

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

Page 3 • Wednesday, June 9, 2004

WEEKEND OF CHAMPIONS

Baseball team riding on cloud nine to Louisiana

By Jordan Meserole
THE BATTALION

The only thing that might be worse than having to face a former national champion in the first round of baseball regional play could be having to face another former champion the next weekend.

To advance to the College World Series, that is exactly what No. 14 Texas A&M (42-20) will have to do. After upending last year's champion Rice University last weekend, the Aggies will face off against No. 8 Louisiana State University this weekend, which won the championship in 2000.

"I spoke to the team Monday and told them how proud we were of them. My speech now will be to put all this behind them and move forward," said A&M head coach Mark Johnson. "In a climb to the mountain top, some people stop along the way after they've surpassed others and admire how well they've done, and it kills all their momentum."

The Aggies have been absent from the super regional tournament for five years. In 1999, A&M defeated Clemson University in three games to advance to the World Series where the Aggies eventually lost in the first round. A&M sophomore infielder Cliff Pennington said he discovered there was much more than just beating Rice on Sunday.

"It didn't hit me till 15 minutes afterwards," Pennington said. "Seeing Coach Johnson's face you know we had done something good. And you could definitely see it in the faces of the guys that have been playing three or four years, how special and awesome it is to make it to the supers."

A&M enters Baton Rouge with hot bats and strong arms. In the four games the Aggies played last weekend, A&M hitters hit a stunning .340 and collected 34 runs. On the mound, Aggie pitchers allowed only 10 runs on 29 hits in all four of the games. Pennington was the bright spot for A&M, going 8 for 13, scoring eight runs and driving in four more. Pennington's work at the plate earned him Most

Outstanding Player honors after the tournament. Senior outfielder Justin Ruggiano also enters the game against LSU with a hot bat, hitting an eighth inning grand slam that secured the Aggies' 7-5 win over Rice and advancing the team to the next round.

A&M senior outfielder Cory Patton said he knew many people slated A&M as the underdog, and didn't think A&M would get past Rice, but that the Aggies should be getting more respect now.

"I know what we're capable of, and we can do just about anything," Patton said. "I feel confident about our pitching and hitting because they're working together right now. I don't think calling us a 'Cinderella team' is fitting for us."

LSU enters the weekend series with stats similar to A&M's. In the three games LSU played in its regional tournament, the team batted .339, scored 26 runs and held opponents to five runs on 28 hits. Aggie pitchers will have to try and find a way to

silence Tiger junior infielder Blake Gill's bat, who hit .455, with seven RBIs and zero strikeouts.

"All of their stats indicate they're a pretty big time ball club," Johnson said. "Everyone that is still standing is good. There are no weak spots, or they're hard to find."

The Aggies will have something else to deal with other than just the Tigers on the field; the fans off the field. For the last 10 years, LSU has consistently had one of the

top five attendances in the NCAA, including last season when the Tigers drew the most fans to home games. Patton said he has seen some games at Alex Box Stadium and knows what the fans are like.

"They are loud. Very loud," Patton said. "But it shouldn't work against us too much because we play in front of a lot of loud fans on a regular basis. The only difference is that instead of 8,000 people cheering for us, there will be 8,000 cheering for LSU."

Six Aggies selected on MLB Draft Day

After two rounds of the major league baseball draft, six Texas A&M baseball players have been selected.

Senior outfielder Cory Patton and junior pitcher Zach Jackson were both selected on day one by the Toronto Blue Jays.

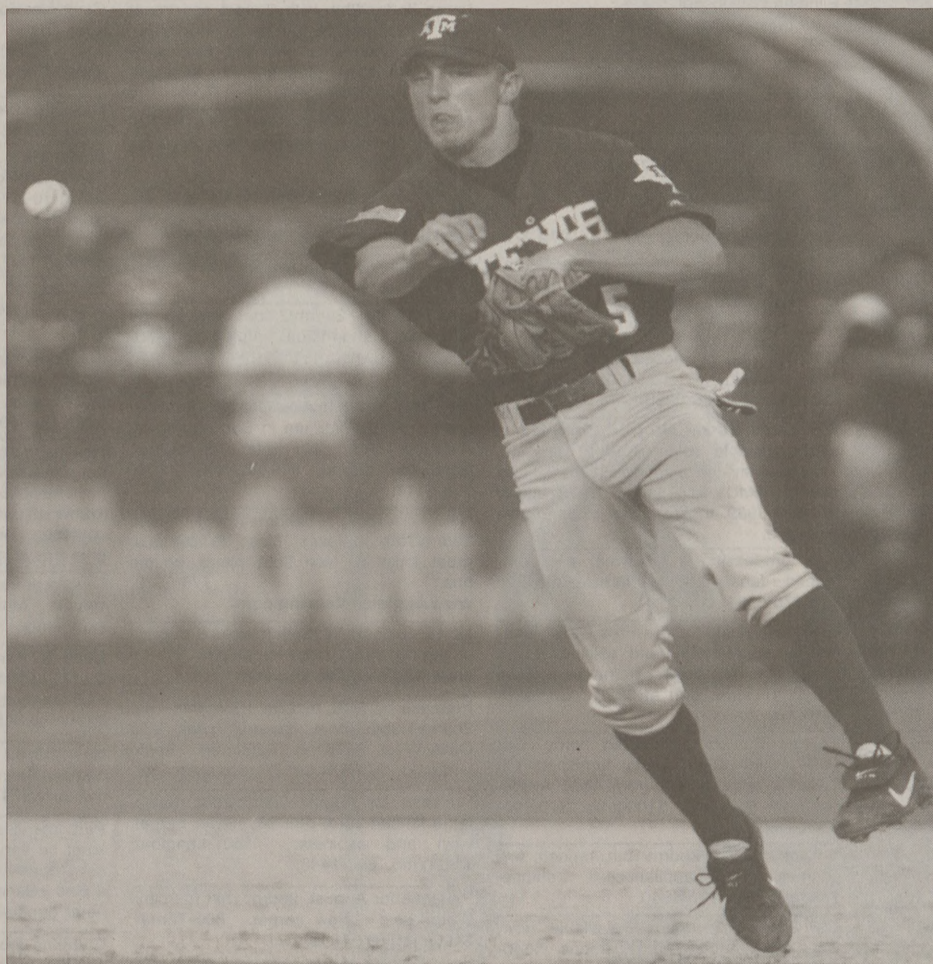
Jackson, who was the 32nd overall pick, led the Aggie pitchers this season with 10 wins and 119 strikeouts, and had the second lowest ERA for the team with a 3.54.

Patton, who was the overall 177th pick, led A&M's offense with 11 home runs and 67 RBIs, and ended the regular season with a .335 batting average.

Also drafted on the second day were:


Senior infielder Eric Schindewolf, 776th overall by the Arizona Diamondbacks; senior outfielder Justin Ruggiano, 748th overall by the Los Angeles Dodgers; sophomore infielder Coby Mavroulis and junior pitcher Kyle Marlatt.

Jackson, Mavroulis, and Marlatt all have the option of returning to the Aggies if they do not sign an agent or a contract with the team that drafted them.



BRIAN WILLS • THE BATTALION

Sophomore shortstop Cliff Pennington makes an off-balance throw to first base on Sunday against Rice. A&M lost the game 3-1, and then beat Rice in the second game to advance to the super regional tournament against LSU.



WHO: Texas A&M (42-20) vs. LSU (44-17)

WHERE: Alex Box Stadium, Baton Rouge

WHEN:

- Saturday, 6 p.m.
- Sunday, 5 p.m.
- Monday, noon (if needed)

RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION
IMAGE COURTESY OF NCAA SPORTS

A&M Track and Field aims for gold at NCAA Championships

By Ryan Irby
THE BATTALION

A total of 13 Aggie men and women will travel to Austin to compete in the 2004 NCAA Championships at Mike A. Myers Stadium on June 9-12.

Of the 13 athletes, seven are women, and six are men, yet there is one unifying spirit that Texas A&M Head Coach Ted

Nelson feels gives the Aggies a competitive advantage.

"I think that Texas A&M track and field is a team, and I'm always going to try and have a team," Nelson said. "I think it's fair for us to feel like a team instead of just individuals."

A&M will be heavily represented in the field aspect of the competition, as the Aggies will send eight of 13 competitors to throw in the javelin, shot put, and discus events.

A&M junior Jarrad Matthews, who unleashed a 243-foot-6-inch blast last weekend at the NCAA Midwest Regional to bring home the gold in the javelin, enters the meet ranked fourth in the nation and will compete alongside A&M senior Luke Marrs, 2001 Big 12 champion and holder of the 23rd national ranking.

A&M sixth-year senior Katy Doyle will join sophomores Rachel Walker and Katy Cullen in the women's javelin.

The Aggies will also feature two discus competitors this weekend, as Big 12 champion and A&M senior Karenrose Honea will throw in the women's competition, with senior Josh Ralston throwing in the men's division.

Honea explained that her personal goal for the weekend will be 55 meters, which qualifies her to try out for the USA

Olympic team.

"I am not going with a different game plan," Honea said. "I am going to go with what I have always done and hope that it's good enough for the finals. Once I get to the finals I will tear it up from there."

Honea owns the A&M record in the discus, as well as several of the school's top throws.

Competing in the shot put is A&M senior Ronny Jimenez, ranked seventh nationally in his event.

"There will be guys who are in the top 10 in the world in the shot," said Jimenez about this weekend's field. "Some guys from UCLA will be competing as well, and they are always great competitors. It should be an interesting day in the shot."

Fabrice Lapiere, a sophomore from Sydney, Australia, will defend his fifth-place national ranking in the long jump. Aggie sophomore Jennifer Johnson and freshman Alecia Green will compete in the heptathlon and long jump, respectively.

On the track side of the venue, the Aggies will be represented by senior Melissa Gulli in the 10,000 meters, in which she ranks fourth in the country. Gulli will end her illustrious five-time All-American career this weekend. A&M senior Andrew Cook will round out the track competitors by running the men's 10,000 meters.


Regardless if all come home with medals or not, Nelson said A&M is proud to be sending so many athletes to the championships.

"It's always icing on the cake for our athletes to go to a meet," Nelson said. "It's almost a given that it's a privilege to be the athlete that qualifies for this meet."



BRIAN WILLS • THE BATTALION

Senior Katy Doyle, ranked No. 2 nationally in the javelin, prepares to launch a throw during the track and field regional meet held in College Station.



WHO: 13 Texas A&M track & field participants vs. other NCAA schools

WHERE: Mike A. Meyers Stadium, Austin

WHEN: Wednesday, June 9 through Saturday, June 12

RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION
LOGO COURTESY NCAA SPORTS

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Parcells not fined for remarks

AP — Dallas Cowboys head coach Bill Parcells won't be fined nor will any action be taken by the NFL for calling surprise plays used in practice "Jap plays," a remark for which he later apologized.

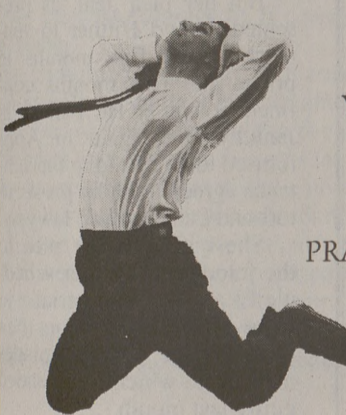
Parcells made the remark, an apparent reference to Japan's 1941 surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, while talking to reporters during the Cowboys' minicamp Monday.

Later in the day, Parcells issued a statement apologizing.

"I made a very inappropriate reference, and although I prefaced it with the remark, 'no disrespect to anyone intended,' it was still uncalculated for and inconsiderate," he said. "For that I apologize to anyone who may have been offended."

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