

Twelfth Man kickoff team an idea that could backfire

Sept. 3, 1983. 6 p.m. Kyle Field. A time bomb is waiting to explode.

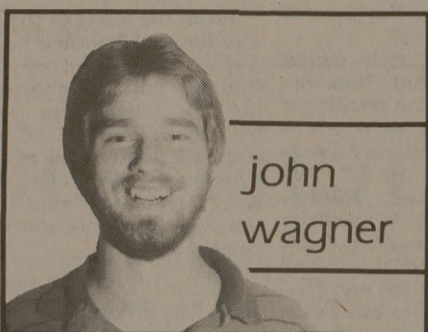
Texas A&M head coach Jackie Sherrill's brainchild, the Twelfth Man kickoff team, takes the field for the first time. Their opponent? The California Golden Bears. The ball is teed up, kicked off and the countdown begins.

An unidentified Golden Bear returns the ball in his own end zone, veers to the left, gets a block at the 20-yard line and sprints down the sideline for a touchdown. No one even gets close to him. The Bears lead 6-0.

California head coach Joe Kapp stands on the sideline, a huge grin on his face. He can't wait for the next kickoff...

It was born in November, the product of a coach getting involved with the student body. It was announced a short time later, and caused a slight uproar, if there is such a thing. And now, as it moves toward reality, there is concern that the Twelfth Man kickoff team may be a mistake.

The group — a combination of cadets and non-cadets, picked from the student body and assigned to cover Aggie kickoffs at all home football



John Wagner

games — has captured the imagination of every person who ever said "I can do that."

It has been the subject of intense media attention, a cute feature story of a cute idea. The writers and photographers and camera crews all trudge over to Kyle Field to ask a few questions, to take a few pictures and all is forgotten — at least for now. One almost can hear the folks in their living rooms saying: "Look what those Aggies are doing now! Jackie's lettin' boys who aren't even football players cover kickoffs!"

Perhaps the scenario above is a bit far-fetched, a bit too Hollywood to believe. Maybe those guys can run and tackle and hit. Maybe Sherrill is right when he says the team will work just fine. Maybe the Aggies will finish the season in November without one kickoff being run back for a touchdown. But what if they don't?

What if the whole idea backfires? What if the cute story suddenly goes sour? Is there a way to back out in mid-season, to save face and protect pride if a tradition-come-to-life falls apart right in front of our eyes?

The idea of a Twelfth Man kickoff team — regular students taking part in a game normally reserved for highly recruited, much-pampered athletes — is a good one, if it works. But how great the odds?

Publicity is a two-way street — it can be bad as well as good. And plenty of people are hanging around who will be more than happy to poke fun at the Aggies when things go wrong. Need an example?

Sherrill was still at Pittsburgh when an Aggie decided to run onto Kyle Field, complete with saber, to protect his home turf. No doubt he heard about it, though. Everyone from Johnny

Carson to your hometown paper mentioned it, most in very unflattering terms.

Need another example? How about last season's most fashionable Aggie joke — football? Sherrill was here for that one, and the publicity his hiring created seemed laughable when the team struggled to a 5-6 record.

Add to that all the hirings and firings and misfortunes that have plagued athletics here for the past several years and you realize Aggies shouldn't be sticking their necks out again. It's a good way to get them cut off.

Texas A&M students are tired of the football season being something they have to suffer through. They are tired of seeing their school laughed at and ridiculed. They are tired of athletics in a fishbowl — the Aggies struggle on as the media and the nation look in and snicker.

It doesn't matter that the idea of the kickoff team was conceived innocently, or that there are good intentions behind it. It still poses a threat. And it would be a shame if the Texas A&M student body — after all these years of standing at football games — had to ask the Twelfth Man kickoff team to sit down.

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(continued from page 11)

continued to unfold. Texas A&M, once thought to be one of the top defensive teams in the conference, committed seven errors in the nightcap. What's more, the Aggies dropped to eight place in conference.

Perhaps the only sign of a

possible revival were the strong bats of Kevin Smith, Tony Metoyer and Mike Scanlon. Smith and Metoyer finished the nightcap with two-for-four performances while Scanlon slapped two doubles in a two-for-five day.

The Aggies have a chance to try and regroup Wednesday

when they travel to San Antonio for an exhibition game against the San Antonio Dodgers. The next conference series for Texas A&M will be Friday and Saturday in Lubbock against the red-hot Texas Tech Red Raiders. Tech won two of three games this weekend from the third-ranked Houston Cougars.

Astros defeat UH Cougars 3-2 in exhibition baseball

United Press International HOUSTON — Kevin Bass snapped a scoreless tie in the seventh to lead the Houston Astros to a 3-2 victory over the University of Houston in an exhibition baseball game Sunday night.

Bass singled in the seventh and Bill Doran drove in two runs in the same inning to give the Astros a 3-0 lead.

The Cougars scored its two in the ninth against Julio Solano, who hit one batter and walked

three.

Bob Knepper, who gave up only one hit in six innings, was credited with the win. Rayner Noble, who allowed only one hit before retiring in the seventh, was the loser.

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