

# 1-3 Cougars look to turn it around

By KURT ALLEN  
Battalion Staff

As every coach knows, a football team must be able to concentrate on each game and execute properly if it expects to win consistently.

For some reason, the University of Houston has forgotten that basic lesson and is now relearning it the hard way. The 1-3 Cougars are off to their worst start since 1975 when they lost eight straight games in a row.

The Coogs' head coach, Bill Yeoman, is usually a calm man on the field, but it's obvious that even he is unusually frustrated by his team's abysmal performance.

His frustration is compounded by the fact the Cougars lost a milestone game for Yeoman last weekend to Baylor in Waco. The 24-12 loss was Yeoman's 200th game as Houston head coach and was the first time he has ever lost a milestone game.

The Cougars had been overwhelming picked in a *Texas Football* magazine pre-season poll to repeat as Southwest Conference Champions.

On paper, the choice seemed logical. The Coogs had either won or shared the title since joining the conference in 1976. They were blessed with incredible talent. New Houston T-shirts were even printed up proclaiming "Three out of Four Ain't Bad."

Defensive tackle Hosea Taylor went one better than that. He suggested, "Four out of Five would even be better."

Perhaps the answer to the mystery surrounding the Cougars' fall can be found by analyzing the Baylor game.

Mistakes proved to be the big difference in the Bears' first win over Houston since 1963 and their first in four conference matchups with the Cougars. Not once, but five times the Cougars coughed up the football, including the fatal fumble from quarterback Brent Chinn to senior fullback John Newhouse.

Houston had possession of the ball at its own 24-yard line when Chinn pitched to Newhouse at the 16. Newhouse never controlled the toss and the Bears' Joe Campbell recovered. On the next play, Walter Ambercrombie danced 16 yards for a touchdown, making the score 17-6 with 5:05 left in the third quarter.

Chinn later claimed responsibility for the fumble, calling it "a low pitch." But he was not the only one at fault in what was a total team failure, especially offensively. As Yeoman said, "We're just going to have to play harder. We also need more experience under our belts."

It's pretty hard to criticize Chinn at this stage. The 19-year-old found himself thrust into a pressure cooker situation when he suddenly had to start the Baylor game.

With only a week's preparation, he had to fill the shoes of senior Terry Elston who broke his wrist. Elston, by the way, is through for the season. It's a shame since he has run out of collegiate eligibility.

Anyway, the question at hand is whether the Coogs can work some magic on the drawing board and put their season back together.

There's no doubt Yeoman still has the horses to run with. He has two of the country's finest defensive tackles in Hosea Taylor (6-5, 265) and Leonard Mitchell (6-7, 271).

Taylor earned all-SWC honors last season by making 70 tackles, seven quarterback sacks and blocking a last-second field-goal attempt by Arkansas to preserve a 13-10 Houston victory. This year, he already has 27 tackles and one sack to his credit.

Meanwhile, UH coaches have been watching Mitchell, who passed up varsity basketball this year to undergo rigorous off-season weight training.

There are reports Mitchell's upper-body strength is 65 or 70 percent better than it was in the Cotton Bowl last January.

The Aggies' offensive line looked much improved against Texas Tech, but it will certainly get a more severe test against Taylor, Mitchell and Co.

Looking at the rest of the defense, Yeoman said earlier he considered this a rebuilding year.

While this may be true, the Cougars' two linebackers are putting in a credible performance. Senior Steve Bradham is leading the team with 52 tackles on the left side, followed by junior Grady Turner on the right side with 51.

By contrast, the Aggies' two best linebackers, Mike Little and Doug Carr, have 48 and 38 tackles respectively.

When the season began, it was thought the Houston veer offense would carry the team with seven starters returning. Ironically, just the opposite has been true. The Coogs are inconsistent at best and have produced an average of only 14 points per game compared with 22 points for opponents. It's no wonder they're having trouble winning.

As noted earlier, the Cougars did not expect Terry Elston to be out of action for the season. They had counted heavily on him to lead this year's offense.

However, there is still plenty of backfield talent teaming with Chinn in the form of running backs Terald Clark and David Barrett.

The number two conference rusher last year, Clark gained 844 of 1,063 yards during the final seven games, including a 167-yard performance against Texas Tech. This year, he's gained only 223 yards, but is still averaging four yards per carry.

Not only is Houston capable of running, its passing game still shows a lot of potential, as evidenced by junior split end Lonell Phea.

Phea became the first UH receiver to have two 100-yard games in receptions since Don Bass in 1975. His second six-reception game against Baylor was good for 135 yards. That included a 51-yard bomb from Chinn. Phea earlier had 132 yards against Miami-Florida.

One area Houston definitely needs help in is punting. Junior Mark Ford is only averaging 35.8 yards per kick. Even the much-maligned Aggie punting game is better than that.

In the end, the Cougars may be helped by their homefield advantage, plus the fact they've been awful lucky against the Aggies.

Houston has been deadly at home, no matter where it's played. The Coogs beat the Aggies 21-10 at Rice Stadium in 1976 and dealt a mortal wound to Emory Bellard's coaching career at Texas A&M by shutting out the Ags 33-0 at the Astrodome in 1978.

Last year, they even won their first game at Kyle Field in a last-minute 17-14 thriller.

This caution is in order for the Aggies. Saturday's game is a big contest for both teams. The final difference may very well be who is most awake and alert when the ball is teed up for a 10:30 p.m. kickoff.

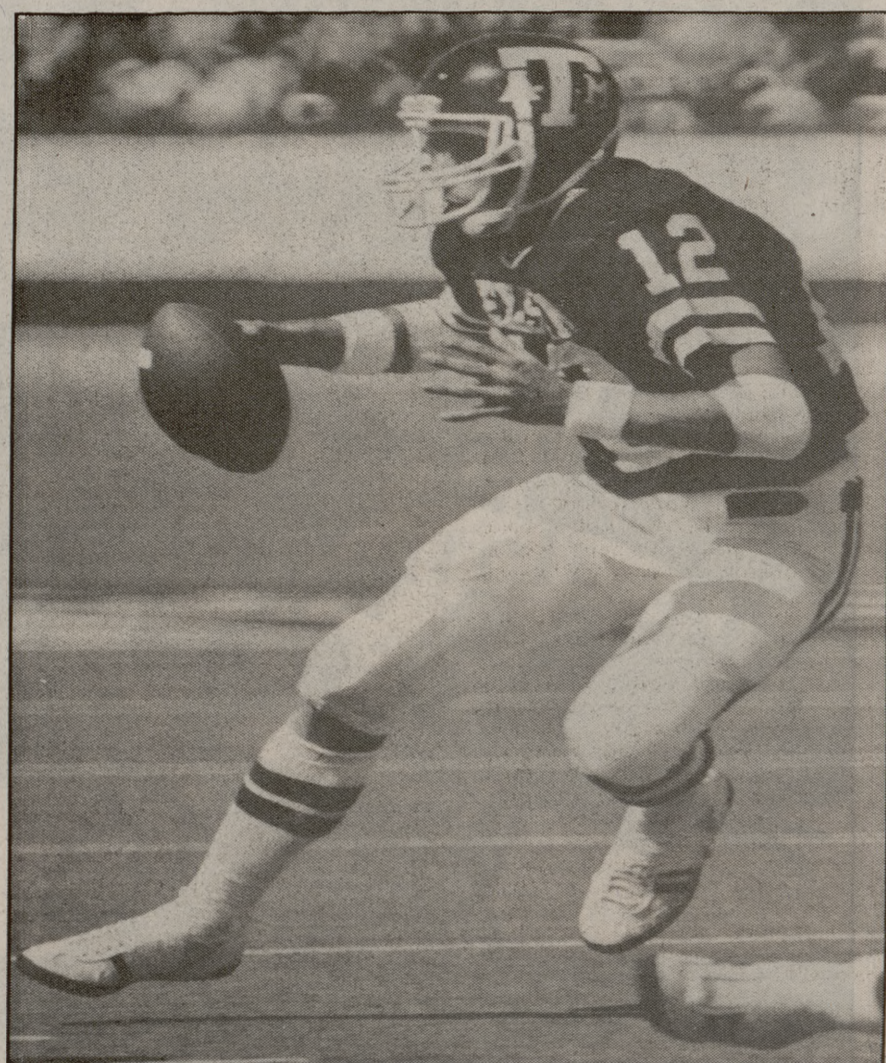


Photo by Lee Roy Leschper Jr.

A&M quarterback David Beal rolls right and readies to cut against the Tech defense in fourth quarter action Saturday. The senior quarterback scored one of his four touchdowns on the play as the Aggies won 41-21. The Ags now prepare for the 1-3 Houston Cougars, who they are scheduled to play on Saturday.

## Hogs prepare for Wichita

United Press International  
FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. — At last, Arkansas coach Lou Holtz says, the Razorbacks are on the right calendar. "Tuesday wasn't the better day," he said. "Usually, Tuesday is our better day and Saturday is our worst," he said.

The Hogs are getting ready for their game Saturday at Wichita State, and Holtz said the defense is performing well in practice but Tuesday didn't have the consistency he wants.

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## Cowboys get 'better'

United Press International  
DALLAS — It was the goal of the Dallas Cowboys to get a little better as the weeks went along this year and hopefully stay close enough to the leaders to be able to make a run at the top spot during the second half of the season.

So far they have clearly met their goal. Despite all the changes wrought on the team by retirement and injury, the Cowboys are not only close to the leaders but are, in fact, one of the leaders.

"I wouldn't have thought we would be 4-1 at this point in the season," coach Tom Landry said Tuesday. "But, then, I thought some of the teams we had to play were going to get off to a little better start."

"You've got to remember that Washington is off to slow start and Tampa Bay is off to a slow start. That's fortunate for us. If they had been as good as they were last year when they finished we probably wouldn't be 4-1."

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