

The Battalion Sports

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A 'Pless' for the alumni

High school coach trading whistle for cleats in alumni game

by John Wagner

Battalion Staff
Gary Pless coaches football track at Alief Elsik High School, something he's done for the past six years.

As a coach, he's teaching young athletes the finer points of playing on a defensive line. And when he isn't coaching, he's teaching aspiring drivers the finer points of their education.

On May 1, Pless will trade the blue and white of the Texas Aggies for the maroon and white of the Texas A&M.

Pless, 28, is a former student at Texas A&M. And not only is he a former Texas A&M football player. Pless will return to Aggieland May 1 with 170 coaches, players, officials, and trainers for the first Texas A&M alumni game against the Aggie varsity.

Pless came to Texas A&M to play football under Gene Stallings in 1971, and played his last years under Emory Bellard. After graduating in May 1975, he went to Alvin High School, where he coached for a year. From Alvin, it was on to Elsik, and he's been there ever since. Pless says he's excited about

the chance to participate in the alumni game.

"I was really honored when I was selected to play," he said.

"Aggie spirit was the main reason I went to Texas A&M. The traditions, the spirit, the fans — that was all important to me. It seemed to me that when I visited the campus, there was a unity there that other schools just didn't have." — Gary Pless, former Texas A&M football player.

"Being a coach, I had kind of lost contact with the University. I hadn't been back to many football games, because we work on weekends.

"I'm looking forward to seeing a lot of the players that I went to school with, and seeing some of

my old coaches," Pless said. "It's also an excellent opportunity to meet some of the players and coaches they are honoring at the game."

Pless learned of the plans for the alumni game while attending a football clinic in Houston. Aggie coach Paul Register and Bellard were there also, and Register asked Pless if he was interested in putting on his cleats one more time.

"I didn't know anything about the alumni game at all, and when he asked me to play, I thought he was joking," Pless said. "Then I realized he was serious, and I said yes."

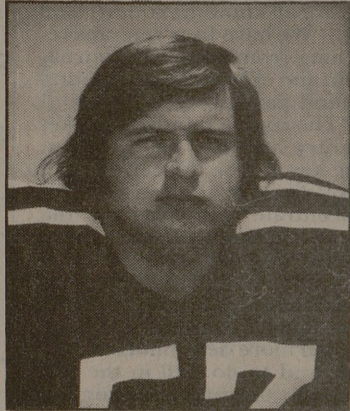
A week later, Pless received a letter listing those players who had accepted the invitation to play. The list included own name.

Getting ready to play football again isn't easy, Pless said. He has been lifting weights and running, but he isn't sure he'll survive the game.

"All the other coaches at Elsik are coming up to see the game," Pless said. "And I'll probably need them to carry me back home when it's over."

Pless says that attending Texas A&M was an easy decision for him.

"Aggie spirit was the main



Gary Pless

reason I went to Texas A&M," he said. "The traditions, the spirit, the fans — that was all important to me. It seemed to me that when I visited the campus, there was a unity there that other schools just didn't have."

And Pless tries to instill those qualities in his players today. Teaching the virtues of hard work and perseverance is easier when one is an Aggie, Pless said.

"When you are associated with a place that only accepts success, you are more believable," he said.

Pless said his fondest memory of Texas A&M was the camaraderie between the members of his class that stayed together through four years of football. Pless and his freshman class were recruited by Stallings, and Bellard took over in December of the same year.

"I'm not sure how many of us started, I think about 45, but there were only about 17 that stuck it out," he said. "The closeness that we got by staying in football is something I'll always remember."

Although Pless has never met Aggie head coach Jackie Sherrill, he said the hiring of Sherrill

touched a nerve with him.

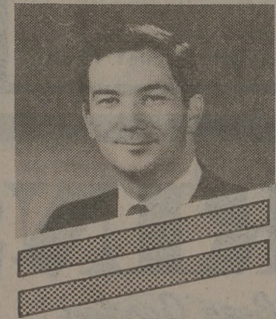
"I'm glad that we went out and got a quality man," he said. "I guess I'm biased because I'm a coach, however, because I thought it was a very unprofessional way of firing Coach Tom Wilson."

"If the Aggies win this year, the people that did the hiring and firing are going to say they

did the right thing. I think the Aggies will be successful this year regardless of who is coaching."

Not to take anything away from Sherrill, however, he said.

"I don't know Coach Sherrill, but I know he is very professional. Anybody who's been groomed by Bear Bryant has got to be good."



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Aggies must win 2 of 3 to host SWC tournament

by Denise S. Sechelski

Battalion Staff
The weather forecast for Friday and Saturday is good, but coach Tom Chandler said he thinks the forecast for the Texas A&M baseball team is more hopeful.

The Aggies begin a three-game series Saturday with the Baylor Bears that will determine whether or not Texas A&M hosts the Southwest Conference tournament.

A tournament berth is at

stake," Chandler said. "We're aware of that. If we win, we'll be in it. We'll be trying to play well so we can get it here."

The Aggies must win two of three games from the Bears to finish among the top four teams in the conference and be eligible to play in the post-season tournament. Texas, Houston, and Arkansas are in the top three positions and are assured places in the SWC tournament.

If the Aggies make the tour-

namment, it will be held on Pat Olsen Field at Texas A&M. If the Aggies lose more than one against the Bears, the tournament goes to Arkansas.

Chandler says the team will try to put thoughts of Olsen Field and conference tournaments out of mind when it travels to Waco Saturday.

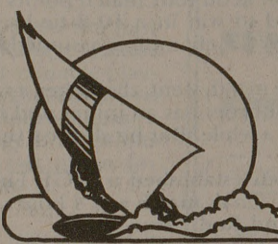
"Baylor has a good team, but our team is ready to play," Chandler said. "We're coming off a good series with Texas

Tech. We played really well against them, and we're just hoping we can continue to play good ball."

The Aggies' SWC record on the year is 8-9, and the Bears have a 7-8 record going into the series. Baylor is tied for fifth place in the conference standings with Texas Tech.

The series opener with the Bears was scheduled for Friday, but the game was canceled because of rainy weather.

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