

Ags host Bearkats in non-conference tilt

By True Brown
THE BATTALION

As the Big 12 Conference battle heats up, the Texas A&M baseball team hosts non-conference opponent Sam Houston State at Olsen Field at 7 p.m.

After a 2-2 record last week and a looming conference series against Baylor this weekend, Tuesday's matchup has added importance as No. 16 A&M (28-13, 9-6 Big 12) needs a strong season finish to earn a regional host site.

The Aggies' two wins last week came in a conference series over Kansas State and lifted the Aggies into a tie for second place in the conference.

"I think in our conference, anytime you win a series you've got to be happy," said A&M baseball head coach Mark Johnson. "Sweeps are almost becoming uncommon in our conference. We had two one-run ball games, and both had runners in scoring position (late in

the game). I think its going to be that way every weekend."

In fact, there have been just five series sweeps in 26 Big 12 weekend series this year, leaving the league with no team showing any sign of running away with the conference title.

Oklahoma State currently leads the league with a 7-4 conference record with A&M and Texas tied for second.

Baylor, the only team with 10 conference wins, is not far behind the Longhorns and Aggies with a 10-7 record. In all, there are seven teams within five games of each other at the top of the league.

While Tuesday's game will not count for or against the Aggies' conference record, it will serve as an important momentum builder for this weekend's three-game set with Baylor.

A&M has defeated Sam Houston twice this season, recording wins in Huntsville and College Station. The Aggies rolled past Sam Houston on Feb. 20, 18-5,

and then won 5-2 last month in a come-from-behind effort.

The Bearkats (18-23) were swept last weekend in a Southland Conference series by Northwestern State.

While the Aggies claimed the series win over Kansas State last weekend, Johnson is hoping for a stronger showing from the plate by the Aggies, who were out-hit 36-27 in the series.

"For us, we're going to have to hit the ball," Johnson said. "We've got to get that going. We look flat when we're not hitting the ball. We've got to get more guys trusting their bats and going to the middle of the field and the opposite side."

Johnson will use sophomore left-hander Kyle Parcus in Tuesday's matchup. Parcus owns a 2-3 record in 10 appearances with a 4.14 ERA.

Parcus took a loss in his most recent outing, giving up five earned runs in three innings against Houston.



A&M junior outfielder David Evans slides into second base on Sunday during the Aggies' 6-5 victory over the Kansas State Wildcats at Olsen Field. The Ags take on Sam Houston State at 7 p.m. at Olsen Field.

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Offseason of decisions awaits Stars

DALLAS (AP) — After a rocky season filled with disappointment and departures, the Dallas Stars have their longest off-season in six years to try to straighten things out.

The Stars failed to make the playoffs for the second time since moving to Dallas for the 1993-94 season. They had made the postseason five straight years, winning the division each time, plus advancing to the conference finals three times and the Stanley Cup finals twice. They got their names on the Cup three years ago.

To get back to that level, owner Tom Hicks and new general manager Doug Armstrong must make some tough decisions. Among the top ones are whether to re-sign goalie Ed Belfour and what to do with inter-

im coach Rick Wilson.

Those decisions, though, may hinge on the answer to a much bigger question: How soon do they expect to bounce back? Management thought the team was still close last summer after being swept from the playoffs in the second round, so the general manager Bob Gainey added offensive-minded players. Their personalities and playing styles did not fit coach Ken Hitchcock's defense-first system and by February practically all of them were gone — Gainey, Hitchcock and most of the newcomers. Team president Jim Lites left soon after.

Dallas never won more than four games in a row and often lacked the grit and desire that had been the team's hallmark. The Stars, also

were not able to transfer their home-ice dominance from Reunion Arena to their new home, the \$420 million American Airlines Center.

Nothing could get them rolling, not even the trade-deadline deal that sent Joe Nieuwendyk and Jamie Langenbrunner to New Jersey. Of all the changes this season, that was the first involving the team's core players and it showed the extent Armstrong would go to shake things up.

The Stars sent a flicker of hope with a 3-1 victory over reigning champion Colorado with five games left and the playoffs still

See **Decisions** on page 3B



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The Stars' Derian Hatcher tussles with San Jose's Bryan Marchment during a Stars victory over the Sharks.

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Questions?

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