

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

Page 3 • Monday, June 14, 2004

Dashed dreams

Aggies fed to LSU Tigers, eliminated from College World Series in 4-run loss

By Jordan Meserole
THE BATTALION

With rally caps on and saddened stares from the dugout, the No. 14 Texas A&M baseball team watched as the last out was recorded Sunday, marking a 4-0 loss against Louisiana State University.

The out not only signified the end of the super regional game, but the end of the Aggies' shot for a return to the College World Series. The No. 8 Tigers are advancing to their 10th World Series appearance since 1990, and are hoping to win their sixth championship.

"This is a disappointing time, but I'm still proud. I'm very proud of this team," said A&M head coach Mark Johnson. "We played great, as did LSU, we just couldn't get it going."

Sunday's game proved to be a pitcher's duel, with the score knotted at 0-0 entering the ninth inning. A&M junior Zach Jackson took a no-hitter into the sixth inning, while LSU junior Lane Mestepey allowed only three hits in the same span. Up to the ninth, a total of five runners had made it farther than first base, with all being stranded on second by the end of the inning.

"Both pitchers rose up and came ready for the game tonight and pitched good. Outstanding even," Johnson said. "I couldn't ask anymore from Zach against a great hitting ball club, holding them at bay for so long like he did."

As the ninth inning began, LSU fans began chanting "Go Tigers" and "L-S-U," attempting to energize their team. By the end of the inning, they would be chanting "Omaha."

Jackson started the inning off by letting the first two batters reach base on singles, and then walking the next batter to load the bases. LSU junior infielder Clay Harris hit a tall

fly ball to center field, allowing the first run to cross the plate. After retiring the next batter, Jackson faced LSU sophomore infielder Will Harris, Clay's brother. Harris hit the first pitch from Jackson into the left field stands, putting the Tigers up 4-0.

"I had been seeing him pretty good all day and had gotten a couple of hard hits that didn't fall in," Harris said. "I wasn't trying to lift it when I swung, it just kind of happened."

Johnson said he never thought of taking Jackson out before the ninth and felt that Jackson wanted to stay on the mound.

"I came in hoping to get our backs off the wall, but LSU played a good game and there isn't much more I can say about it," Jackson said. "It's tough to take the loss and face the reality that this is it."

Saturday's game, the first game of the series, proved to be significantly different than Sunday's.

A total of 20 runs crossed the plate on 28 hits in the 11-8 win by LSU. Both starting pitchers were removed from the game early, with A&M red-shirt freshman Jason Meyer being removed after three innings of work and LSU senior Nate Bumstead getting the hook after recording only two outs in the first inning.

"The pitchers had trouble establishing strikes on both sides, especially from the starters," Johnson said after the first game. "If you would have told me we were going to score eight runs, I would be thinking 'W,' but we just didn't pitch very well."

The Aggies jumped out to an early 5-0 lead in the first inning off LSU's Bumstead. Bumstead walked the first two batters and allowed a single to load the bases. Junior outfielder Travis Bartek bounced a single up the middle of the infield, scoring two runs.

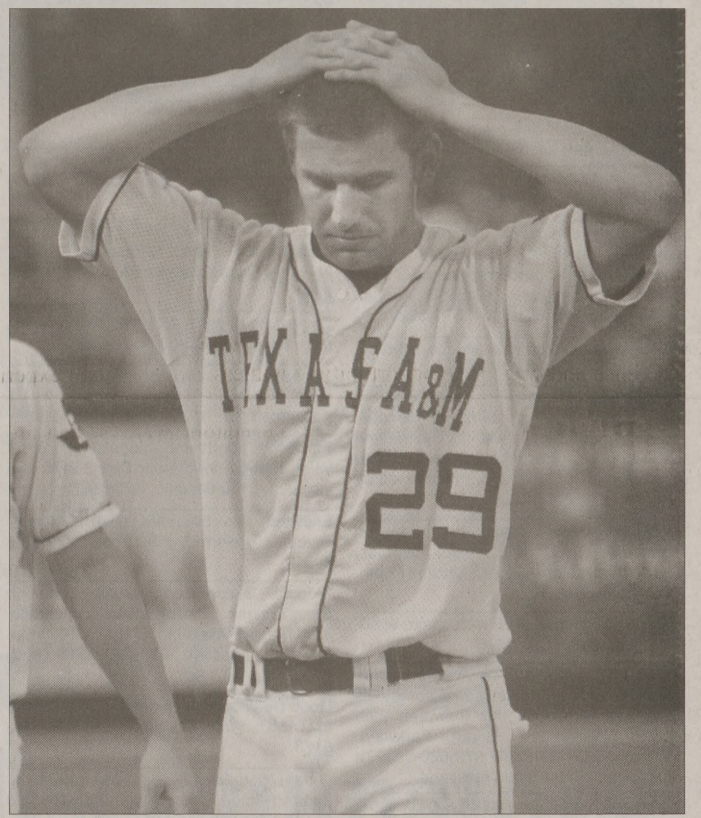
Senior outfielder Justin



PHOTOS BY SHARON AESCHBACH • THE BATTALION

Above: The LSU Tigers celebrate by piling up on pitcher Lane Mestepey at Alex Box Stadium in Baton Rouge after defeating the Aggies 4-0 on Sunday. The Tigers now head to the College World Series for their 13th appearance. Mestepey pitched nine innings and allowed no runs.

Right: Aggies catcher Craig Stinson walks off the field after the Aggies' loss. Stinson led the Aggie offense with two hits in the game. The Aggies were eliminated after losing two games to LSU.



Ruggiano, who hit the game-winning home run against Rice last weekend, continued his hot streak by lining a single to left field and adding the fifth Aggie run onto the scoreboard.

The Tigers slowly chipped away at the Aggies' lead, putting one run on the board in the first inning and adding three more in the second. LSU finally captured a 6-5 lead in the fourth inning off LSU junior outfielder Jon Zeringue's single over second base. A&M regained the lead in the sixth on two runs, but LSU would answer right back in the bottom of the inning with three more runs.

"We had a tough first inning and put ourselves in a hole,"

said LSU head coach Smoke Laval. "I just told our guys we had to keep putting guys on base and be as opportunistic as they were. Just come out swinging."

Johnson said that even though many had dubbed A&M's come-from-behind win against Rice last weekend as a fluke, he felt that A&M deserved to be in Louisiana.

"I don't think us beating Rice was an accident and I don't think we're going to go home and hang our hats on the Rice game," Johnson said. "We were right there with LSU, had some chances to score some crucial runs but their defense rose up to the moment. That's just the way baseball goes."

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