

Sportfolio

By Paul McGrath
Battalion Sports Editor

Texas A&M Head Football Coach and Athletic Director Emory Ballard simplifies the old adage: "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." Or, in this case, hire 'em.

After four straight losing seasons, Ballard was politely asked to step aside and into the frying pan of the firing line. That was in December of 1971, when Ed Simonini and Pat Thomas were finishing their school careers in Las Vegas, Nev., and Plano, Tex.

Ballard took over at a school that had only one winning season in 10 years. It was a common occurrence to see local state road signs directed to read "Highway 6, A&M State Road." The outlook along the Brazos, particularly in football, appeared as deplorable as the preceding years. The average attendance at Kyle Field was 32,886 for a stadium with a capacity of 48,000. The ticket office sold only 5,104 season tickets while the Athletic Department had a total income of \$1,486,000.

Ballard begins his fifth year at A&M. He has a long list of disgruntled A&M alumni who are on new expressions. Last year, the Aggies went 10-2 on the field in their first bowl game in 10 years, a relative financial boom in place. Total attendance averaged 50,545 per home game and season ticket sales soared to 12,763, an expected 14,000 season tickets to be sold this year. The total income for the department will top \$5 million.

How did this turnaround originate? The athletic program can stay in the black without a successful football team. Putting it in terms of dollars and cents, only one sport at A&M—basketball—has lost more money than football at most other universities—pays for itself.

Ballard began his face-lifting campaign by gleaming the recruiting pipeline, hoping to bring home a bumper crop to rejuvenate the dormant football program.

That first litter went through its pangs, but with careful rearing, matured into a national powerhouse. However, not all the credit goes to the athletes. The suave, soft-spoken, magnetic Ballard gathered some of the top football minds around as assistants to go along with his own creative abilities. It was Ballard, as nearly everyone knows, who fathered the "bone." It was this Frankenstein that has terrorized defenses for almost a decade.

The present Aggie mentor already amassed quite a reputation as a school coach. In 15 years at Inside, Breckenridge and San Angelo Central, he emerged with a record of 139-34.

After he became an assistant to Darrell Royal at the University of Texas that Ballard devised the "bone" attack. It was under Royal's tutelage, perhaps, that Ballard gained his administrative prowess.

For three straight years, Ballard's teams met with disaster at the hands

of his former employer. When he overcame the stigma of Texas dominance last season, Ballard appeared like the perpetual second chair musician who had finally outplayed the maestro. It may have been a sea of emotion rather than a jubilant A&M squad that carried him from the field that day.

Humble in victory, gracious in defeat, Ballard is a master diplomat in both situations. Whether on the sideline or at a speaking engagement, he maintains an air of confidence that calms those around him.

Apparently the Southwest Texas State graduate has deeply impressed the A&M former students, for an estimated \$550,000 in donations has been pledged thus far this year in support of Ballard.

Not everyone has had praise for his efforts. Ballard has been out-maligned for "losing in the clutch." Even when he wins, he draws some criticism for not winning "big enough."

Deservedly, comments to the positive far outweigh those to the negative. But Aggie fans are consistently hard to please. So Coach Ballard, what can you do for an encore?

Sport Shorts

Former Texas A&M golfer Steve Veriato had one of the best tournaments of his rookie year on the pro tour as he scored a 293 in the Western Open, good for a ninth place tie. Veriato took home \$5,000 from the Open, won by the veteran Al Geiberger. Veriato graduated from A&M in 1972 and was the Southwest Conference champion in 1971.

SIDs increase fall mailing list

The Texas A&M Sports Information staff plans to increase its mailing lists this fall to include all interested Aggie fans.

Sports Information Director Spec Gammon and Assistant Director Jim Butler will make available notes, quotes and updated statistics after each A&M game. Also included will be facts and depth charts on upcoming opponents and features on A&M players.

These releases will be mailed each Sunday of the 1976 season

and should be received by Wednesday before each game.

Cost for this service will be \$10 for 12 releases during football season and \$20 for information releases on all Aggie sports throughout the school year.

The services are payable by check to the Sports Information Office, Texas A&M University, College Station, Tex. 77843. Those interested are reminded to enclose a return address. All requests must be received by Aug. 23, 1976.

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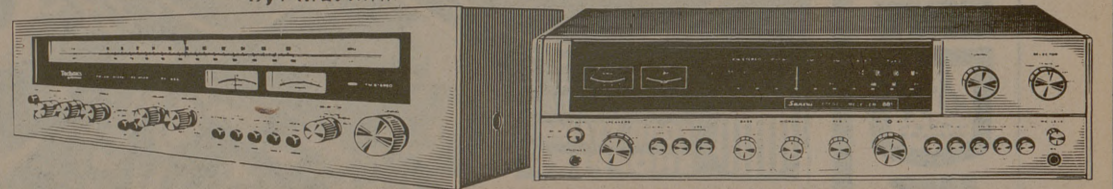
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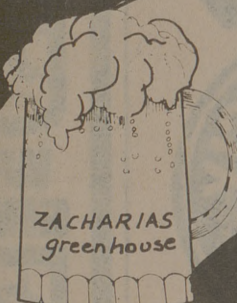
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