

Sports

Thursday, September 20, 2001

THE BATTALION

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Watch and see: Slocum in charge

With one of the most well-known jobs at Texas A&M, R.C. Slocum has a lot of people to make happy. Not many people have spelled "Fire R.C." with styrofoam cups in the Wellborn Road skywalk, followed immediately by the words "R.C. is a legend" to replace the first.



BRIAN RUFF

Many Aggie fans would like to see the first Wellborn message come true, but they need to wait one week before jumping on the R.C.-canning wagon. At the end of the Aggies' 28-20 win over the Wyoming Cowboys on Sept. 6, Slocum was more than upset with the Aggie defensive squad.

"I haven't been pleased with the way we played," Slocum said. "I don't think they [the team] have been either."

Slocum showed his concern with the team's intensity during a Thursday afternoon team meeting, where, according to players, Slocum took over the defensive talks, and told his players exactly what he thought of their play.

"Coach Slocum has definitely taken a stance," said junior linebacker Brian Gamble. "He decided that we

were going to do things right, or we weren't going to do them."

With the team needing something to jumpstart the defense and gain some respect from the campus and nation, Slocum's talk may be just what the defensive doctor ordered.

With Big 12 play starting on Saturday for the Aggies, practices may need some added intensity. After Slocum's talk with the defensive unit, players were convinced Slocum meant business.

"It seemed like the whole defense had passed out [after the following practice]," said senior safety Jay Brooks. "That's a good sign, because somebody worked hard."

The entire defense apparently took the talk to the practice field, as the linebacking core noticed the difference as well.

"There was a definite change in tempo and change of attitude," Gamble said. "When you do that, you are going to be in great shape, in game shape. There has been a total change."

The defense should welcome the change, and should see some positive reinforcement of that change on Saturday.

"There are no complaints," Slocum said. *See SLOCUM on page 4A.*

Ags open fall slate Saturday

By MARK MERRELL
THE BATTALION

The softball equivalent of football's spring game begins this weekend for the Aggie softball team when they participate in the Spring-Klein College Classic in Spring, Texas. As in the spring game, the major focus on the field is not on wins and losses but on the performances of individual players.

"Always in the fall season, we just want to get a look at our new kids and see where we are at," said A&M softball coach Jo Evans. "It's a good time for us to see where we need to make adjustments and where the strengths and weaknesses may lie."

Despite the Aggies' disappointing 32-19 season last year, many starters returned to the squad, including 2001 Midwest Regional Softball-Second Team members Kelly Ferguson and Crystal Martin.

Ferguson, a senior first baseman, led the Aggies in batting with a .354 average last season, while Martin started all 44 games at shortstop for the Aggies. Other starters returning include junior catcher Selena Collins, senior second baseman Lisa Klam and last season's freshman standout pitcher, Jessica Slataper.

Even with several key components back in place, there remains several question marks for the Aggie coaching staff to ponder over that they hope will be answered during the next few weeks. One of the key areas being focused on is the outfield, where the Aggies lost all three starters from last season.

"The whole outfield is pretty much a battle for position," Evans said. "Right now, it's really up in the air, so we're anxious to see who's going to step up."

Four of the players looking to "step up" this fall are members of the Class of 2005. One freshman in particular has caught the attention of the coaching staff. Adrian Gregory, a freshman from Livingston, Texas, has been one of the biggest surprises of the preseason.

"She's one of the most athletic players on our team and pretty versatile too, so right now, we're trying her at a couple of different positions just to see where we can plug her in," Evans said. "I think she'll make an impact on our team right away."

While this weekend's tournament is primarily a time when coaches are able to evaluate talent, it also is a way for the entire team to prepare themselves for the upcoming spring season and leave the memories of the previous season in the past.

For this year's team, that means making a complete turnaround from a disappointing 2001 campaign in which the

team did not make the post-season for the first time in two years.

"There's more of a fire in our belly from every player to resolve that we won't let that happen again," Evans said. "We were extremely disappointed that we didn't go post-season and, yet we know that it was really nobody's fault but our own. I just see more of a commitment and a firm resolve that we're going to get that done this year."

The Aggie softball team begins that quest this weekend. While wins and losses will not affect the official standings of late May, there are more important lessons to be learned this fall. Lessons that will land the Aggies back in the NCAA Tournament.



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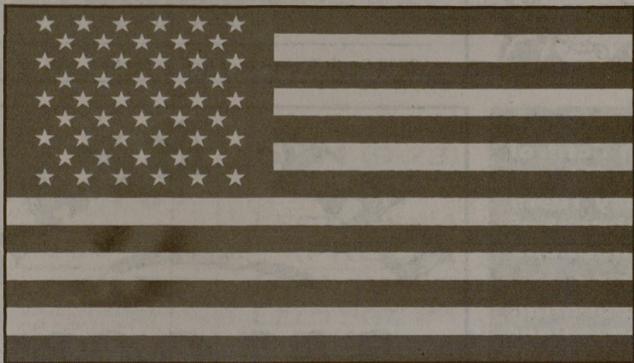
The Texas A&M softball team will begin its search to replace players like 2001 All-Big 12 outfielder Hollee Hayden Saturday at the Spring-Klein College Classic.

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