

# Aggie-Hog battle a costly one

By JOHN CURYLO  
Assistant Sports Editor

Saturday's 45-6 setback to Arkansas could be one of the costliest games of the season in terms of quality Southwest Conference players.

In his weekly press conference Tuesday, Coach Gene Stallings commented on the loss of line-backer Mike Lord and offensive tackle Andy Philley, in addition to Arkansas running back Bill Burnett's shoulder separation.

"That's real tough about Burnett," he said. "I hate to see it happen, because he's really a fine athlete." Burnett was operated on Monday, and he will miss the rest of the season.

Philley and Lord were both operated on Sunday for ligament injuries.

"Ligaments take longer to get well than cartilages," Stallings

explained. "It's really unusual, too. Billy (Pickard, the A&M athletic trainer) said that statistically you usually only have one ligament injury every three years, and here we are with two in the same game."

Philley will be replaced by either Ralph Sacra, a 6-5, 228 pound sophomore from Houston Jesuit, or Mike Fields, a 6-3, 224 pound junior letterman from Texarkana. Lord's replacement is doubtful, however, since A&M's linebacking corps resembles a hospital ward, with something wrong with just about every player who is listed at the position.

"Every linebacker we've got is doubtful," Stallings said. "Dennis Carruth isn't well yet. Grady Hoermann's still got a bad ankle on one leg and a bad knee on the other. Even though Steve Luebbehusen played the other day, he's not fully healthy yet either. Todd Christopher (played linebacker against Arkansas when Lord left the game) and of course, Lord's out. Gary McCaffrey can't even practice and hasn't in a long time.

"As a result," he added, "I'm working Van Odom some at linebacker. I'm not doing this because he's not playing well at guard, it's just that I want some depth at linebacker in case something happens, and we need him."

Elaborating more on the physical condition of the rest of the team, things look at least as bad for the Aggies as they have week after week this season. Dave Elmentendorf is sick with flu and a fever. Stallings said that he would not practice Tuesday. Leonard Forey, injured in the Arkansas game, practiced Monday in the

usual early week running workout, and Stallings reported that he ran all right. Carruth was not able to practice Tuesday, either, as he has not yet fully recovered from the injury he received earlier in the season. No position seems to be off limits to the injury epidemic which has hit the Aggie team, as Stallings talked about Lex James, the A&M quarterback.

"I was concerned about Lex after the game," he admitted. "His elbow was swollen, but it looks like he'll be okay."

Mike Mistovich, owner of KORA radio, told Stallings that he "wouldn't blame James one bit if he turned tail and ran out of the stadium the way they get after him sometimes." The coach agreed, saying that James has a lot of courage and that he took a real physical beating against the Razorbacks.

"Our pass blocking was poor," Stallings said. "I don't know if it's the worst we've had this year, but it was pretty bad. Needless to say, that's a phase of the game we'll work on this week. You have to consider, though, that pass blocking is one of the hardest things in football, and we don't have a whole lot of experience in the line."

Asked about the possibility of changing the passing attack to sprint out rather than straight drop back style, Stallings said that that might not be the solution.

"It might be easier to protect the passer," he said, "since you only have half the rush, but it might not be the best thing for Lex's passing. He throws the ball a lot better dropping back

than he does sprinting out. The change might result in a better block, but it might not necessarily give us the better pass."

Stallings cited James for playing a good game. He said that the Houston Sam Houston product threw only two bad passes, even though he was intercepted four times. Also, the coach pointed out that the negative rushing yardage was not an indication of the performance of the 6-0, 186 pound sophomore.

He said that James Ducak (defensive end) played well, and that split end Joey Herr also had a good game. He pointed out that Bruce Best made some good plays and that he is coming around real good at defensive guard. He was switched from linebacker when the defensive alignment was changed prior to the Baylor game.

Looking ahead to SMU, the Ponies are 3-4 this year, and 1-2 in SWC play. They have beaten New Mexico State, Northwestern, and Rice, and they have lost to Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas Tech, and Texas. However, the defense, which was supposed to be the Dallas team's weakness this season, held Rice scoreless and only allowed Texas Tech two touchdowns. Until Saturday, when Texas beat them 42-15, the most points scored against them was 28. The passing of Chuck Hixson and the running of converted split end Gary Hammond gives the Mustangs their offensive punch.

"To stop SMU, we'll have to rush the passer better and play pass defense better than we have this year," Stallings said. "Hixson can really throw the ball."

For the past two years, the Aggies have been successful at stopping the SMU passing attack. In 1968, A&M was able to contain Jerry Levias, the Mustang spit end who was responsible for the only SWC setback for the 1967 championship team. However, in 1968, the running game took over, and SMU outscored the Aggies, 36-23.

Last year, the Mustangs brought the Hixson-Hammond combination to Kyle Field, but they only scored one touchdown and one field goal, as A&M came out on top, 20-10.

"A good pass defense is the result of a good rush," Stallings said. "If the quarterback is hurried, he won't complete as many passes."

A&M has three SMU games on film: the 34-21 victory over New Mexico State, the 14-10 loss to Tech, and the loss to Texas.

"Naturally, they looked good when they won (New Mexico State)," Stallings said, "but they played well against Tech. Also, when you can throw against Texas like Hixson did, it's tremendous."

Asked whether being outscored six weeks in a row has hurt his young team mentally, or whether there is a morale problem or losing attitude, Stallings reported that he can see no difference in the team than when they were coming out on top in the score.

"The kids have a lot of character," he said. "From what I see out on the practice field, things still look good. They practice well and they're really bouncing around a lot out there."

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