

Photos by Tanner Garza — THE BATTALION

'Not a big hoo-rah guy'

Outfielder Nick Banks leads by example in the clubhouse

By Andre Perrard

It's springtime in College Station. The smell of fresh-cut grass, peanuts and hot dogs fill the air. The chalk is down, the dirt is ready and some Olsen Magic is ready to dazzle visiting teams.

Baseball season is back in Aggieland, and leading the charge into the 2015 campaign is the preseason second-team All-SEC outfielder Nick Banks.

Banks is set to be a key piece of the puzzle for A&M this spring. A sophomore from Tomball, Texas, Banks comes back for his second year after notching a .327 batting average with 26 RBI and two home runs last year. While A&M's final, eliminating loss in last year's Houston regional came from longtime foe Texas, Banks and the team are ready to get back to work this spring.

"We were disappointed losing in the regional to Texas," Banks said. "Being our rival, losing to them in a big game to go to the Super Regionals was really disappointing, but I think we came back stronger. Everyone is motivated to get back, hopefully [we will] host a Regional and a Super Regional so we can get back to our one goal — winning in Omaha."

The team comes into the season ranked No. 17 nationally. As with any high preseason ranking, there are high expectations for this team. Talk of rankings, records and predictions can weigh on the mind of young players such as

Banks. However, Banks said he and the team do not fall into the trap — this time around, it's business as usual.

"We've prepared all fall and spring leading up to these upcoming games," Banks said. "Our teammates keep each other level-headed, and do not let each other get too out there and forget what our goal is for the season. You can't think ahead because when you think ahead in a game, that is when you get beat."

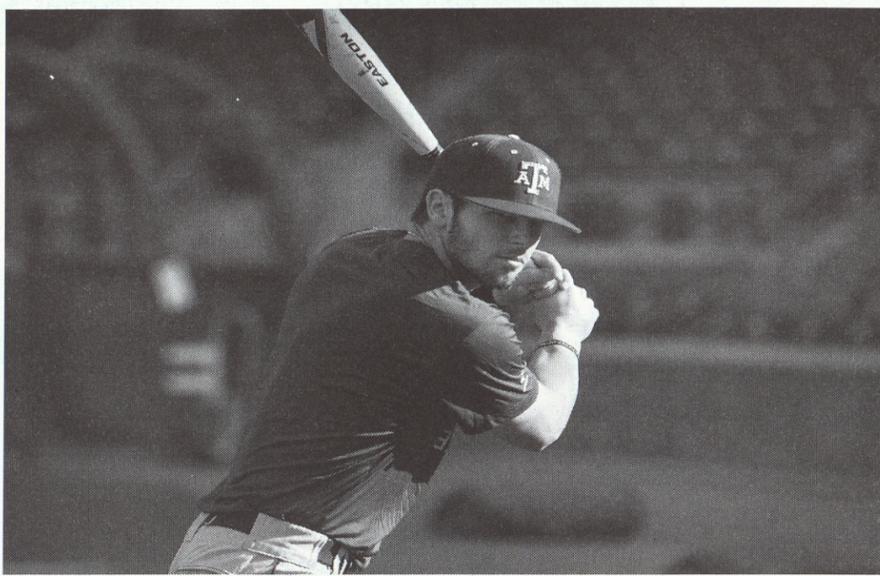
The team looked for a leader to stay on task and focused on its ultimate goal of a win in Omaha. They eventually found that leader in Banks due to his "lead by example" attitude.

"He's not a big vocal guy," said outfielder Logan Nottebrok. "He steps into the role of leading by example. He is not a big 'hoo-rah' guy, but whenever you are out of line, he'll put you in line when he needs to."

Head coach Rob Childress has taken notice as well.

"I think he is one of the many leaders on this team," Childress said. "He has a great combination of strength and speed and plays with a chip on his shoulder. His motor is running full speed all the time. He is an honor to coach."

In 2014, Banks stole seven bases, while adding 10 doubles and two triples. Childress said Banks' rare combination of strength and speed is possibly



the best facet of his game.

Last summer, Banks was selected to play for Team USA's collegiate baseball team. It was a chance for him to play with some of the most talented players in the country, an experience that Banks said helped him grow both as a player and as a person.

"To get invited to that [national roster] was a blessing," Banks said. "To be around players that they see as the best players in the country and hand-

selected coaches that are the best in the country, it really makes you mature a lot as a player and person. Yes, I think it did mature me as a baseball player, but I think it matured me more as a man."

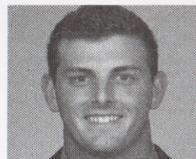
Banks and the team will shoulder their expectations when the lights shine down in Olsen Field on Friday night. Texas A&M will begin the long journey to Omaha at 6:30 p.m. against the Holy Cross Crusaders.

Outfielder **Nick Banks** was named preseason second-team All-SEC.

MORE AGGIES TO WATCH

LOGAN NOTTEBROK

Senior infielder Logan Nottebrok transferred to Texas A&M from Temple Junior College in 2014 and immediately served a role as the team's power hitter. He contributed seven doubles and knocked a team-high eight balls out of the park while leading A&M in slugging percentage (.478).



PROVIDED

GRAYSON LONG

Junior right-handed pitcher Grayson Long held the lowest ERA (3.12) of pitchers with at least 40 innings pitched a year ago. He totaled 55 strikeouts over 89 1/3 innings pitched with an opponent batting average of .284. Long figures to be one of the three starting pitchers in the A&M rotation after starting 15 games last season.



PROVIDED

BLAKE ALLEMAND

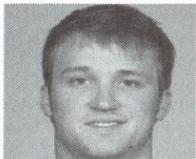
Senior infielder Blake Allemand started in 53 games last year for the Aggies with a .290 batting average on 60 hits. Allemand was one of the team's most efficient players, drawing 34 walks, scoring 38 runs and boasting a .397 on-base percentage, all of which were team highs. He also contributed 118 defensive assists, another team high, in addition to 87 putouts.



PROVIDED

ANDREW VINSON

Junior right-handed pitcher Andrew Vinson recorded all 36 2/3 of his innings pitched last season in relief effort. With a 3-2 record and 2.95 ERA, Vinson struck out nearly one batter per inning with a 3.09 strikeout-to-walk ratio, one of the highest for returning pitchers this year.



PROVIDED

By Cole Stenholm



Tanner Garza — THE BATTALION

ANALYSIS

2015 season will give youthful roster chance to prove itself



Tyler Stafford
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Football season is over and the droves of camera crews that showed up every Saturday are leaving Aggieland almost as quickly as College Station's three-week long winter, which can only mean one thing — it's baseball season.

Stop me if you've heard this before: The Aggies, while loaded with young talent from a string of strong recruiting classes, will need to prove they can compete in the vaunted SEC this season after losing several key players who chose to leave school early for the draft.

No, I'm not talking about Manziel and Evans. I'm talking about Mengden and Lankford.

Last year's Aggies often struggled to find a rhythm, but they showed flashes of greatness, beating a few highly ranked SEC schools in road games that they had no business winning.

A&M barely snuck into the NCAA Tournament, where they were matched against No. 1 seed Rice and a very strong Texas team. Somehow, the Aggies found a way to make it to the finals of their Regional, ending the season of the Owls in the process.

This year's Aggies, on paper, are much better. They have Nick Banks, who will be drafted very early in the

MLB draft the second he is eligible. They have a 6-foot-5 workhorse pitcher, the aptly named Grayson Long. They had sophomore southpaw standout Tyler Stubblefield, but he will miss most of, if not all of the season with an ACL tear.

It's been four years since future-first-round-picks Michael Wacha and Tyler Naquin led the Aggies to the College World Series in 2011. That team tore through the Big 12 in its final season in the conference.

The 2014-15 roster has even more talent. It has a chance to be special.

Sure, the roster is unproven, but it is far from lacking. The Aggies have a potential breakout player starting at every position, especially the corner infielders. Logan Nottebrok and Ronnie Gideon are home run threats every time they step in the box. In a game void of true power potential, these two Aggies bring the thunder.

What this team lacks in veteran collegiate pitching experience, it makes up for in untapped youthful potential. Head coach Rob Childress, one of the better pitching coaches in the country, has an arsenal full of lively arms just waiting to be reigned in.

There are three seniors who played on that 2011 CWS team — Blake Allemand, Jason Freeman and Mitchell Nau. I hope they remember what Omaha looked like, because they just may be going back.

Tyler Stafford is an interdisciplinary studies senior and sports reporter for The Battalion.

5 MAKE-OR-BREAK OPPONENTS

VS. NO. 7 HOUSTON

MARCH 6

Minute Maid Park plays host to this matchup as part of the 2015 Houston College Classic that spans March 6-8. Houston is led by second team preseason All American starting pitcher Jake Lemoine, who posted a 2.87 ERA in 106 2/3 innings last year.

AT NO. 28 ALABAMA

MARCH 20-22

This series marks the first true road trip for the Aggies, who will have played 19 of their first 22 games within the friendly confines of Blue Bell Park. Additionally, it will be the second conference series on the season. The Crimson Tide are led by middle infielder Mikey White, a third team Preseason All American, who scored 50 runs on 71 hits, batted .300 and blasted seven home runs in 2014.

VS. NO. 15 RICE

APRIL 7

The Aggies meet their old Southwest Conference foe only once in this midweek slot that's sandwiched between two conference series for the Aggies. The Owls finished 42-20 last season and finished ranked No. 24. However, they bring back second-team Preseason All American starting pitcher Blake Fox, who was an undefeated 12-0 record with a 1.46 ERA a year ago.

AT NO. 4 LSU

APRIL 23-25

Texas A&M begins the home stretch of conference play in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where an LSU team that was knocked out of postseason play early in Regionals a year ago awaits. Alex Bregman, LSU shortstop and 2015 first team Preseason All American, and Andrew Stevenson, outfielder and third team Preseason All-American, lead the Tigers.

VS NO. 11 S CAROLINA

MAY 8-11

The Aggies wrap up play at Blue Bell Park with another ranked SEC opponent. The Gamecocks, like the Tigers, were also eliminated in Regionals last year, finishing 44-18 and ranked No. 23. The series serves as one of the final opportunities for the Aggies to jostle for conference position prior to the SEC tournament in Hoover, Alabama, in mid May.

By Cole Stenholm