

## Four Aggies selected in 2001 baseball draft

Strelitz, Russ taken by Yankees; Midland recruit Jayson Nix picked in second round by Colorado

Mark Passwaters  
The Battalion

Four Texas A&M baseball players and one Aggie signee were chosen in the 2001 Major League Baseball amateur draft held June 5-6. The Aggies that had their names called were senior Chris Russ, juniors Brian Strelitz and Greg Porter and sophomore Steven Ponder.

Jayson Nix, a shortstop from Midland High, was the second round pick — the 44th overall — of the Colorado Rockies. Nix had signed a letter of intent to attend Texas A&M and had been expected to compete for the starting shortstop position next spring.

Strelitz, a pitcher from Temple City, Calif., was selected in the 11th Round (pick 330) by the defending world champion New York Yankees. Strelitz made only 11 ap-

pearances for Texas A&M last season, posting a 1-1 record with a 4.26 ERA. However, Strelitz has successfully pitched in the well-scouted Cape Cod League during the past two summers.

Russ ended his Texas A&M career with the school's record for most career appearances, a second-team All-Big 12 berth and a spot on the All-Big 12 tournament team.

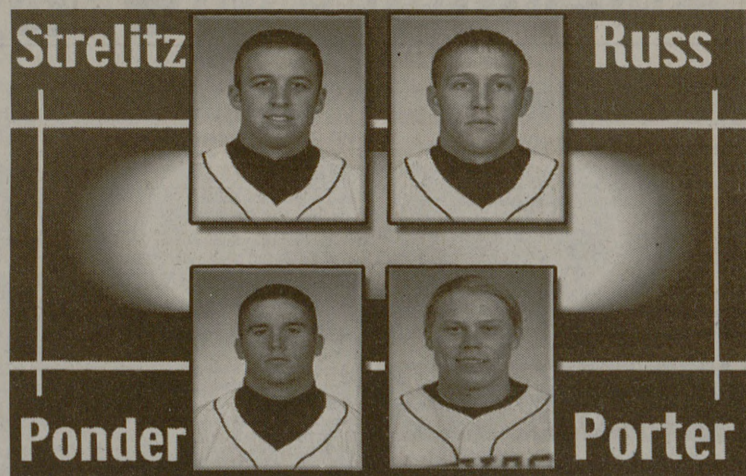
Russ was picked up by the Yankees in the 12th Round (pick 360) after posting a 6-2 record with a 3.81 ERA and 9 saves.

Ponder, from Austin Westlake, moved in and out of the Aggie rotation this season. The Boston Red Sox selected the left-hander in the 28th round after a 2001 campaign consisting of a 2-2 record and a 5.87 ERA in 15 appearances, which included 4 starts and a win in relief against Texas Tech in the Big 12 tournament.

Porter, a junior from Keller and a wide receiver on the Aggie football team, was picked in the 45th round by the Anaheim Angels. Porter, who was chosen in the third round of the 1998 draft by the Cincinnati Reds, struggled this season with a .202 batting average, two home runs and 10 runs batted in during 34 appearances at third base.

Aggie baseball coach Mark Johnson was not available for comment while he was attending the College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska.

Other notable drafted Big 12 players include University of Texas pitcher Gerrit Simpson, who lost twice to A&M this season (5th round, Colorado), Baylor All-American catcher Kelly Shoppach (2nd round, 48th pick overall, Boston), and Nebraska's Dan Johnson, the Big 12 tournament MVP (7th round, Oakland).

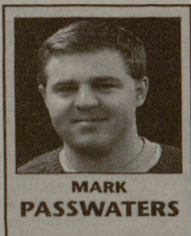


RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

## Expos, D-Rays make cases for contraction

Big leagues are too big; Montreal and Tampa Bay are too awful to keep around

There is too much of a good thing. Really, there is. Take a look at a designer coffee shop or an ice cream parlor with more than say, 31 flavors.



MARK PASSWATERS

Has anybody ever watched the Montreal Expos or Tampa Bay Devil Rays play baseball?

These two teams are the poster children for "contraction," which Major League Baseball is considering. Contraction would eliminate at least two and maybe more teams from the league, and the Expos and Devil Rays are the perfect candidates. They are lousy clubs with terrible farm systems, no fan base and have architectural disasters for stadiums.

Since baseball cannot send teams down to the minors like English soccer leagues do, it is time to give those franchises a cigarette, a blindfold, and put them out of their misery.

The Expos' situation is depressing. Just seven years ago, Montreal had assembled a team that was potentially dominant. Then came the strike, and all their quality players — Moises Alou, Larry Walker, Delino DeShields and some pitcher named Pedro Martinez — were sent packing. The team that now takes the field for Montreal could compete with decent college teams or the Baltimore Orioles, but that is it.

The Expos have had a great amount of talent in their minor league affiliates. They traded it all away, fearing they would be good — high priced, in other words — major leaguers. They had a great manager in Felipe Alou. Owner Jeffery Loria fired him.

The Expos play in Olympic Stadium, which hosted the 1972 Games and should have been demolished the instant the athletes left. On most nights, the Double-A Round Rock Express outdraws the Expos. Montreal was once a good team; now it cannot compete financially. Baseball Darwinism is calling for the Expos' extinction.

The Expos may be a sad case, but the Devil Rays are a joke. The team came into existence a mere five years ago, and they have already claimed the phrase "unbelievably awful" as their own.

Major League Baseball wanted desperately to have two teams in Florida, thinking there was a great base of untapped fans there. They have discovered those fans are actually in Cuba.

The Devil Rays (now officially known as the Rays but usually referred to in more colorful ways) have never built a farm system. Former Texas A&M

pitcher Ryan Rupe is the only player in the history of the franchise to come from Tampa's minor league system and do anything at the big league level — and most of that has been bad.

The Devil Rays have thrown tons of money at aging players like Vinny Castilla (now in Houston), Wade Boggs (now retired), and Jose Canseco (now in Newark, N.J.). Now, with most of their high-priced talent released or injured, rumors claim the team's ownership is bordering on bankruptcy.

They play at Tropicana Field, a concrete pimple on the face of western Florida's landscape. Tropicana Field is so bad that the Minnesota Twins decided not to move to Tampa because of the stadium, and they play in a place common referred to as a "trash bag." The roof is so low that the catwalks are in

play, causing for some tremendously odd plays.

The novelty of big league baseball wore off on the people of the Tampa-St. Petersburg area faster than Britney Spears got annoying. The Devil Rays have drawn an average of 15,361 fans per game. Then again, who wants to watch a team with a record of 17-44?

Some people want to see these teams (and others) moved. The list of candidate cities is less than impressive. Washington D.C. has watched its "beloved" Senators leave town twice due to fan apathy. We now know the Senators as the Minnesota Twins and the Texas Rangers.

Charlotte is supposed to be a basketball town and ignores the NBA's Hornets. The NHL's Carolina Hurricanes have not drawn very well either.

In the case of Las Vegas, it is a safe bet that nobody goes and watches. After all, how many people in Las Vegas are actually from the town? Having no real population makes it difficult for people to root for the "home" team.

Baseball should get rid of the Expos and Devil Rays, and allow the remaining teams to hold a special draft for what little major league talent is there. It would be interesting to see Valadmir Guererro in an Orioles uniform, or Greg Vaughn hammering balls for a contending team like the Mariners. And those players might get to play something they have not in a long time — real baseball.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

### News in Brief

#### Comets postponed by Houston floods

The scheduled Monday night WNBA game between the Houston Comets and Los Angeles Sparks has been postponed because of the severe flooding in Houston and surrounding areas.

The Comets said the game would be rescheduled. No date was immediately set.

#### UT alum Estes wins US Open tuneup

Bob Estes survived with an even-par 71 Sunday to finish off a wire-to-wire victory in the St. Jude Classic for his second win on the PGA Tour, holding off Bernhard Langer by a stroke.

Estes started the day with a three-stroke lead over John Daly and Scott McCarron and was up by four through 13 holes. Then, the man who opened the tournament with a course-tying 61 made it interesting as he bogeyed two straight holes to trim his lead to just a stroke.

He finished off his first victory since the 1994 Texas Open with tough par saves on Nos. 16 and 17 to pick up the biggest check of his career, \$630,000.

#### Colorado, Bourque win Stanley Cup

Ray Bourque's number finally came up and the Stanley Cup is his.

The Colorado Avalanche used home ice to its advantage in a series where the visiting team had won four times, scoring the first three goals to wrest the cup from the New Jersey Devils with an emotional 3-1 victory Saturday night in only the third finals Game 7 in 30 seasons.

Alex Tanguay supplied the scoring touch with two goals and the 40-year-old Bourque, who had played a record 1,825 games without ever touching hockey's biggest prize, finally won the cup he has chased over a distinguished career spanning four decades.

Colorado goalie Patrick Roy was awarded the Conn Smythe trophy as the MVP of the playoffs. He is the first player ever to win the award three times.

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