

## Texas Leaguers hold Texas-sized dreams

A&M's Kessel, Baylor's Carter, TCU's Huffman with Astros' AA Round Rock Express



Round Rock Express first baseman Charley Carter waits for the throw as Midland Rockhound Oscar Salazar lunges for first. Round Rock won Saturday's game, 4-3.

Mark Passwaters  
The Battalion

For many baseball players working to make it to the major leagues, time in the AA Texas League is just another stop on the road to their desired destination. For several members of the Round Rock Express with ties to Texas, it means a great deal more.

Third baseman Royce Huffman, a graduate of TCU; first baseman Charley Carter from Baylor and pitcher Kyle Kessel from Texas A&M are on the roster of the Houston Astros' AA affiliate. The team is run by President and CEO Reid Ryan, a TCU graduate and son of Hall of Fame pitcher Nolan Ryan.

Huffman hails from Missouri City and is a graduate of W.C. Elkins High School. As a freshman at TCU, Huffman had a chance to play against the Aggies at Olsen Field, which he described as a memorable experience.

"It was awesome, a great environment. It's one of the toughest places to play," he said.

Huffman said that not much went right for TCU that day, as he was on second base when the Horned Frogs lined into a triple play in the midst of an Aggie victory.

"They beat us pretty good," he said.

Huffman was a 12th round pick of the hometown Astros in 1999, a fact made even sweeter by the fact that his family has had season tickets for nearly 20 years. Now that he has returned to Texas, Huffman says life is much better than it was at Kissimmee, Florida, the Astros' single A affiliate.

"It's so much nicer it's almost like college again except you don't have to go to class," he said.

Being only a couple of hours away from home is an extra perk for Huffman.

"I get to see a lot of friends and family at the park. It's really a dream come true," he said.

Playing in Round Rock is a return to a familiar place for Charley Carter as well. Originally from Mt. Pleasant, Carter transferred to the University of Texas for the 1997 season after two years at Waco's McClennan County Community College. In 1998, he moved on to Baylor, where he was an All-Big 12 selection.

"It wasn't that I wanted to leave Texas, but (coach) Augie (Garrido) wanted to go in a different direction," Carter said. "I had some ties up in Waco and I made a phone call, and Baylor needed a first baseman, so I had a legitimate shot at playing."

Carter said that he considered transferring to Texas A&M, adding that his sister is an Aggie.

"I remember going to Olsen on a trip in high school and going on the field and thinking, 'this would be awesome,'" he said. "I would have liked to have played there if I could."

Carter split last season between Round Rock and Kissimmee, and needed to adjust to the large Round Rock crowds after playing before only a few hundred people in Florida.

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## No, Jose, it's Redding Time

Newest Astros pitcher part of a needed youth movement

Two weeks have passed since the Houston Astros dealt away fan-friendly Jose Lima to the Detroit Tigers and brought up young fire-baller Tim Redding to enter the starting rotation. Redding's arrival gives the Astros one of the youngest rotations in baseball and signifies they are trying to compete this year while catching a glimpse of the future.



MICHAEL BALHOFF

If the consistent pitching of late is any indication, the future is now.

The Astros now have a starting rotation that includes the 23-year-old Redding, 23-year-old Roy Oswalt, 24-year-old Wade Miller, and 25-year-old Scott Elarton. Shane Reynolds, 33, is the veteran of the group who is called on to mentor the youngsters on the finer points of pitching in the big leagues.

The youth movement was not supposed to happen this soon. The Astros had hoped Lima could revert to his all-star performances in 1998 and 1999 to help anchor a pitching staff led by Reynolds and Elarton.

Instead, Elarton has been mired in a season long slump and Lima kept spiraling downward, losing ballgames and allowing the Ten-Run Field references to shake his confidence.

Lima was relegated to the bullpen with few opportunities to pitch. His charismatic nature and electric slides on the mound made him a fan favorite despite the fact that his winning ways had deserted him.

As the struggles continued, the Astros decided that Lima needed a change of scenery and traded him to Detroit for Dave Mlicki. To make matters worse, starting pitcher Kent Bottenfield went down with an injury, leaving the Astros with a lack of pitchers.

This chain of events paved the way for Redding, who had gained almost a cult following for his exploits on the minor league level. Redding, equipped with a devastating curveball and an overpowering fastball, went 11-2 with a 2.03 ERA for Class AA Round Rock and Class AAA New Orleans this year, leaving little doubt that he has nothing to prove on that level.

The Astros are counting on him to speed up his learning curve and help the team win now rather than later.

If Redding were to start feeling overwhelmed about his sudden rise to prominence, he would not have far to look for advice.

Miller was being counted on to hold down the fifth spot in the rotation this year, but had catapulted himself into the staff ace with an 11-3 record.

Oswalt, a star pitcher for the U.S. Olympic team one year ago, was expected to get a full season of AAA under his belt and help the team next year. His emergency call-up and 7-1 record showed the Astros that their talented young arms could win now, paving the way for Redding's arrival.

The group that was once considered to be the future of the organization is suddenly the present.

Lima has performed well in his first two starts with the Tigers and only time will tell whether the Astros gave up on their former all-star too early. The recent pitching gems of Miller, Oswalt, and Redding, however, have Astros fans thrilled that the team decided to get a head start on the future.

The clubhouse may be quieter and less jubilant with the departure of Jose Lima, but the team hopes that the young pitching staff will help them generate plenty of noise and excitement in the second half of the season, the playoffs, and beyond.

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## Williams wins Wimbledon

American defends women's title; men's final on Monday

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) — Venus Williams won the Wimbledon women's singles title for the second straight year Sunday, surging through the last set to defeat Belgium's Justine Henin 6-1, 3-6, 6-0.

The final, which should have been staged on Saturday, had been delayed a day because of rain.

The second-seeded Williams breezed through the first set in 20 minutes before Henin, 19, the first Belgian in a Wimbledon final, hit back with her powerful ground strokes to even the match.

But Williams' power took control in the third set as she broke three times, winning the title when Henin, under pressure on the baseline, was unable to control her shot and fired it tamely wide.

Unlike last year, when she celebrated with a victory leap, Williams was more reserved this time.

"I couldn't leap because it was raining," she said. "I didn't want to fall."

Williams started the final with two double faults and didn't get her first serve in until the fifth point when she served an ace. But she won four points in a row to hold serve.

Henin, who defeated Williams 6-1, 6-4 in their only previous meeting on clay in Berlin in May, had two aces in a confident first service game.

Williams captured five break points in the fourth game but Henin, powerful and accurate hitting from the baseline, saved four. Williams gained the break with a volley at the net to lead 3-1, and then gained three set points with her powerful serves.

The defending champion squandered the first when she fired a backhand wide but, when Henin sent up a lob under pressure, Williams clinched the set in 20 minutes with an easy smash.

After a 15-minute rain delay, both players held before Williams fired a backhand wide to hand two break points to the Belgian and, when the defending titleist 1/4 netted another, Henin led 5-3.

When Williams put another backhand out, Henin had two set points and, luring the American to the net, punched a backhand past her to take the set.

Williams said she was "a little bit angry" after losing the second set, but was more relaxed afterward.

"I thought I could have played better," she said.

After holding in the opening game of the deciding set, Williams broke in the second. Although Henin saved two break points to twice bring the game back to deuce, she surrendered a third by netting a low backhand.

Williams then held for a 3-0 lead and had two more break points when Henin netted a forehand. The Belgian saved the first when Williams' return was long but the American broke again when Henin fired a forehand long.

With rain falling again, Williams appeared in a hurry and a fourth double fault handed Henin an opening at 15-30. But the American won three points in a row to move ahead 5-0.

Henin's third double fault followed by two netted forehands gave Williams two championship points. Although Henin saved the first with a service winner, the defending champion clinched the title with some powerful strokes that the Belgian teenager was unable to handle.

"She was a great champion," said Henin, who defeated Jennifer Capriati in the semifinals. "She played better than me today."

"In the third set, mentally, she was stronger."

On the men's side, unseeded and unpredictable Goran Ivanisevic advanced to play Patrick Rafter in the men's finals after defeating local favorite Tim Henman.

"Never had so much fun in Wimbledon ever on the tennis court like I have here," the Croat said Sunday in broken English. "Even sometimes I enjoy to lose the point, which is stupid, but with me everything is different."

Ivanisevic, the only wildcard to reach the final since 1977, needed three days to

finish his semifinal against Henman, finally winning 7-5, 6-7 (6), 0-6, 7-6 (5), 6-3 after just four games and 18 minutes of play Sunday.

Five of Ivanisevic's 14 serves Sunday went for aces, giving him 186 for his six matches. He needs 21 Monday to break his own Wimbledon record of 206 set in 1992 when he was runner-up to Andre Agassi. He also improved his return game during the past two days.

The 29-year-old lefty also lost in the 1994 and 1998 final to seven-time champion Pete Sampras, but his career plummeted when he encountered shoulder problems last year. He entered Wimbledon this year ranked 125th in the world.

"If some angel comes tonight in my dreams and say, 'OK, Goran you going to win Wimbledon tomorrow, but you not able to touch the racket ever again in your life,' I say, 'OK, I rather take that and then never play tennis again.'"

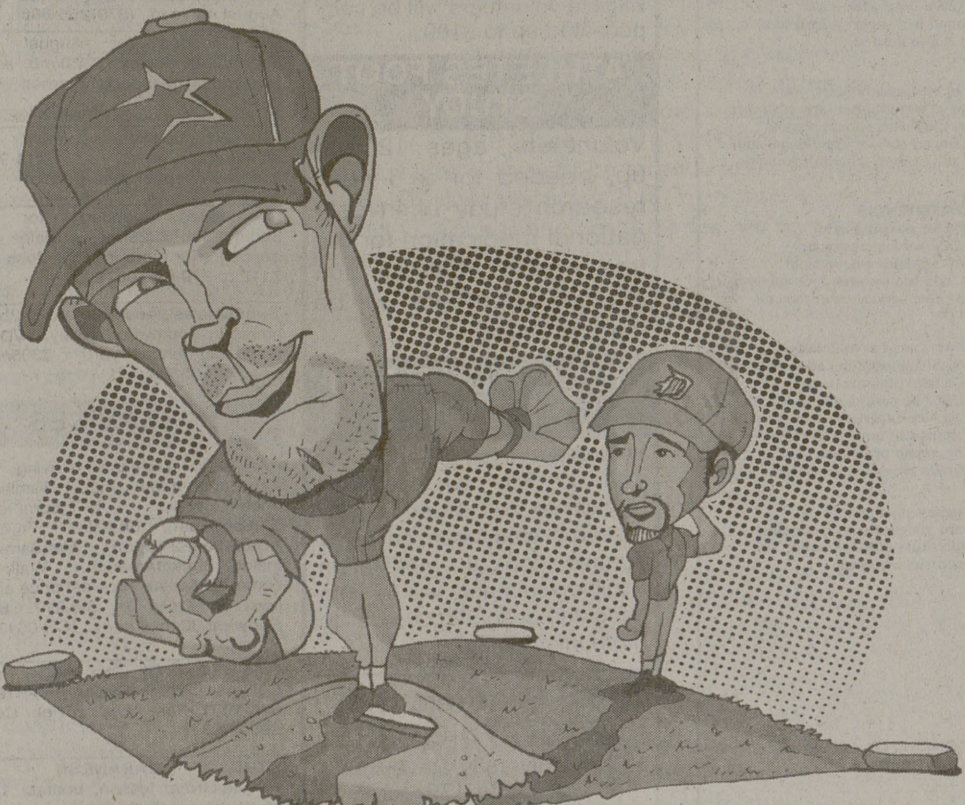
Henman, trying to become the first Brit since Bunny Austin in 1938 to reach a Wimbledon men's final, led 2-1 in sets and 2-1 in the fourth Friday when play was suspended by darkness after a two-hour rain delay.

On Saturday, things got better for Ivanisevic, who forced a fifth set and led 3-2 before rain forced a second suspension after 52 minutes of play.

On Sunday, a rainy morning gave way to clear skies about a half hour before the match resumed.

"Today was match of nerves, nothing to do with tennis," Ivanisevic said. "Who's going to have more nerves and guts going to win the match?"

Henman, who hails from Oxford, was not the only one who was disappointed when it ended. So were the fans who filled Henman Hill, where a huge video screen was set up inside the Wimbledon grounds. Others waiting in line to buy tickets for the final picked up their sleeping bags and left when they found out their countryman would not be in it.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION