

Non-conference opponents have Aggies worried

A&M scheduled to play Cowboys, Indians and Golden Bears

by John Wagner
Sports Editor

Of all the lessons learned by Texas Aggie football players last season, perhaps the most important was taught by a young sophomore from Natick, Mass.

To be sure, head coach Jackie Sherrill and his staff spent the season drilling the squad in both fundamentals and flashiness, but neither had as much impact as the 60 minutes of football magic Boston College quarterback Doug Flutie displayed in the Aggies' opening game.

Flutie completed 18 of 26 passes for 346 yards and three touchdowns, leading the Eagles to a stunning 38-16 upset victory. The apparent ease in which Flutie moved the Eagles' offense left the crowd of 55,177 — not to mention the Aggies themselves — with a severe case of defensive doubt.

But this is not a story without a moral. If the Aggies learned anything in 1982, it is not to take any opponent lightly. In the case of Boston College, the Aggies thought nothing could spoil Sherrill's nationally televised debut as A&M's head man. Flutie showed them the error of such thoughts.

A&M players vow not to be so foolish when they host the California Golden Bears Saturday — the first of three non-conference games. It is not easy to forget the harsh lessons of yesterday, but don't count on the Aggies making it to Southwestern Conference play without a blemish in the loss column. In fact, despite what appears (on paper) to be a throw-away game in Arkansas State, this may turn into one of the toughest non-conference schedules the Aggies have ever played.

On the surface, there might be reason for the Aggies to take a light-hearted approach to the non-conference portion of the season. A&M's non-conference opponents combined for a 16-15-2 record in 1982, and only Cal finished the year with a winning record (the Golden Bears went 7-4).

But looking deeper, it's easy to see why California and Oklahoma State, and to a lesser extent, Arkansas State, have the Aggies worried. All three schools have talented offensive personnel returning, a fact that could translate into long evenings for the A&M defense.

To begin with, the Aggies have to be concerned about Cal's Gale Gilbert, a 6-3 junior quarterback with two years of playing experience. Gilbert hit 54 percent of his passes in 1982 en route to 1,796 yards and 12 touchdowns. Shades of Doug Flutie? Maybe so.

Cal coach Joe Kapp says Gilbert is a winner.

"There's nobody better in the Pac-10," says Kapp. "Gale was a solid quarterback last year, but he has matured now and this season he will start to excel."

Gilbert has a favorite target in all-America tight end David Lewis, a 6-4, 240-pounder. Lewis caught 54 passes for 715 yards in '82, including six for touchdowns.

But Lewis wasn't the only Cal player catching Gilbert's passes last season. With Lewis double-teamed much of time, Cal's two starting wide receivers caught 77 passes between them. Although both graduated, the Golden Bears should have adequate replacements in junior Rance McDougald and senior Andy Bark.

The Aggies are aware the Golden Bears won't hibernate when they hit College Station. And they say they're just as aware that a win against Cal could be the springboard for a very successful season.

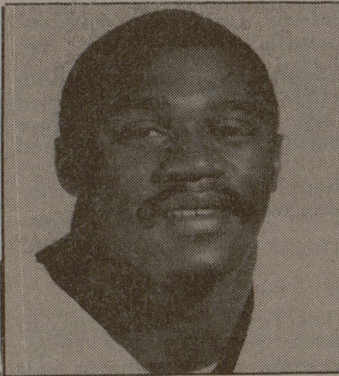
A&M defensive end Ray Childress says last year's opening loss to Boston College is on everyone's mind.

"I think (the loss) had a definite effect on our season. It hurt our confidence, and made us doubt ourselves.

"We know California's gonna be a big part of our season. To be successful, we're gonna have to beat California."

"Obviously you want to get off to a great start," says A&M quarterback John Mazur. "Unfortunately, half the teams in the nation won't. We're just gonna have to fight like the dickens to be on the winning side."

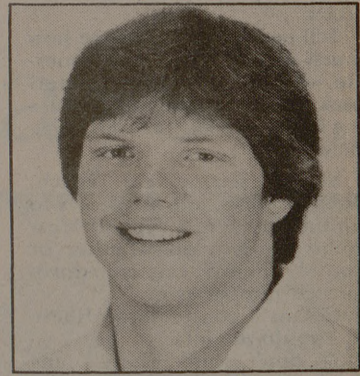
The one game A&M may have trouble getting excited about is Arkansas State. With Cal out of the way and OSU up next, the Indians may find the Aggies absent from the warpath. That could be a mistake, however, as



OSU's Ernest Anderson led '82 NCAA rushers



QB Tim Langford returns to give ASU stable attack



Cal's Gale Gilbert threw 12 TD passes in 1982

eight offensive veterans, including the entire offensive line, return.

Arkansas State may be a small school — its enrollment is a few hundred shy of 8,000 — but it doesn't always act like one. The Indians are used to being underdogs, considering last season's road games against Mississippi St. and Alabama. And quarterback Tim Langford, who accounted for 756 yards of total offense out of the Indians' wishbone attack, is back this year, along with No. 2 quarterback Greg Grant.

Indian coach Larry Laceywell explains the situation.

"Timmy Langford is a better player than people give him credit for, and I won't be surprised if he has a super season. But we'll remain a two-quarterback team because of the physical beating quarterbacks take in the wishbone."

Laceywell says he expects Langford and Grant to throw the ball more in 1983.

"We haven't had any trouble running the ball, but we've been so predictable that opponents have been able to stack their defenses against us.

"We feel we've got to throw the football more to make our running game more effective."

And last (but usually first, because of his speed) is Oklahoma State's Ernest Anderson, the Cowboys' all-America running back and the NCAA's 1982 rushing leader with 1,877 yards. Anderson was so spectacular last season he has a three-page spread in the 1983 Cowboy

media guide, all to himself.

The man OSU's linemen call "Ernie" rushed for 200 yards or more in a single game four times last season, and he hit the 1,000-yard mark after the fifth game, only the fourth back in NCAA history to accomplish that feat.

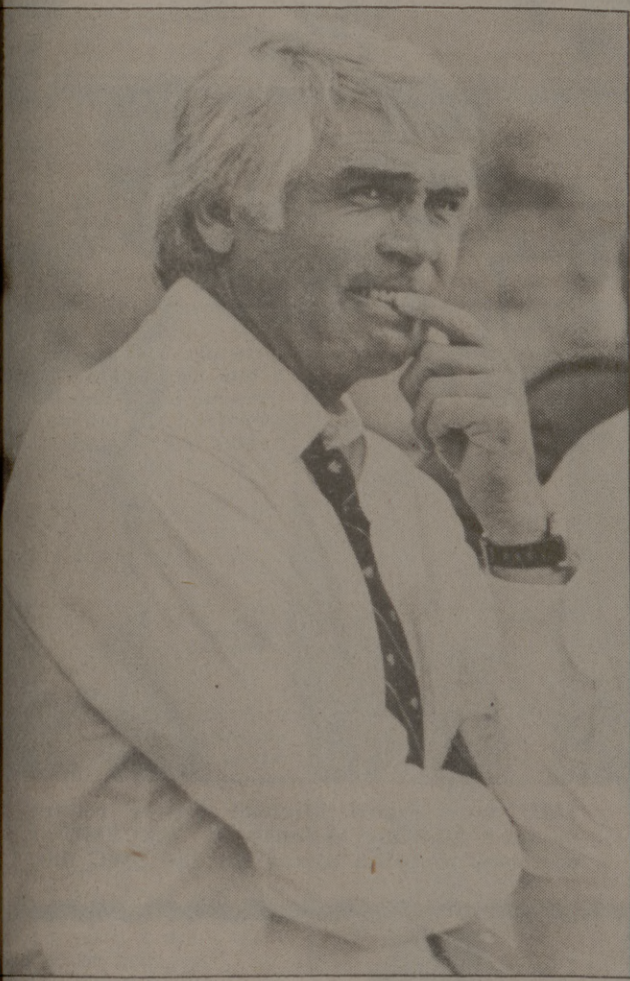
"Anytime, any game, any crucial play ... I can feel confident when Ernest has the ball in his hands," says Cowboy coach Jimmy Johnson. "He has outstanding balance — that's his asset as much as anything. He gets knocked around from all angles but never loses his balance. He

just doesn't go down easy."

Gilbert, Langford and Anderson have got to have A&M defensive players praying, especially when you consider the Aggies gave up over 400 yards a game last season.

"I've heard some very, very good things about Cal and Oklahoma State," says Mazur. "They're gonna come out and play their butts off, and we've got to be ready for them."

If they are, give the Aggies credit for a lesson well learned. And if they're not — well, just say Doug Flutie tried his best.



California head coach Joe Kapp is hoping Golden Bear quarterback Gale Gilbert can reach his potential in '83.

Opponent Quick Facts

California

Nickname — Golden Bears
Conference — Pac-10
1982 record — 7-4

Arkansas State

Nickname — Indians
Conference — Southland
1982 record — 5-6

Oklahoma State

Nickname — Cowboys
Conference — Big 8
1982 record — 4-5-2

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