

Robertson says the best he's seen

Dean, Fields head up top notch front four

By PAUL MCGRATH
Battalion Staff Writer

college football." Robertson is not a man to hand out praise undeservedly, and he thinks that perhaps the only ingredient lacking from his starting quartet is a catchy nickname.

Returning at defensive tackle are a pair that makes Robertson's eyes twinkle. Seniors Edgar Fields (6-3, 253 lbs.) and Jimmy Dean (6-5, 260 lbs.) anchor a defensive line whose search and destroy missions into enemy backfields helped Texas A&M lead the nation in rushing and total defense.

At the defensive end slots will be the third senior of the front four, Tank Marshall (6-5, 255 lbs.) and junior transfer from Washington,

Eugene Sanders (6-4, 265). In a nutshell, opposing offenses will have to get by over half a ton of meanness and muscle to make progress.

"I think they'll be super," Robertson said of these four. "I know a football coach is supposed to play it down, but I can't when I'm talking about these guys."

He was highly complimentary about his group of defensive linemen, both individually and collectively.

Marshall — "He's everything you could want in a defensive lineman. Size, speed, everything."

Fields — "He's got quick feet, he's strong, he's smart and he's a phenomenal pass rusher and excellent against the rush."

Dean — "He's stronger than Fields and is a better technique ballplayer. He can play the run better than he can rush the passer. He's a darned good athlete."

Sanders — "He has great ability. He still has a lot to learn though, but once he gets our system down he should be a good one."

It has been Dean and Fields though, who have been raising the eyebrows of the talent scouts. Fields was fourth amongst the Aggie defenders in tackles and assists with 92. Dean was not far behind with 84, although he missed a pair of

games with a hand injury. Marshall had 82.

Fields, an Austin Johnston product who transferred from Navarro Junior College as a sophomore, tackled runners behind the line of scrimmage 11 times last season, including four quarterback sacks. Robertson also keeps a statistic entailing harassment of the passer. Fields topped the list with 20.

Fields has been named to several pre-season all-conference and all-America teams. All-Southwest Conference last season, Fields has been cited for his savvy and his excellent use of his hands to play off blockers.

An amateur naturalist, Fields collects plants and blossoms. Pots of every shape and size hang from his ceiling and decorate the floor of his room. He seldom knows the types of plants he keeps, just as he seldom misses his pigskin-carrying prey.

Dean carried all sorts of credentials with him when he first entered A&M. All-State, all-America, Houston area Player of the Year and so on. Recruited from Gulf area power Brazoswood, Dean has become one of the steadiest performers of the defense that allowed only three runs over 17 yards last year.

A lot of top names are gone from what was the nation's top defensive unit, a fact which many gridiron

prophets use to denote weakness in the A&M ranks. Not so, says Dean. "Sure, a lot of the big names are gone, but we still have a lot of talent here at A&M. There's also a lot of pride involved," he said.

Dean has played alongside Fields and Marshall during dozens of contests, anticipating countless numbers of snaps. He has come to know and rely upon his teammates.

"The senior season is the one they say you look forward to most. We've all had another year's experience" he said. "We have confidence in each other. If you have confidence in the people around you, it's easier for you to play—you don't have to worry about taking up the slack for someone else."

Dean is backed up by Steve Spitzzenberger (6-4, 248 lbs.) and Johnnie Donahue (6-6, 235 lbs.). Also expected to add depth is Gary Milligan (6-1, 245 lbs.). Robertson expressed concern over depth at the defensive end positions, but feels his reserves at tackle are more than adequate.

"This is the best defensive line since I've been here at A&M—the best since I've been coaching," said the Aggies' defensive mastermind.

Each member of the front four seems to fit the mold of Robertson's defensive philosophy. "The number

one thing about playing defense is reaction to the offense. It's reaction football played with great emotion and enthusiasm," he said.

"You have to have super morale. Football is a morale game, that's what it's all about. I'm not worried about alignments, stunts, blitzes—

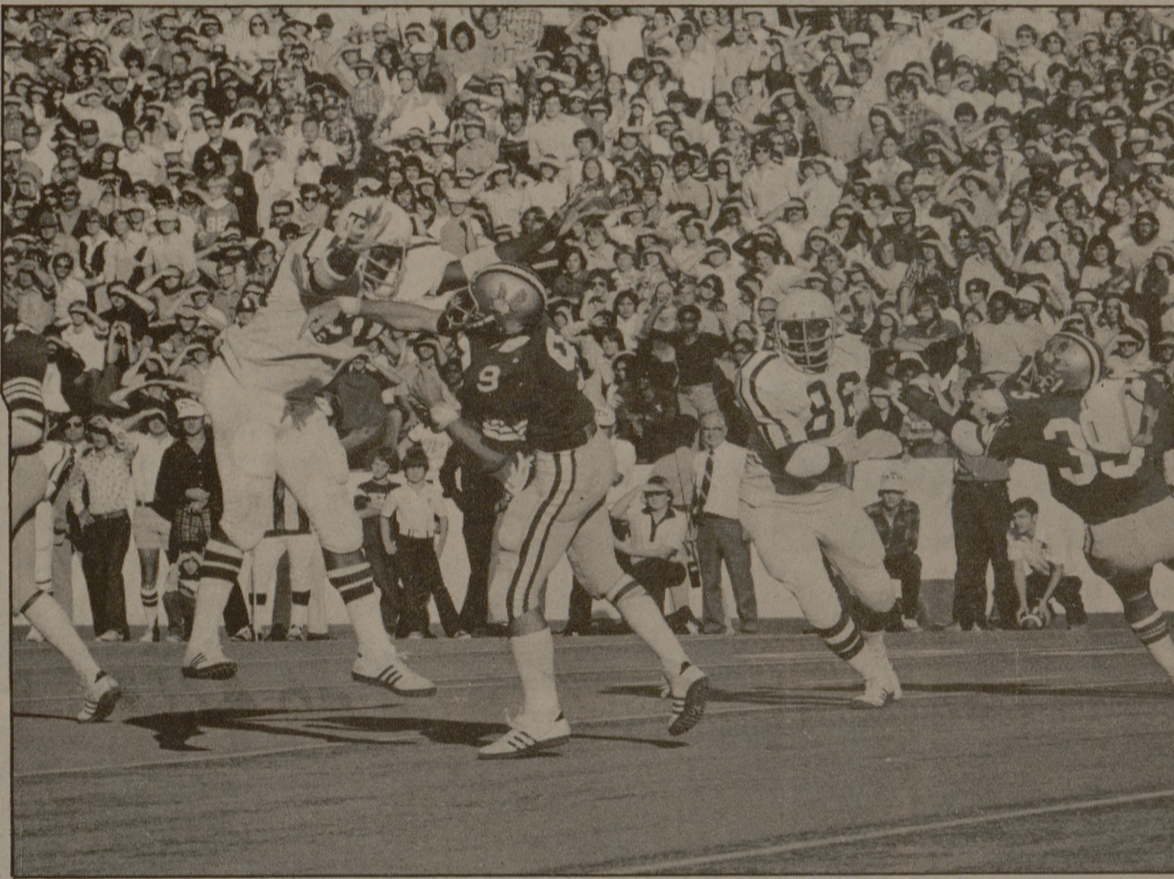
that's easy. All I'm worried about is morale.

"If they're ready, we'll pull every thing out that we have. Otherwise, we're a close-to-the-line, conservative, stereotyped football team."

Stereotyped will be an adjective easily avoided should Robertson's expectations be met.

The evolution of the 4-3 defense in college and professional football has shone new light on those behemoths of the trenches—the front four. Unlike their kinsmen on offense, defensive linemen have found a path to the limelight, usually at the expense of some quarterback or halfback. Names like the Fearsome Foursome, Domsday, the Purple People Eaters and the Steel Curtain quickly come to mind.

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Edgar Fields (90) and Tank Marshall (86) close in Rice's stellar quarterback Tommy Kramer. This pair, along with Jimmy

Dean and Eugene Sanders will anchor the Aggies' defensive line this fall.

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