talent. It's just going to be how strong we are when we face adversity."**

— Mark Johnson  
A&M baseball coach

far along defensively as Wardinsky or Garner, and Petru is still getting it all figured out as well."

Shortstop is one of the only positions Johnson has his mind made up on as senior Chris Russ emerged as the front-runner.

Russ, who also doubles as the team's closer, started 22 games last season at shortstop.

When Russ goes into pitch late in the game, Wardinsky will be the man to go in for him.

Third base is shaping up to be a dogfight

between junior Greg Porter and sophomore Kevin Theiss.

Porter started last season for the Aggies but had a disappointing season. After a strong freshman season in which he hit seven home runs, Porter failed to clear the fence once in 2000.

Theiss, a transfer from San Jacinto Junior College, has impressed Johnson with his hitting against right- and left-handers.

In the outfield, Johnson will have a handful of choices, as only departed home-run king Daylan Holt needs to be replaced.

Junior Carlos Sepulveda is the leading returning home-run and RBI producer. He hit nine home runs and drove in 34 runs last season.

Sepulveda missed fall practice because of surgery to repair an injured hand. But Johnson said he had a good enough spring to push him into the line-up.

A pair of speedsters will also be at Johnson's disposal in the outfield. Sophomores David Evans and Eric Reed return after successful freshman seasons.

Evans batted .329 and led the team in stolen bases with 15. Reed hit .301 and was third on the team with 11 steals.

Sophomore Ben Himes looks to take over for Holt in right field. A transfer from the University of Virginia, Himes hit .316 and led the Cavaliers with nine home runs last year. He was also named to the freshman All-America team.

Johnson has two-thirds of his starting rotation set as junior Khalid Ballouli and sophomore Todd Deiningner return.

Ballouli led the team last season with 4.25 ERA and with 91 innings pitched. Deiningner led the team in wins with 8 and in strikeouts with 82.

The Aggies were also counting on the third man in the rotation from last year, Grant Gregg, but he transferred, leaving Johnson up in the air about his third starter.

Junior transfer Joe Hart from North Junior College was the leading candidate for the third slot in the rotation, but he had some setbacks and Johnson is bringing him along slowly.

That leaves the door open for sophomore Steven Ponder and junior Brian Strelitz to step up and take the third position.

The Aggies open the season by playing against Arkansas State at Olsen Field 7 p.m. Then the team hits the road for two weeks before a weekend series with Baylor on Feb. 23.

A&M hopes to jump out of the gate quickly in order to avoid another disastrous start like last season.

"Some quick wins will give this team world of confidence," Porter said. "Once we get some confidence, who knows where this road will end. I think we can do it. If we can sweep a few series at the beginning, or at least win them, it will do a world of good."

### TOP RETURNING PLAYERS

**Carlos Sepulveda**  
34 RBIs  
33 Runs Scored  
9 Home Runs

**Todd Deiningner**  
82 Strikeouts  
8 Wins

**Jeff Freeman**  
.345 Batting Average

**Khalid Ballouli**  
4.25 ERA  
91.0 Innings Pitched

## After subpar year, look for Aggies to recapture their winning ways

I was right. As much as it pains me, I was right.

In my predictions for the 2000 Texas A&M baseball season, I predicted that the team would not do as well as they had the previous season when they made it all the way to Omaha.

In fact, I think my exact words were, "The Aggies will have a dropoff this season. It's inevitable. If the Aggies stumble out of the blocks and the youngsters get discouraged, it could spell doom for the Ags."

Wow, who knew I could predict the future?



DOUG FUENTES

Although even I could not foresee the depths to which the team would fall.

First losing season in 40 years, losers of 20 of their last 23 games — that's not a dropoff, that's falling off a cliff.

So now the 2001 season is upon us and it's time for me to do my best Nostradamus impression once again. Here goes nothing.

The Aggies will bounce back this season and once again be a force in the Big 12.

There will be absolutely no way this team repeats its performance from last season.

The guys on the team are a year older, and more importantly, have a year of experience.

I'm sure they have a bad taste in their mouth about last season and do

not want to experience that again.

Another reason to expect improvement is Coach Mark Johnson.

The man knows how to win. There is a reason last season was his first losing season as a coach.

He knows how to handle adversity. With a pitching staff that he describes as having great depth and team that is one year older, look for him to do great things.

With Nebraska and Baylor the only teams in the Big 12 that are prohibitive favorites, there's no reason the Aggies can't have a great season.

Here's hoping that Coach Johnson and the rest of the team make me look like a genius once again.

Doug Fuentes is a sports journalist.

Index: Sports 2  
A&M junior Antonio of  
Ags after  
BY KEVIN E  
The Battalion  
Louisian  
men's and v  
travel to the  
Saturday fo  
Texas A&M  
The six  
team (4-1) i  
non-confer  
the No. 1  
Longhorn  
team hopes  
against the  
who have st  
opponents t  
O victory  
Louisiana-  
There's  
of the real  
said A&M  
"We've ha