

Wilson's efforts finally pay off for Ag team

By KURT ALLEN
Battalion Staff

The scene in the Memorial Stadium visitors' dressing room was typical of hundreds of winning dressing rooms that could be found around the country on any given weekend.

There was plenty of back-slapping, whooping, hollering and general hell-raising as the Texas Aggies showered and dressed following their 24-14 upset win over the University of Texas.

In the Texas A&M coaches' dressing room, the atmosphere was similar, as jubilant Aggie administrators and alumni squeezed their way through the door to offer congratulations to the triumphant staff.

But this game was more than a too-often rare win over Texas and in Austin. In many ways, the win symbolized the Aggies' long ordeal in climbing from the early season collapse back to the top of the hill.

For the man sitting in the corner of the dressing room, the triumph's meaning was clear. No longer was Texas A&M unprepared to play and unable to execute. No longer was there any doubt that its young players could deliver. And no longer was there a resignation to defeat when the team got behind.

In personal terms, looking through the eyes of Aggie Head Coach Tom Wilson, the win finally confirmed all the beliefs and convictions he had held and stood by. Less than 20 minutes after being hoisted off the sidelines on his players' shoulders, Wilson sat on the corner stool emotionally drained.

Tears welled up in his eyes and his face was flushed as he quietly tried to put things into focus. At times, with all the background frenzy, it was hard to hear what Wilson said as he spoke slowly but steadily; yet the message contained in the words was unmistakable.

"Considering all the problems and adversities that this team has faced this season, this win culminates all the things I've worked on all year," began Wilson. "I think our players now believe in the three things that I think are the most important toward winning."

"Those three things, and not in any particular order, are mental, physical and spiritual. I told them on Friday that for the first time since I've been head coach, that we were

Analysis

spiritually, mentally and physically prepared for a game and we were going to win."

Saturday capped what had been an emotional week for Wilson. It started with a rousing speech to Aggie faithful at the Bonfire, continued with the almost evangelical talk on Friday and finished with a firecracker of a pre-game pep talk on Saturday. In fact, junior linebacker Mike Little later told reporters he felt the pre-game talk was a major influence on the game's outcome.

"He was really fired up," said Little. "In fact, he lost his head. The guys liked it. I can't repeat it. But he was excited and generated enthusiasm."

Wilson said what he told his players was that with the right attitude they could win. He told them they had to know and realize that they must prepare themselves mentally, that physically they must fight for everything as nothing comes easy. But just as importantly, they must be spiritually ready as well.

"Though I'm not a deeply religious person, I think spiritually there is only one person who can beat us," said Wilson. "I know that the biggest factor in our lives is God and if you

play with spirit and to the best of your ability they you're going to win some games."

"I told this squad early this week that I had confidence we could win this football game. This team has a lot of talent but it no longer can be called young. What we've been through this season has matured all of them."

Indeed, the younger players came through with some outstanding individual performances. Sophomore Earnest Jackson had perhaps his finest all-around day ever, rushing for 79 yards and catching three passes for another 80 yards.

Freshman Kyle Stuard kept the Aggies in the game with a first-half punting average of 48.5 yards per kick, and sophomore linebacker Will Wright snuffed out the last Texas threat by picking off a Rick McIvor pass and returning the interception eight yards.

Undoubtedly, the key to the win was the Aggie defense yielding only seven points in the first half followed by some big offensive plays in the second half. Noting the great team effort, Wilson was hard put to give away the game ball.

"All of our players should get a game ball, but I gave this one to the one player who epitomizes what this team is all about and what I think a football player should be," said Wilson. "That player is quarterback David Beal."

That decision was certainly appropriate since Beal had directed the Aggies to three of their four wins this season and came within a whisker of also beating Arkansas. Against Texas, he completed 7 of 13 passes for 153 yards and one touchdown. Several times he evaded a strong Horn rush to throw big gainers to junior Mike Whitwell, Jackson and freshman Thomas Sanders.

"I think this is what we've been talking about," said Wilson. "Quit-

ters never win and winners never quit. That's part of life. Our players have learned to fight adversity. I wish we could go on playing this year, but I am looking very much toward next year and recruiting for that."

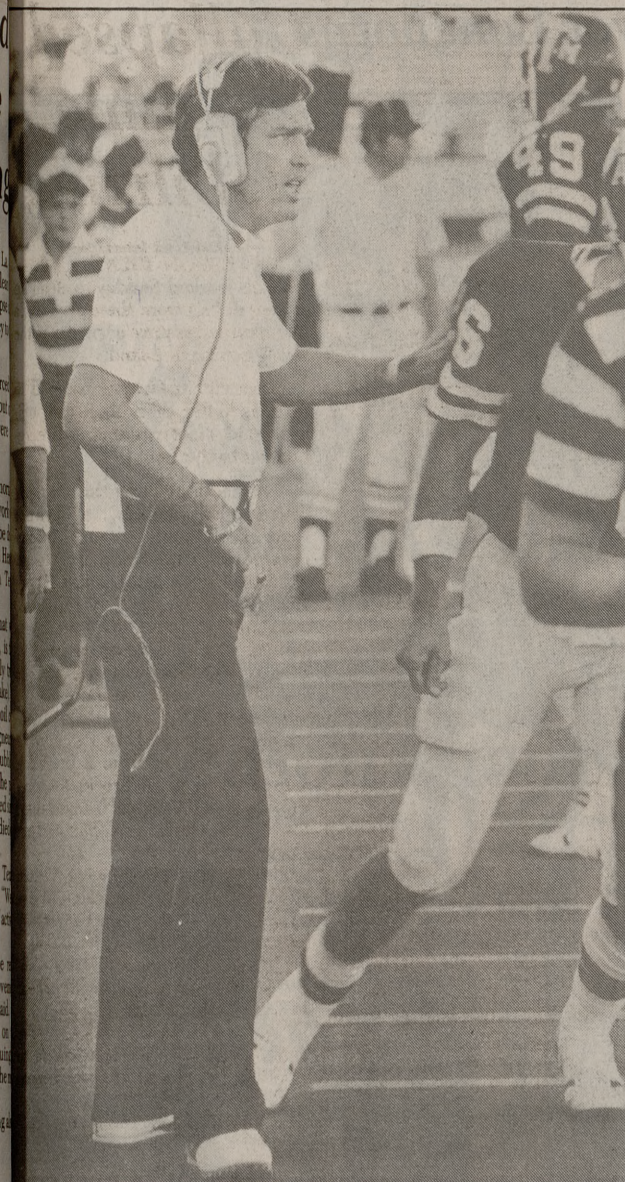
Then someone asked the obvious question: "Was this your most satisfying win ever as a head coach?"

"I don't know," said a weary Wilson as he paused for thought. "I guess you could say I just like to win."

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