

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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UNCOVER!

Students should stop harassing one another over so-called tradition

“Hey a—hole, take your f—g hat off! Stop being silly!”

This obscene yell, or an equivalent one, has become more popular at Kyle Field than the actual “yells.” The only thing it needs is a passback.

But who is the one being silly?

The person who may or may not go to Texas A&M? The person who may or may not know to take his hat off during a yell “out of respect?” Or the person cursing a fellow Aggie supporter to take his (insert expletive here) hat off?



DALLAS SHIPP

There is no written history available online that details this so-called tradition.

Traditions Council doesn't know when it started or why it started.

Senior yell leader Jonathan Lusk said he didn't know when it started, and tried to find out. And maybe he could if he was given enough time. But if a senior yell leader, one of five people in charge of leading the yells, can't pinpoint the origin of uncovering before a yell, it's unlikely Joe Schmo in section 226 does.

Everyone's been told that it is a sign of respect to uncover before yells. Respect for who? It's a great sign of respect to the other team by taking our hats off before yelling, “Beat the hell outta”

But regardless of whether it is a real tradition, apparently it is more acceptable to curse other Aggies in the stands, just don't hiss at them — it might start a riot and could cost someone his Aggie ring. Obviously, anyone who hisses another Aggie isn't really an Aggie.

Oh, and did the Aggies lose this weekend because people didn't take their hats off?

Senior electrical engineering major Kerry Stout said he is tired of people yelling in the stands for something so petty.

“I hate it,” he said. “I'm embarrassed to take friends from other schools with me to see a football game or to yell practice because they might

get screamed at.”

At a school that prides itself on being one of the nation's friendliest campuses, students shouldn't be ashamed to bring friends to a one-of-a-kind tradition such as Midnight Yell Practice.

Stout said he saw a former student at yell practice Friday teaching his little boy how to do the yells. A moment that should have been special for one former student — taking his son to his first yell practice — was spoiled by a current student who walked up and rudely told the man to take off his hat.

That makes sense. An 18-year-old freshman definitely has the right to yell at someone 10 to 20 years older for the sake of an unofficial tradition.

Tatum Neely, an oceanography graduate student from California, attended her first game Saturday against Pittsburgh. When she got to Kyle Field she was impressed that students weren't drunk and obnoxious like those who she attended sporting events with in California.

But by the end of the game, she wasn't as impressed.

After hearing fans curse and taunt one another over something she knew nothing about, Neely felt like the Twelfth Man she had heard so much about wasn't really all it was cracked up to be.

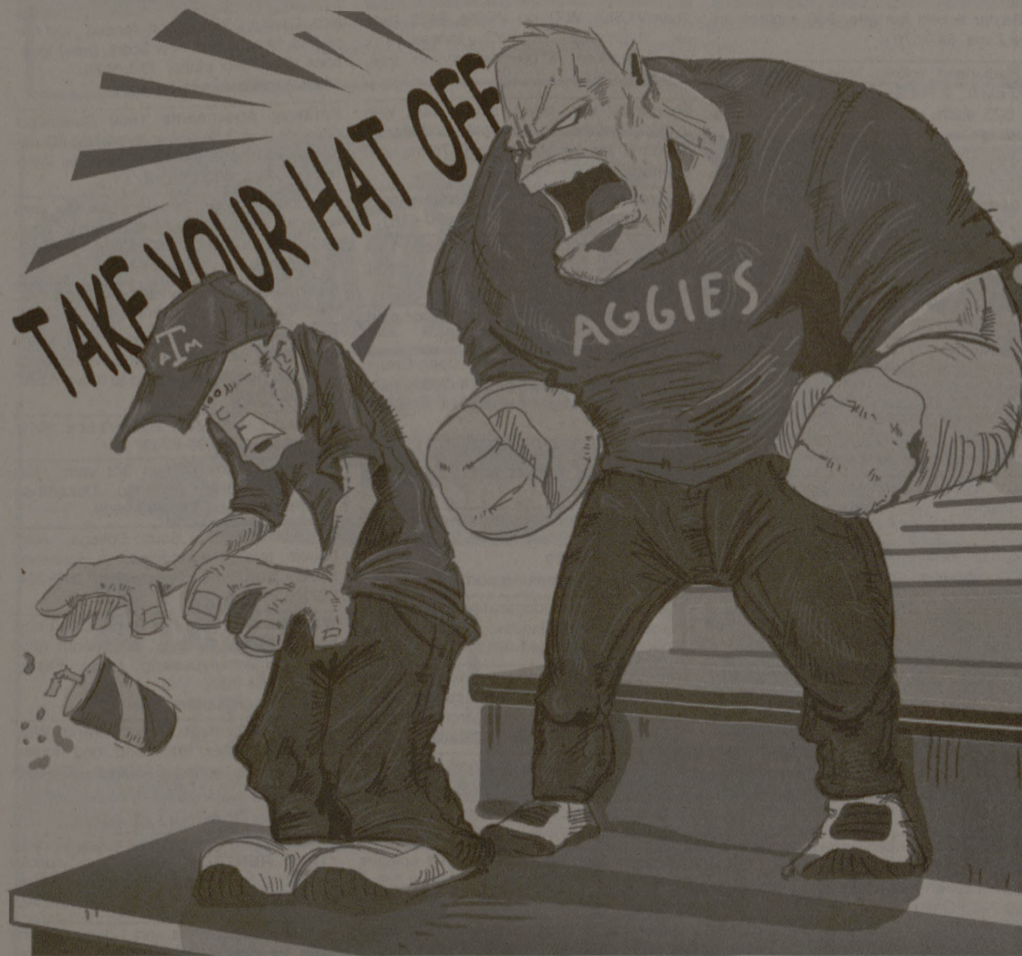
But she is lucky that she was amongst the “best fans in the nation.” God only knows what would happen if she had been at Texas Tech.

Aggies love to bash the Red Raiders for obnoxious behavior and cursing Ags at Jones SBC Stadium in Lubbock, but at least they aren't cursing each other for not taking off a hat.

There aren't many things that are more obnoxious than a group of people two rows back screaming, “Take your f—g hat off!”

The funniest part about the whole uncover “tradition” is no one seems to know when it started, why it was started or the real reason behind it. Even the “redass” Aggies screaming at the top of their lungs for people to take off their hats — usually during the actual yell — probably don't know why they are yelling. They just think they sound cute.

No other school in the country can draw



RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION

30,000-plus fans every Friday at midnight to sing the school songs and practice the cheers — or yells. Even ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit has commented on the amazing sight of Kyle Field packed with Aggies the night before the game. Let's just hope he watches from the pressbox and not from the student section.

Instead of barraging people to take their hats off throughout the entire yell, enjoy Yell Practice, enjoy the football game. Pass it back, hump it and yell like crazy.

Who cares if the “a—hole” two rows up has his hat on.

True Brown contributed to this column

Astros' lack of hitting ends season early, again

By Michael Lutz
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — The last week of the regular season was too much like the playoffs for the Houston Astros. Their hitting evaporated just as it has done the last four times they've made it to the postseason.

This year, they didn't even make it that far and slipped into the offseason with owner Drayton McLane taking a close look at the team's \$70 million payroll and general manager Gerry Hunsicker going forward with the team's youth movement.

And, two of the team's top performers this season, closer Billy Wagner and right fielder Richard Hidalgo, were guessing where they'll be playing next season.

Wagner, who had a career high 78 appearances and 44 saves, criticized McLane for not making a move to get another starting pitcher for the 2003 season and he expects more of the same for next season.

“It's going to be a tape job,” Wagner said after what seemed like final goodbyes to his teammates following Sunday's season finale. “It's not like we're going out there and getting any marquee pitchers. It's just going to be nip and tuck and try to compete.”

Hidalgo overcame being shot in the arm in a robbery attempt prior to the start of the season. He had a big comeback season, hitting .308 with 28 home runs and 88 RBIs. A year ago, he hit .235 with 15 homers and 48 RBIs.

“I've just got to thank God that I'm here,” Hidalgo

said. “I feel sad that we didn't make the playoffs. Now there's nothing we can do about it.”

Hidalgo is due a raise from \$9 million to \$12 million next season while Wagner, with one year remaining on a three-year deal worth \$24 million, will get \$9 million in 2004. Octavio Dotel, Roy Oswalt and Wade Miller are arbitration eligible and will get big raises.

Lance Berkman and Jeff Bagwell also will add more burden to the salary crunch.

“It will be a challenge to keep this club together,” Hunsicker said. “We always have challenges with the budget.” Hunsicker said. “I wouldn't anticipate we'd be expanding the budget so we've got to find ways of working within the budget.”

The Astros missed the playoffs for the second straight season. Before that, they won four NL Central titles over a five-year span, although they were eliminated in the first round of the playoffs each time.

They lost six of their final nine games to fall out of the playoffs.

“It's hard to put a finger on any one thing,” Berkman said. “It's injuries, it's underachieving at certain points during the year. At the same time, the Cubs played well and we haven't had a bad September.”

Miller struggled this season and finished with a 14-13 record.

“I think we were a bunch of underachievers this year,” Miller said. “I don't think a lot of us lived up to expectations. I know I haven't. A few other guys feel like they haven't done it all year.”

The Astros had their most serious injury problems among the starting pitchers. Oswalt was on the disabled list three times, a total of 71 days, with a strained left groin. Jeff Kent spent 23 days on the DL with tendinitis in his left wrist.

Carlos Hernandez, counted on as a part of the youth movement in the starting rotation, missed the entire season following shoulder surgery.

With little hope of an expanded budget for next season, the Astros have turned to the youngsters for help. Shortstop Adam Everett and third baseman Morgan Ensberg had breakthrough seasons.

Brad Lidge overcame a long series of injuries with a healthy season and became a part of the effective late-inning bullpen that was the team's strength.

“I think we have a nice nucleus here,” Hunsicker said. “One of the things we started last year was trying to make this transformation of roster where we infuse more of our young people. The challenge that goes with trying to win and change the roster at the same time.”

“Everett and Ensberg, look where they were a year ago and look where they are today, you can say with confidence they are keepers and able to contribute on a major league level.”

Wagner wants to finish his career in Houston. He just doesn't think he'll get the chance.

“I don't own the team, I don't make those decisions. If they trade me, they trade me,” Wagner said. “It's been a great run and if I'm gone this offseason so be it.”

SPORTS IN BRIEF Orioles say goodbye to Hargrove after four losing seasons

BALTIMORE (AP) — Mike Hargrove was fired Monday as manager of the Baltimore Orioles, one day after the team finished its fourth consecutive losing season under his direction and sixth straight overall.

Hargrove told The Associated Press in a telephone interview that he met Monday with team officials and was told of his dismissal.

“They said they weren't going to offer me another contract,” Hargrove said. “I guess they wanted a different personality.”

Hargrove, 53, went 275-372 with the Orioles, including 71-91 this year. His departure did not come as a complete surprise, given that his contract ran through this season and the team never talked about an extension.

Jim Beattie and Mike Flanagan, the vice presidents who oversee the team's baseball operations, are expected to quickly start the search for a new manager.

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