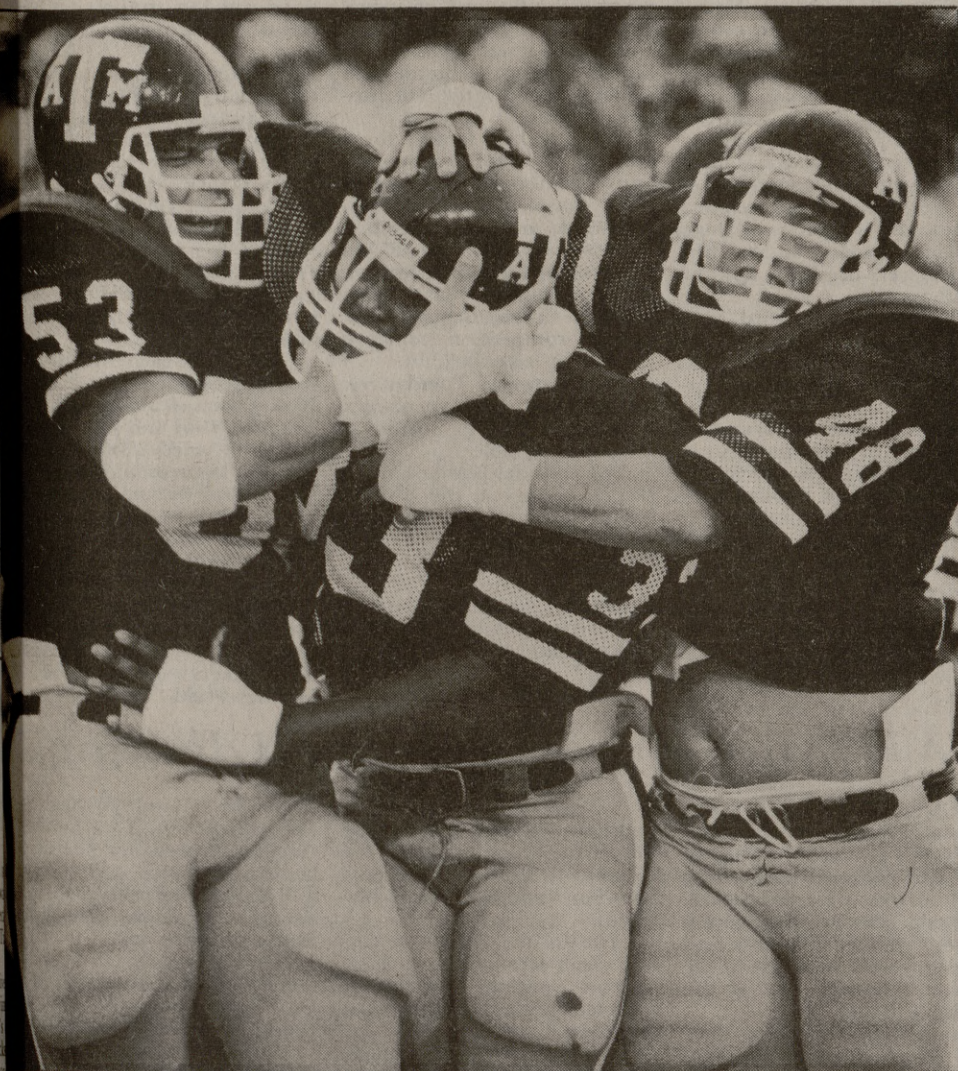


Texas A&M

The Battalion Sports

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Aggie end Ray Childress (left) and linebackers Jerry Bullitt and Greg Berry have been instrumental

in A&M's defensive turnaround, defensive coordinator and linebacker coach R.C. Slocum says.

Gettin' tough

Defensive turnaround pleases Aggie coaches

by John Wagner
Battalion Staff

There's no escaping the truth. The year 1982 wasn't a good one for the Texas Aggies, especially when it came to stopping the other team. Quite simply, the Aggies didn't.

A&M's defense was an 11-man disaster area — as solid as Swiss cheese, as sturdy as wet toilet paper. Opponents ran up 400 yards of offense without breaking a sweat. Words like lame, limp and just plain bad became everyday adjectives used to describe the Aggies when they didn't have the football.

That, however, was the old days.

These are the new days. This Aggie defense stops the Houston Cougars three times on fourth-and-one, holds the Baylor Bears to 246 yards of total offense and turns in seven quarters of shutout football in the last three games, giving up only two touchdowns in that same span.

This defense is currently ranked No. 3 in the nation against the pass and has given up just one touchdown pass and 76 total points since the season began six games ago.

That's the kind of defense needed to be successful in the Southwest Conference — head-knocking, bone-breaking, earth-shaking defense. R.C. Slocum knows that, and he says the Aggie defensive unit is not too far from being where it needs to be.

Slocum is A&M's defensive coordinator and linebacker coach. As could be expected, last season wasn't a particularly special time for him. Attitude problems and a lack of speed at crucial positions hurt the Aggies again and again, and Slocum and A&M coach Jackie Sherrill were determined to put an end to the bloodbath.

Enter the 3-4 defense. And Billy Cannon at linebacker. And

the play of a rejuvenated Keith Guthrie. And Ray Childress back at end. And a more-experienced Jerry Bullitt. And Greg Berry. And Jeff Paine. And freshman Rod Saddler.

Get the picture? A&M's defensive success has been a team effort.

"We've got a group of guys who play together and play hard", Slocum says. "There seems to be a better chemistry between these players than we had last year."

"There's a bond there, and they don't fall apart when things get rough."

The Aggies gave up 403 yards per game in 1982, placing them last in the SWC in total defense. A&M's opponents weren't picky — they piled up yardage both through the air and on the ground, averaging 204.6 yards per game passing and 198.4 yards per game rushing. The reason, A&M coaches believed, was a lack of quickness. Their defense was simply too slow.

The 3-4 has helped, Slocum says, to get speed and quickness where it is needed most — closer to the line of scrimmage. Instead of relying on safeties and cornerbacks to make tackles, they're being made by linemen and linebackers. Against Baylor Saturday, the Aggies made 13 tackles behind the line of scrimmage.

"I think they're (the defensive players) starting to see themselves as good players, and as a good unit," Slocum said. "That's why we're seeing week-to-week improvement, because they're realizing they, we played so-and-so and didn't get blown away, and we played so-and-so and didn't get blown away."

"Attitude is the single-most important aspect of football, but it's especially so when you play defense."

The Aggies opened this season with a performance almost identical to last year's Boston

College blowout. California scored on its first possession, and the first half ended with A&M behind 17-0. But the Aggies got tough, and shut out the Golden Bears in the second half.

The only poor defensive outing the Aggies have had this season was on regional television against Oklahoma State. Cowboy tailback Shawn Jones burned the Aggies for 203 yards, and the OSU offense picked up 412 yards total. But Slocum says that game was a learning experience for a defense that had some things to learn.

"We made a lot of mental mistakes," he says of the letdown. "Oklahoma State's touchdowns were the kind of plays where the players realize if they had made the right move or been in the

right coverage it wouldn't have happened.

"You look back and say 'We haven't had a situation where a team took the ball and drove it down our throats to score. The things they did they did because of our lack of execution.'"

With the toughest part of A&M's schedule coming up (the Aggies still have Arkansas, SMU and Texas left to play) and the offense having trouble putting points on the board, things aren't exactly looking up for A&M.

But Slocum says the defense is right on schedule.

"We started the season with two goals," he says. "We didn't have any yardage goals or anything like that. We just wanted to play hard, and we wanted to play smart. The only area we can improve on is playing smart."

"Because we can't play any harder."

Nebraska still No. 1 despite Akers' claims

United Press International
NEW YORK — The Southwest Conference may have other ideas, but Nebraska is No. 1. The Cornhuskers showed Missouri a thing or two over the weekend with a 34-13 romp over the Tigers. As a result, the Big Eight power picked up a possible 42 first-place votes and 626 total points Monday from the UPI Board of Coaches to maintain its top ranking.

However, there are dissenting voices in Texas. Arkansas following the Longhorns' 31-3 goring of the Razorbacks.

"I think we should be voted No. 1," said Texas coach Fred Akers, whose team remained No. 2 with the other four first-place votes and 590 total points.

"Texas is not the second best team in the country," Arkansas coach Lou Holtz said. "They are the best team in the country."

No. 3 North Carolina and No. 4 West Virginia maintained their positions, while Auburn jumped three spots after a 31-13 victory over Georgia to crack the top five.

Rounding out the Top 20 are No. 6 Florida, No. 7 Georgia, No. 8 Southern Methodist, No. 9 Miami, No. 10 Michigan, No. 11 Illinois, No. 12 Iowa, No. 13 Maryland, No. 14 Arizona State, No. 15 Washington, No. 16 Brigham Young, No. 17 Alabama, No. 18 Ohio State, No. 19 Pittsburgh and co-No. 20 Alabama and Boston College.

Auburn's jump dropped fellow Southeastern Conference schools Florida and Georgia one notch each. Florida was idle and Georgia downed Vanderbilt 20-13.

Miami, Illinois, Washington and Brigham Young all won and ascended three spots. Miami won its sixth straight, a 31-7 decision over Mississippi State. Illinois scored an important 17-13 Big Ten victory over Ohio State. Washington topped Stanford 32-15 and BYU clobbered New Mexico 66-21 for its fifth straight victory.

Maryland, with a 36-33 decision over Wake Forest, and Arizona State, a 34-14 winner over Southern California, each gained two spots. Ohio State plunged 11 spots after losing to Illinois while Alabama dropped 10 positions after its second straight loss — a 41-34 beating by Tennessee.

SMU, 5-0 with a 21-game unbeaten streak — longest in the nation, was idle and climbed one spot. Also moving up a rung was Michigan, a 35-0 winner over Northwest 3rn, and Iowa, a 31-14 victor over Purdue.

Oklahoma remained No. 17 after a 21-20 triumph over Oklahoma State, previously ranked No. 20.

Pittsburgh and Boston College re-entered the ratings after falling out in recent weeks. Pittsburgh crushed Louisville 55-10 and Boston College was idle.



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