

Sports



Photo by Michele Rowland

offensive tackle Tommy Robison (77) plows into sophomore safety Steve Box (36) during a blocking drill in Wednesday's practice. Robison, a sophomore, is part of an offensive line that has cleared the way for the Aggies.

Linemen play important part in team's offensive success

By GAYE DENLEY
Battalion Staff

Southwest Conference statisticians would never suspect that the Aggies are struggling in their quest for a bowl bid.

A mediocre 5-4 season record and a throw rug overshadow an explosive Texas offense that ranks first in the conference in average yards per game (5.4), second in total passing yards (181 yards per game), and third in overall offense (388 yards per game).

In addition, Aggie running backs Johnny Hector and Ernest Johnson are tied for second in average yards per carry at 5.3. Only the Dickerson of league-leading Southern Methodist University, with 5.6 yards per carry, has a higher average.

Instrumental to the Aggies' most balanced offensive attack in years is an offensive line that has paved the path for the outstanding performances of Hector, Jackson, and junior quarterback Gary Kubiak.

"The production that we've had since we've been together has been a balance-wise between run and pass. It has shown that the offensive line is doing a pretty good job, because we're asking them to do a lot of different things," head coach Tom Wilson said.

Bob Stanley, in his eighth year as offensive line coach for the Aggies, said Texas A&M has "an excellent offensive line of scrimmage" this year.

"As a group, as far as being smart, competitive, and talented, this is about our best offensive line I've coached here," Stanley said.

A new strategy that separates the linemen into two different units that square off on either side of senior center David Bandy has enabled them to do a better job of protecting Kubiak and opening holes for Hector and Jackson, he said.

The brawny strongside unit of guard Aubrey Raiford, tackle Tommy Robison and tight end Mark Lewis, and the smaller

quickside unit of tackle Bryan Dausin and guards Kent Adams and Flint Risien, who share starting honors, lend a versatile, yet specialized look to the line.

"We've got some kids that are larger than others, and we've got some kids that are more agile, but not as large," Stanley said. "So we decided to get our larger kids together on one side, and get our quicker, more agile kids together on one side."

The strongside concentrates on power plays that involve "just mashing people off the ball," while the quickside works on maneuvers that require more finesse, like pass blocking, screens, and draw plays, he said.

Bandy, in his second season as the starting center, said a healthy starting lineup has also been a factor in the continued progress of the line. Injuries prevented last year's lineup from working together enough to become a unit, he said, while this year's linemen "have stuck together through thick and thin."

"There's just an abundance of talent on the line, and what they do for our backs is incredible," Bandy added. "What we're doing

for the option play is making the cuts — last year, the cuts and holes weren't always there."

Though improved, the offensive line is not perfect, Stanley said, and he credited Kubiak with taking up the slack when the line doesn't hold up. "In offensive line play, you have to realize that you're not going to be dead perfect every time — too many things happen," he said. "Somebody's going to get on the fringes and get loose every once in awhile, and the thing that really helps you on that is you've got a gutsy kid like Gary Kubiak who's going to step up in there, and throw the ball, and take his licks. And that's the thing that really helps our offensive linemen."

The mark of an excellent line — a mark that the Aggies are approaching — is the ability to execute when the defense knows exactly what the next play will be, he said.

"The thing you work on all the time is let them know we're throwing, and now protect the passer," he said.

While Wilson is pleased with the on-the-field performance of the linemen, he said he is equally

impressed with the leadership of seniors Bandy and Adams.

"The thing that has been so pleasing is the leadership of Bandy and Kent Adams, and I think it's rubbed off on all of them," he said. "We are to the point now where everybody's assuming that leadership role, and not just a few of them."

Stanley agreed: "Leadership in football is performance. As kids see you perform and see you execute well, they develop a degree of confidence in you, and that confidence turns into closeness."

He cited Robison, a sophomore, as an example of leadership by performance. "Tommy Robison is a heck of a leader, and is basically a quiet person," Stanley said. "But he has executed and performed outstandingly this year. And as his teammates watch those films and watch practice and so forth and see, 'That guy is good,' then they develop a great deal of confidence in him."

Most of the line, including Robison, will return next year, much to Wilson's delight. Dausin and Risien are juniors, and Robison, Raiford and Lewis are all sophomores.

Cougars, Sooners in Sun?

United Press International
HOUSTON — The Houston Cougars and Oklahoma apparently have confirmed a deal to play in the Sun Bowl Dec. 26, two newspapers reported Thursday.

tween the Rose, Holiday and Sun. "We looked toward Houston when we knew our deal in the PAC-10 wasn't working out," Fol-

mer said. "Neither Oklahoma nor UH, both 5-3-1 with two games to play, has been to the Sun Bowl before."

"We will have our representatives in Norman and in Houston and nowhere else," Sun Bowl Selection Chairman John Folmer told the Houston Chronicle and The Houston Post.

UH Athletic Director Cedric Dempsey said that nothing is certain until bowl bids go out Saturday, but he was optimistic about the Sun Bowl.

"We can't say anything definite, but they've expressed to us that we are still in their picture. But I don't know that we're the only ones," Dempsey said.

The Sun Bowl was expected to pay \$350,000 per team and provide national exposure on CBS-TV.

The Sun reportedly had been hoping to match a PAC-10 team against Oklahoma, but that deal fell through because a three-way deal could not be worked out be-

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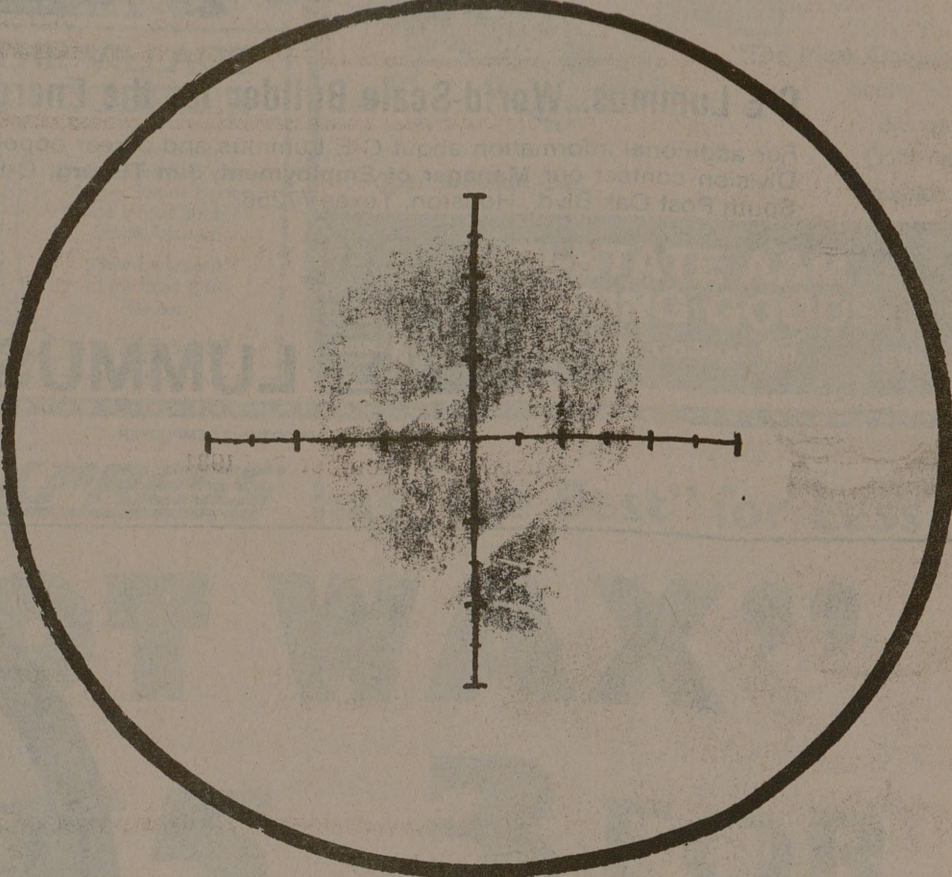
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