

Standing tall

Jason Meyer impresses many in freshman season with Aggies

By Jordan Meserole
THE BATTALION

Jason Meyer doesn't stick out much on the baseball field. He quietly shags fly balls during batting practice, does his routine bullpen workouts and hits the showers.

At 5 feet 9 inches, he is often overshadowed by the larger, bulkier 6 foot-plus players around him. But the soft-spoken and polite redshirt freshman left-handed pitcher from Abilene was a leading factor for the Texas A&M baseball team's success this season.

On the season, Meyer had a 2.89 ERA, second lowest of any pitcher with at least 10 innings pitched, 111 strikeouts and gave up only 34 runs in his 106 innings of work. These stats are usually rare for a pitcher in his first season facing hard-hitting teams like the University of Texas, Baylor University and Louisiana State University.

But Meyer's success this season almost wasn't. Last season Meyer had surgery to repair a torn ulnar collateral ligament more commonly known as 'Tommy John' surgery, that has ended many ballplayers' careers. The procedure takes non-useful tendons from the hand, wrist, forearm or leg and replaces the torn tendon on the throwing arm.

"He has had an amazing comeback," said A&M head coach Mark Johnson. "Most guys are off one or two years and lose a lot of velocity off their pitches - if they ever can pitch again that is - but he's really impressed us."

Meyer attended Abilene Cooper High School where, in his senior year, he was the star pitcher and workhorse for the team, pitching 83 innings. Despite his small frame, he caught collegiate coaches' eyes by throwing a no-

hitter in his first game of the season, striking out 116 batters and compiling a 1.30 ERA. He was highly recruited by Texas Tech, Baylor, Alabama and A&M, among others. But the Olsen Magic caught Meyer's eye after a trip to College Station.

"I came to a game and it was more than awesome," Meyer said. "I would definitely have to say the game environment around here swayed my decision some."

Johnson said it wasn't Meyer's stats or pitch selections that made him so desirable, but something that can't be taught to players.

"He's got great composure out on the mound," Johnson said. "He's a great competitor, doesn't back off anybody and really trusts the stuff he's got. He's not scared at all, he really gets after it."

Nagging soreness in his forearm after his senior season forced Meyer to see a doctor, who gave him and Johnson the unfortunate news that he would have to have surgery. As May rolled around and the 2003 season came to an end, Meyer was itching to get back on the mound and pitch again. Watching the team play and not being able to help out was excruciating, Meyer said.

When doctors finally gave the greenlight for him to start again, he was throwing that very day. Meyer would get his first chance to pitch in a live game situation after almost a year on Feb. 15 against Texas A&M Corpus Christi, and would use the opportunity to impress the coaches. Meyer faced five batters, allowed only one hit and struck out one in the 4-3 win.

"We originally wanted to use him as a short reliever even though he didn't really fit the role," Johnson said. "After seeing him pitch in a few games, we felt that he deserved to be one of our starters, and



BRIAN WILLS • THE BATTALION

Redshirt freshman Jason Meyer delivers a curve ball against Rice and advance to the super regionals. Meyer struck out nine batters and walked one in the no-decision.

the rest of that story is still being written."

Now after earning the coaches' respect, Meyer has earned the respect of others in the NCAA. Meyer has been nominated for the Roger Clemens award, given to the top collegiate pitcher and the Dick Howser award, given to the top collegiate player. At the end of the Big 12 tournament in May, Meyer was named to the All-Big 12 first team and also given the honor of freshman pitcher of the year. Also, Meyer was

recently awarded the A&M team award for the most outstanding pitcher. Even with overcoming Tommy John surgery, accomplishing phenomenal stats in his first season and being nominated for the prestigious awards, Meyer is still humble and shy about it all.

"This has all kind of caught me off guard," Meyer said. "I definitely didn't think I would have this kind of success. And to be listed with some of those pitchers from the other clubs for those awards

is an honor and dream come true."

Even though Meyer wasn't able to help lead the Aggies past LSU into the College World Series, there will always be next season to impress fans and coaches alike even more, especially his own team.

"I expect him to do even more next season," Johnson said. "But even if he performed like this for three more seasons straight, I'm not going to complain one bit."

Pistons step in as NBA champs; Lakers reign comes to end

By Chris Sheridan
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Motown is Titledown. The descendants of the Bad Boys made sure of it with a stunning upset that was really no contest at all.

Without a superstar among them and without being given much of a chance, the Detroit Pistons humiliated the Los Angeles Lakers 100-87 Tuesday night in Game 5 of the NBA finals for their first title in 14 years.

With finals MVP Chauncey Billups and Ben Wallace leading the way, the Pistons were at their very best in the clincher, defeating Shaquille O'Neal, Kobe Bryant and the rest of the Lakers in every facet of the game. It was both methodical and shocking the way they pulled ahead and pulled away for one of the biggest surprises in NBA finals history.

Wallace took a big step toward becoming a superstar with an 18-point, 22-rebound effort that helped Detroit become the first Eastern Conference team to win the title since the Michael Jordan-led Chicago Bulls in 1998.

Equally important was 14 points from Billups, the best

guard on the floor throughout the series, 21 from Richard Hamilton and 17 from Tayshaun Prince.

Game 5 was so lopsided that Lakers owner Jerry Buss, carrying his jacket and accompanied by an entourage, headed for the exit before the third quarter was over. By the time the last timeout rolled around, fans were already being urged to keep their celebrations under control.

As the final buzzer sounded and confetti began dropping, Pistons coach Larry Brown stotically walked to midcourt and received an affectionate handshake and warm smile from Lakers coach Phil Jackson and a hug from Bryant.

Many fans at The Palace stood through the final several minutes, savoring every moment they had waited for since the Bad Boys of 1989 and '90 won back-to-back titles.

The game steadily got away from the Lakers from the second quarter on, unraveling completely over the latter part of the third quarter when it became clear they weren't going to make a game of it.

On one especially telling sequence, Bryant missed a 3-pointer, got his own rebound but

missed on a drive, and Wallace soared high above everyone to snare his 14th rebound. Bryant was then called for a blocking foul as Billups brought the ball upcourt, and an "M-V-P" chant greeted the point guard as he went to the line and made it 80-59.

For good measure, Bryant missed a layup just moments later, and the quarter ended with Detroit ahead by 23 and the Lakers shuffling off the court a thoroughly defeated team.

Lindsey Hunter began the fourth quarter by stealing the ball from Bryant, who could manage only a grimace and didn't even give chase as Hunter took it in for a breakaway. It was a Pistons party the rest of the way, the culmination of one of the greatest and unexpected success stories in NBA annals.

Even before the series, the Pistons promised they were prepared to shock the world. What they lacked in star power they made up for in cohesiveness and determination — two factors that Detroit displayed in abundance throughout the finals while executing their coach's mantra to "play the right way."

For Billups, a castoff in five NBA cities before he landed in

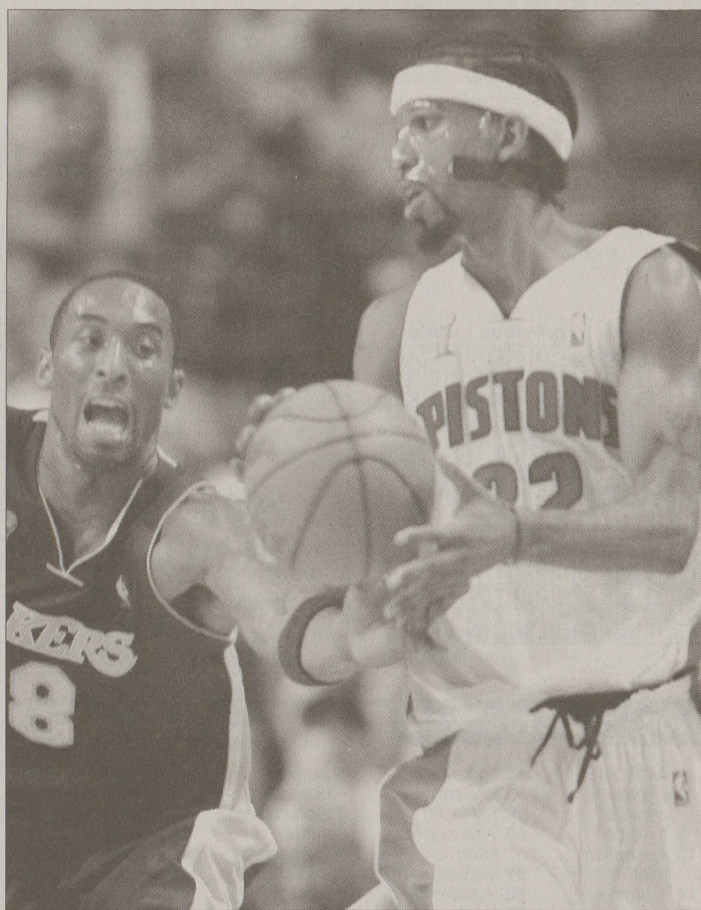
Detroit, that meant taking advantage of his mismatch against Gary Payton and making the key baskets that demoralized the Lakers through all five games.

For Rasheed Wallace, it meant keeping relatively quiet when the officials whistled him for fouls and his coach sat him on the bench for extended periods because of foul trouble.

For Prince, it meant keeping one of his long arms in Bryant's face whenever possible and justifying the faith team architect Joe Dumars showed in him a year ago when he passed on Carmelo Anthony with the second pick in the draft.

For Ben Wallace, it was about pounding the boards relentlessly and showing a level of effort O'Neal could only envy. For Richard Hamilton, it was proving how big of a mistake Jordan made two years ago when he dealt him from Washington in exchange for Jerry Stackhouse.

And collectively for the Pistons, it was about not being afraid as previous Eastern Conference opponents had been when confronted with the task of taking on the big, bad Lakers.



MICHAEL GOULDING • KRT CAMPUS

Los Angeles Lakers forward Kobe Bryant attempts to steal the ball from Detroit Pistons forward Richard Hamilton in the second quarter of Game 5.

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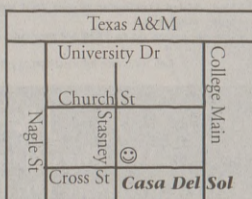
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