

# SPORTS

AGGIE BASEBALL TUESDAY  
7 p.m.  
vs. No. 6 Rice  
Olsen Field

THE BATTALION

Page 5 • Tuesday, March 23, 2004

## Aggies gear up for second half of season

National champion Rice visits Aggies at Olsen Field

Big 12 a tough test for Texas A&M baseball

By Jordan Meserole  
THE BATTALION

The No. 6 defending national champion Rice University baseball team is coming to College Station Tuesday, but don't expect No. 10 Texas A&M University to roll out the red carpet.

"It's just another ball game," said A&M head coach Mark Johnson. "It's still going to be an interesting game, though, because they're a good ball club as well as the defending national champion."

Rice (16-6, 5-1 WAC) has been chosen by many sports enthusiasts to win the College World Series again this year, and it is off to a good start by winning 14 of its last 15 games. A&M (21-4, 1-2 Big 12) is not being counted out to make a run for the title, however, after jumping out to one of its best season starts in almost 10 years.

"A&M is one of the better teams in the country right now," said Rice head coach Wayne Graham. "This will be a good gauge to see where we are."

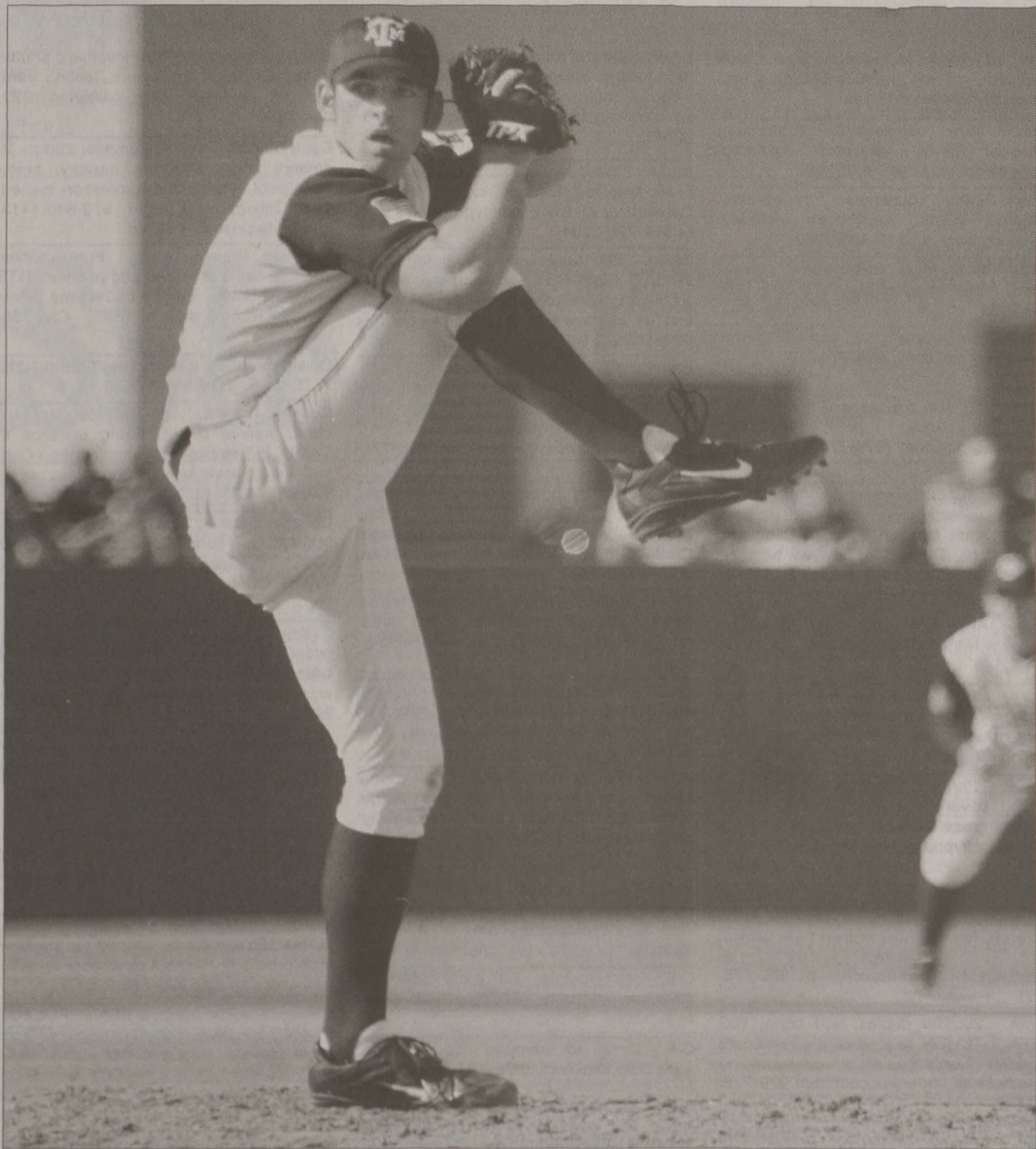
The Aggies are looking to bounce back from a paltry performance in last weekend's series against Baylor University, in which the Aggies lost two of three games. A&M entered the series against Baylor with a team batting average of .323, but only managed to bat .241 in the three-day series. Many of A&M's top hitters struggled against strong Baylor pitching, including A&M senior outfielder Cory Patton, who went two for 11 with three runs batted in.

"They're not necessarily in a slump as much as just not hitting well," Johnson said. "It's all part of the game though, where sometimes your game isn't hitting on all cylinders."

Rice is coming off a weekend series win against the University of Hawaii, winning the first two and dropping the last game 5-3. The Owls' pitching staff dominated the stat books, striking out 15, 17 and 10 in each respective game, and only allowed seven earned runs in the entire series. The Owls' pitching staff has many of its hurlers returning from last year who helped the team win the championship, including three of its four top starters.

"I'm sure we'll probably be seeing a little bit of heat from the mound," Patton said. "We faced some good pitchers against Baylor so we should be a little more prepared for whatever comes at us."

A&M freshman pitcher Doug Frame is scheduled to start against the Owls. It will be Frame's second start of the season, the other coming against Sam Houston State



ABOVE: A&M junior pitcher Zach Jackson delivers a pitch against Arkansas on Feb. 27 at Olsen Field in the Aggies' 7-5 victory over the Razorbacks.

RIGHT: A&M senior first baseman Eric Sheidt slides into home plate to score in the top of the sixth inning while senior outfielder Cory Patton waves him home on Feb. 28 at Olsen Field. The Aggies beat New Mexico 11-10.

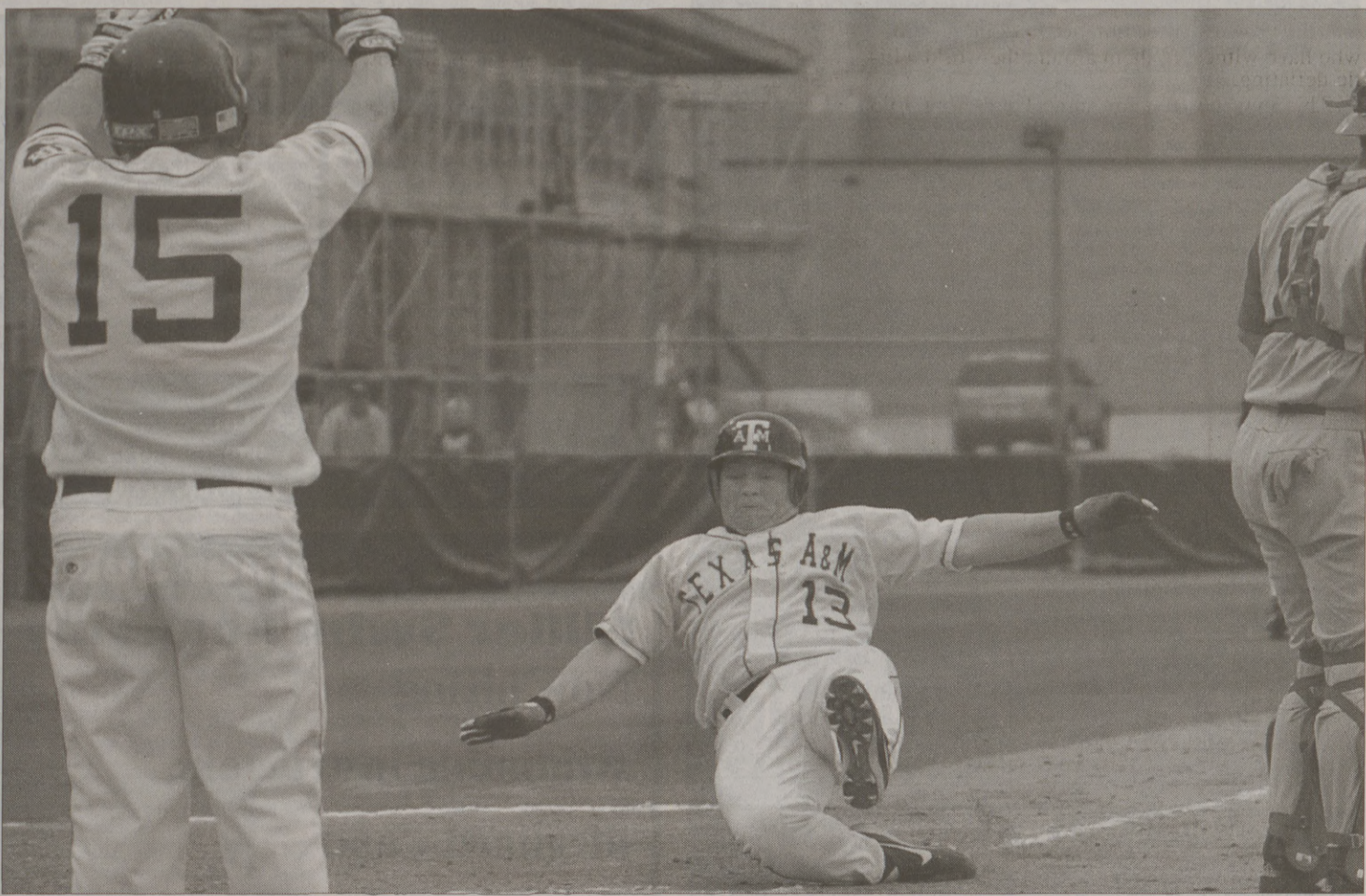
University on March 17. Frame showed good composure in the game, lasting four innings, striking out seven and allowing only one run.

Rice will send left-handed sophomore pitcher Matt Ueckert to the mound. Similar to Frame, Ueckert will be starting in his second game of the season. Ueckert appeared in a Feb. 15 game against Kansas State, lasting five innings, striking out six and allowing no runs.

Graham said even though the outcome of Tuesday's game shouldn't effect either team's season greatly, it still is an important game this season.

"A&M fans are about the best in the country," Graham said. "It will provide a good experience to see how some of the younger guys perform under pressure."

First pitch is scheduled for 7 p.m. at C.E. "Pat" Olsen Field and will be televised on Fox Sports Southwest.



SHARON AESCHBACH • THE BATTALION

As students filter back onto campus at Texas A&M University to finish out the final stretch of classes before summer, the Aggie baseball team finds itself in a similar situation as it enters Big 12 Conference play.

And just like classes, this final stretch in anything but easy. The Big 12 Conference is one of the most dominant leagues in college baseball. In fact, besides the Southeastern Conference, no other even comes close.

The No. 10 Aggies are one of six Big 12 teams that dot the four major national top-35 polls. If having more than half of the Big 12's 10 baseball schools (Iowa State University and the University of Colorado don't sanction baseball) in the national polls doesn't make the Aggies notice the potential pitfalls in the Big 12, then their first weekend of conference play should.

A&M dropped its first series of the season, winning only one of three games against Baylor University. The Bears were picked second in the Big 12 by media in the preseason, but Baylor fumbled in non-conference play by win-

ning just five of its first 18 games before taking two from A&M.

Leave it to a rivalry series to bring out the best in Baylor.

But the Bears are the least of A&M's problems. On the horizon in conference play are the University of Nebraska, Oklahoma State University and the University of Oklahoma — all top-35 teams. The Big 12 even houses the No. 1 team in the nation in the University of Texas, which will play A&M in its annual season series finale.

But A&M went 20-2 in non-conference play, making many believe that this Aggie team could duplicate the feats of the 1999 Aggies that made it to the College World Series.

The problem is that this season's non-conference schedule did not adequately prepare A&M for the rugged Big 12.

It's not anyone's fault on A&M's side, though. In a typical year the University of South Alabama, the University of Arkansas, UCLA and Santa Clara University would be a daunting non-conference slate. All four teams are usually in the top 25, but in 2004 they so far combine for a 49-40 record.

Not bad, but not exactly super either.

In those 22 non-conference games, the Aggies were able to rely on their three starting

See Big 12 on page 7

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#### Information Meeting:

- Wednesday, March 24<sup>th</sup> at 5:30pm
- Rudder 407
- Refreshments served



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## Got Talent?

Show your art, music, poetry, literature, dance, or any other creative talent you have at Evening of the Arts: "Unique Perspectives" this year.

For more information contact Becca at [beccam@studentlife.tamu.edu](mailto:beccam@studentlife.tamu.edu) or Chris at [cbergeron@hlkn.tamu.edu](mailto:cbergeron@hlkn.tamu.edu)

Please email if you are interested.

Deadline for submission of interest: March 26th, 2004

Evening of the Arts: "Unique Perspectives" April 15, 2004