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the sports

**Aggies being protected
by Donzis' flak jacket**

By KURT ALLEN
Battalion Sports Staff

Imagine that it's third down and eight and Texas A&M quarterback Mike Mosley drops back to pass. Suddenly, a 265-pound defensive lineman breaks through the line and rams his full weight into Mosley's ribs, planting Mosley firmly into the Astroturf of Kyle Field.

Despite the brutal collision, Mosley avoids injury.

He manages to get untangled from the lineman's grasp, dusts himself off, and trots back to the A&M sidelines as the punting unit comes on. What might have been a serious injury becomes only a close call thanks to a relatively new device he wears called the flak jacket.

The brainchild of Houston inventor Byron Donzis, the flak jacket first appeared last December. At that time, Houston Oilers quarterback Dan Pastorini had three broken ribs and needed protection as the Oilers headed for the AFC playoffs.

Donzis brought his as yet untested invention to Pastorini and convinced the quarterback to give it a try. It was the first test under fire for the flak jacket, but the results were very encouraging. Despite several violent hits, Pastorini sustained no further injuries, and played in three playoff games before the Oilers were eliminated by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the third game.

Pastorini's experience with the jacket started a wave of orders flowing to Donzis from around the country for the protective jacket. The Aggies' order was just one of the wave. The possibility of preventing the loss of key personnel to rib injuries prompted them to order two flak jackets before the start of the 1979 season.

Aggie trainer David Heath said the jackets were originally ordered with the Aggie quarterbacks in mind.

"Our quarterbacks do a lot of running and consequently run a greater risk of some defensive player smacking them in the ribs with his helmet," Heath said. "That sometimes is very painful as I can testify to."

"During the Baylor game, one of their defensive backs ran into me on the sideline. He hit me right in the ribs and I was sore for the next three weeks. It made it hard to get out of bed in the morning."

To call the device a jacket is a little misleading. It actually looks more like the bottom half of a vest. Covering the back, sides and parts of the lower chest, the flak jacket is held in place by shoulder straps while tight lacing keeps it secure in the front.

Incredibly lightweight, the jacket probably weighs 11 or 12 ounces according to Heath, contrary to the sales brochure's claim that it weighs six-ounces. The light weight comes from an inside layer of urethane-coated nylon air pockets attached to a poly-carbonate shield on the outside.

The shield looks much like plexiglass, only more pliable. When the shield takes a direct hit, the air pockets absorb the blow and distribute the shock away from the impact point. The jacket can absorb a direct hit from a baseball bat, and allows a player to take an impact of 800 pounds per square inch without injury.

"Generally, we've had good luck with the thing, although there have been a few problems," said Heath. "Mosley put one on during halftime of the Houston game after hurting his ribs, only to have the Cougars pull the whole thing off while making a tackle."

"Then Curtis Dickey had problems with his during the Rice game last week. After one hit, the valve that keeps the air pockets inflated broke. That seems to be the biggest design defect so far, but Byron is

working on improving the valve, and I imagine he'll have it solved before long."

The jacket that Dickey has worn since the Brigham Young game is actually a scaled-down version of the one Mosley and the other quarterbacks wear. It covers the body about 270 degrees around and gives the wearer extra lower-back protection. To give the smaller jacket as well as the larger ones more firmness, Heath has added a thin layer of foam rubber on the outside of the shield.

Having developed the design he wanted, Donzis now offers the jacket in two series and three sizes. Both the college and high school series offer small, medium and large sizes. Mosley currently wears a medium jacket which is designed for players weighing between 165 and 194 pounds.

Heath said the University ordered the first two jackets without ever having met Donzis. The first meeting with Donzis came about when Dickey needed a special guard to protect a sore shoulder before the BYU game.

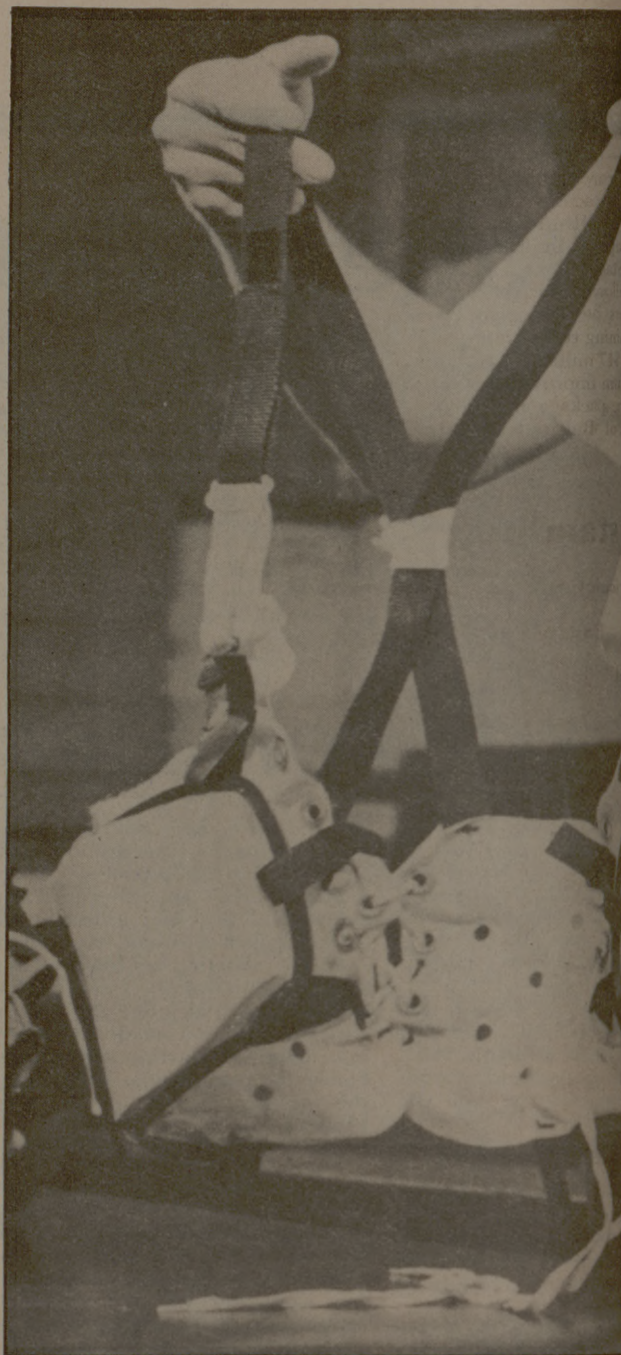
"We called Byron up and told him what we needed," Heath said. "He came here from his office in Houston and consulted with us for an hour and a half. Then he took a set of Curtis' shoulder pads back to Houston. From those, he designed a guard that covers the top of the shoulder."

Soon after, the University bought the third jacket for Dickey's lower back, and has just purchased a fourth one for receiver Mike Whitwell, who suffered cracked ribs two weeks ago.

The jackets don't come cheap though. Each one costs \$290, regardless of the size.

While he expects more players will wear the jacket in the future, Heath said he doesn't see it becoming a part of every person's equipment.

"A few players, like offensive backs and receivers do take some pretty strong rib hits, but most of the others seldom do."



The flak jacket has added a new dimension to football protection. The jacket, invented by Houston inventor Byron Donzis, has saved many a quarterback's ribs since its introduction in December of 1978. The Aggies have purchased four jackets; one for Mike Mosley, two for Curtis Dickey and one for Mike Whitwell. Battalion photo by Brian...

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