

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

Page 5 • Tuesday, February 25, 2003

Transfers making presence felt Ruggiano, Patton help return A&M to national rankings

By Dallas Shipp
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M baseball team is ranked No. 16 by Collegiate Baseball Newspaper and No. 24 by Baseball America thanks in large part to the six junior college transfers who have made an impact for the Aggies.

Last year's team had strong pitching, which has returned this year for the most part, but lacked the ability at the plate to get clutch hits with runners in scoring position, which was so important to the 1999 team that advanced to the College

World Series in Omaha, Neb.

This year, two of those six transfers, junior outfielders Cory Patton and Justin Ruggiano, have joined the Aggie squad and say that their goal is simple — providing the run production that the Aggies lacked last year.

"It's all about getting hits at the right time," Patton said. "Coach (Mark) Johnson always says 'RBIs win games, not hits.'"

If RBIs are indeed the difference, then Patton will be a huge pickup for the Aggies this year.

The 5-foot-10 power-hitting right fielder from Seward County Community College in Liberal, Kan., led the team with a .465 batting average in 2002, and led the nation with 31 home runs and 119 RBIs.

Following his standout year at Seward County, Patton was named the National Junior College Player of the Year and the National Junior College Athletic Association Male Athlete of the Year. Patton also pitched 70 innings and finished the season with an 8-1 record that led his team to a conference championship and to the Region IV finals.

A&M Head Coach Mark Johnson said that he was extremely happy to pick up the junior college All-American and was glad to have his big bat in the lineup.

"(Patton) has been big for us," Johnson said. "He swings the bat extremely well."

Ruggiano did not get national attention at Blinn College in Brenham last year, but he did receive attention from Johnson.

The 6-foot-2 center fielder from Austin said that when he got the call from Johnson, he didn't have to think twice about the decision and came in large part because of the reputation and the tradition A&M has.



JOHN C. LIVAS • THE BATTALION
Junior Cory Patton was named the tournament MVP after the Domino's Pizza Aggie Classic.

"When Coach Johnson called me up, I knew this is where I wanted to play," Ruggiano said.

Both players said that there are significant differences between playing at the junior college level and Division I baseball. Patton said that the biggest difference to him on the field was stronger pitching.

"The pitchers here (in Division I) don't throw a lot harder, but they hit the spots much better," he said.

Off the field, Patton said that the classes at A&M are a lot tougher than they were in junior college.

Ruggiano said that the biggest difference to him was the crowd at Olsen Field, which was ranked No. 4 in the nation last

Aggies win tourney

By Troy Miller
THE BATTALION

The No. 16 Texas A&M baseball team took home the Domino's Pizza Aggie Classic tournament championship by defeating the University of Utah 5-1 and the University of California at Los Angeles 3-0 on Monday.

Against Utah (7-5), the Aggies (9-2) used a four-run fourth inning to take the lead against the Utes. Junior Scott Beerer began the inning by singling to left field. Junior second baseman Erik Schindewolf singled Beerer home two batters later. Junior Matt Alexander singled to right field in the next at bat scoring two more runs for the Aggies. Junior outfielder Cory Patton added another run when he singled up the middle to score Alexander.

Alexander earned another RBI in the fifth for the Aggies.

Junior pitcher Brian Finch earned the win for the Aggies as he threw five innings and gave up just one run while striking out five.

In the nightcap, the Aggies took on UCLA (8-9) with the tournament title on the line. Despite a starting temperature of 34 degrees, freshman pitcher Robert Ray threw 62 pitches in five innings of work to earn his first win and shutout at A&M.

"Actually the weather was good," Ray said. "This was a perfect night to pitch because we had the wind coming in and all we had to do was throw strikes." The Aggies started in the top

half of the first inning with Schindewolf doubling down the third-base line. After Alexander struck out, Patton singled to right bringing Schindewolf home in what proved to be the game-winning run.

Patton added another RBI in the third inning when again he singled home Schindewolf. Patton totalled 10 RBIs in the tournament and two home runs to earn him tournament MVP honors.

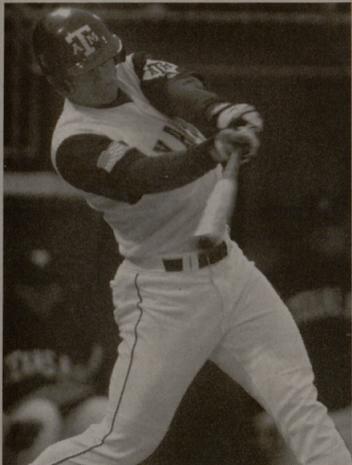
"I've been struggling a lot lately," Patton said. "I was jumping at the ball, and we made the adjustment and it's been successful. I'm a lot more comfortable in the (batter's) box and I've settled down and found some success."

In the 3-0 win the Aggies peppered UCLA freshman starter Hector Ambriz for seven hits despite the freezing temperature. The win gave the Aggies a 5-1 record in the weekend tournament.

The junior college transfers for A&M such as Patton and outfielder Justin Ruggiano are stealing the headlines so far for the Aggies, but the freshmen, such as Ray, are beginning to make their mark as well.

"We started on average four freshmen a ballgame," said A&M Head Coach Mark Johnson. "We talk about the junior class, but there are some freshmen that are really doing a good job."

The Aggies will travel to Tucson, Ariz. to start a three-game weekend series against the University of Arizona on Friday.



JOHN C. LIVAS • THE BATTALION
Junior transfer Justin Ruggiano reaches for a pitch in Monday's action at Olsen Field.

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Liberal Arts Career Week All majors welcome!

Tonight: Behavioral Interviewing
5:30p.m.
Koldus 111

Wednesday, Feb. 26th: Career Fair Networking
5:30p.m.
Koldus 111

Thursday, Feb. 27th: Alumni Forum
Panel discussion and reception with former students
6:00p.m.
Reed Arena

**Friday, Feb. 28th:
Liberal Arts Career Fair
And
Communications Career Fair**
10:00a.m.-3:00p.m.
Rudder Exhibit Hall

For a complete list of companies attending the career fair and other info please check out our website.

www.lasctamu.org

Spring Break plans?

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- Climb Hueco Tanks** Trip date: March 9-14 Cost: \$265/\$318
- Horsepack Big Bend** Trip date: March 12-16 Cost: \$471/\$542

Want to know more? Join TAMU Outdoors for an informational meeting:
February 25th at 6:00 p.m. in 281 Student Rec Center
February 26th at 5:30 p.m. in 501 Rudder

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