

Aggies' secondary woes may disappear in SWC

So the Aggie defense needed a little practice against the pass.

Fine. The Aggies shipped in some good sparring partners, didn't they? Flutie and company of Boston College, the duo of Jackson and Hopkins of UT-Arlington and the ever-efficient Matt Dunigan of Louisiana Tech all passed with flying colors.

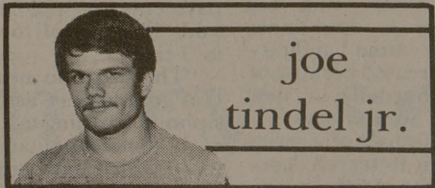
Together, these guys managed to unload the ball 126 times on the Aggie defense, which is fine when we consider the old cliché "practice makes perfect."

But it seems unlikely that Coach Jackie Sherrill figured those opponents would actually catch 71 of those passes for almost 1,000 yards — in three games.

So much for practice. That's all over now, and this weekend will mark the start of that tough Southwest Conference struggle the Aggies were hoping to be prepared for.

Some may be predicting a gloomy outcome for the Maroon and White. But they're caught up in the apparently negative statistics. They need to read the fine print.

In the first place, anybody in the SWC who needs to pass as much as Louisiana Tech and UT-Arlington did is in big trouble. Unless you're Brigham Young, it's unlikely you can win many games



joe tindel jr.

without some kind of running game to keep defenses honest.

Many teams throw the ball simply because they can't move it on the ground or because they're way behind. Granted, some throw it because they're good at it, like Boston College. But who's going to count the Aggies out because they lost to a team that tied defending national champion Clemson?

Second, the fact that the Aggies are 2-1 right now instead of something unthinkable like 0-3 has to be a positive sign. Opponents are averaging only 92 yards a game on the ground against the Aggies. That's why they're passing, and any team — especially one with a Flutie or a Dunigan at the helm — is going to complete passes when it launches the ball all night long.

Yes, the Aggies still need to work on secondary play, and yes, 994 yards passing is a bit much to surrender in three

games. There's no debating that. But Sherrill has come up with an observation that many critics may be forgetting:

If a team can play poorly and still win, there's got to be hope.

A big chunk of that passing yardage can probably be attributed to something few people consider. When a team is ahead by some absurd margin like 30 points, it's only natural (though not wise) for the defense to relax a little. And it doesn't take much relaxing in the secondary for a receiver to slip past a defender into the open.

As for the 126 passes thrown the Aggies' way thus far, it seems only logical to assume the secondary has learned a thing or two about pass defense. If they haven't learned it on the field yet, they certainly have enough related film footage to look at the mistakes in more detail and make the necessary corrections.

But as obvious as it sounds, as long as the Aggie offense generates more points than the defense surrenders, it shouldn't matter whether the secondary allows 50 or 500 yards passing.

Of course, it's unlikely the offense will always jump out to a big lead. That's why defensive improvement is a must.

But improvement may not be as far away as it seems. Sherrill's players might prove that the deficiency in the secondary was just a passing thing.

Boren may miss Saturday's game

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. — Arkansas defensive tackle Phillip Boren may miss Saturday's Southwest Conference opener with Texas Christian due to a trained knee sustained during the Mississippi game, Razorback coach Lou Holtz says.

"He has hurt the same knee before," Holtz said Monday. "It looks like he will be out for a while. He has a lot of pain."

Holtz said tackle Earl Buckingham has been playing well as Boren's backup and said freshmen Jim Kingsby, Rodney Beachum and Bobby King would need to improve their play to provide depth in the interior line.

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Cards assured of division title with 4-2 victory

United Press International
Willie McGee hit an inside-the-park, three-run homer in the first inning Monday night to lead the St. Louis Cardinals to a National League East pennant-clinching 4-2 victory over the Montreal Expos.

The Cardinals' win, combined with Philadelphia's 8-1 loss to Chicago, gave St. Louis its first NL East pennant since the league went to two divisional play in 1969.

"I thought we had a good chance to win it in spring training," Herzog said. "I can't get excited too much any more, but it's always nice to win."

After a rain delay of 63 minutes, Ken Oberkfell hit a one-out double in the first inning and scored on a single by Dane Berg. After loser Bill Gullickson, 2-13, issued a walk to Darrell Porter, McGee hit a line drive to left center Expos' center fielder Andre Dawson missed on an attempted shoestring catch.

By the time the ball was rewed home, McGee slid in safely for his fourth homer of the year to make it 4-0 and help Dave

LaPoint improve his record to 9-3.

LaPoint went 5½ innings and gave up six hits while Bruce Sutter got his 36th save.

The Cardinals last won the NL pennant in 1968, the year before the league split into two divisions.

In other games, Cincinnati stopped Los Angeles, 6-1, Atlanta got by San Francisco, 7-0, Chicago defeated Philadelphia, 8-1, New York downed Pittsburgh, 4-1, and Houston beat San Diego, 7-3.

In the American League, it was: California 3, Kansas City 2; Seattle 8, Chicago 4 in the first game, then Chicago 4, Seattle 1 in the nightcap; New York 10, Boston 3; and Texas 4, Oakland 1.

REDS 6, DODGERS 1 — At Los Angeles, Mario Soto tossed a five-hitter and the Reds punched out five consecutive singles to score four runs in the fourth to hand the Dodgers' their sixth straight loss and dropped them into a first-place tie in the NL West.

BRAVES 7, SAN FRANCISCO 0 — At San Francisco, veteran knuckleballer Phil Niekro pitched a two-hitter for his first shutout of the season and Chris Chambliss drove in three runs with a double and a sacrifice fly to pace the Braves into a tie with Los Angeles.

ASTROS 7, PADRES 3 — At San Diego, Alan Ashby hit a home run from each side of the plate and drove in four runs to lead the Astros. Vern Ruhle, pitching in relief of rookie Frank DiPino, won his ninth game of the season against 13 losses.

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