

Sanders' pain is just a bad dream

By JEFF GRAUNKE
Sports Writer

After a year of stormy weather, the sun is finally shining for running back Thomas Sanders.

After a long year of injuries and pain, Sanders is finally back in an Aggie uniform. For the fifth year senior from Giddings, the injuries have taken their toll in the last two years.

"First my ankle was sprained real bad the spring after the '82 season," Sanders said. "Then I hurt my neck. I had a herniated disk, and it was pinching a nerve that runs down my right arm. It caused damage and atrophy on my right side. I had surgery in July.

"The doctor told me give it time to let it heal. I waited a whole year until this past summer, and I started working out again, lifting weights."

As far as the Ags' were concerned, Sanders wasn't expected to return. His picture and statistics were even left out of the 1984 football media guide.

It wasn't until two days before the 1984 fall practices started that Sanders decided he wanted to play.

"I went to another doctor two days before two-a-days (practices) started, and he examined me and said I'd be fine," Sanders said. "He told me he knew other players that had the same type or similar type of injury I had and they were playing. He also told me there was no chance of any permanent injury. That was basically the main thing that changed my mind. It was a big decision, and it was a last minute thing."

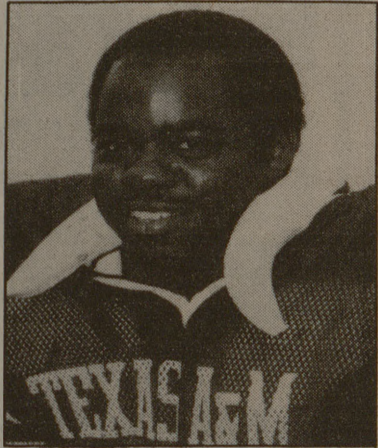
It appears Sanders made the right decision.

After just three games, Sanders is the second leading rusher for the Ags. He's totaled 110 yards with an average of 4.9 yards per carry, the highest of any A&M running back.

Sanders' progress hasn't gone unnoticed by Head Coach Jackie Sherrill.

"Sanders is showing that he's back and he's getting into form," Sherrill said.

Sherrill said the Aggies are struggling offensively because of youth and inexperience.



A&M's Thomas Sanders

Experience is what Sanders contributes most to the team.

Sanders has made the transition from former A&M head coach Tom Wilson's system to Sherrill's and he has played with some past Aggie football greats.

He played in the same backfield with current NFL players Johnny Hector (New York Jets), Gary Kubiak (Denver Broncos) and Earnest Jackson (San Diego Chargers).

"I liked being back there with them (Hector, Kubiak and Jackson)," Sanders said. "We were real close on and off the field. We helped each other as much as we could. They would help me and I would help them. We were just like a family. I'd say. We had a lot of fun together."

Sanders doesn't have his heart set on the NFL.

"If it happens, sure, but if it doesn't, it's not that I don't have anything else to do," he said.

It's taken Sanders time to get adjusted to working with the younger A&M rushers.

"The backs I'm working with now, I don't really know them as well as I did the other guys that I played with," Sanders said. "This is the first time I've been on the field with them. I've seen them around, but I've never really spent a whole lot of time with them as far as practicing."

Sanders is confident the team will



Photo by JOHN MAKELY

Texas A&M's Thomas Sanders (45), who recovered from an injury that sidelined him for all of '83, has staked a claim to

the Ags' No. 1 halfback spot for the Texas Tech game. Above, Sanders slices through a host of Arkansas State defenders.

carry on without quarterback Kevin Murray, who is lost for the year with a broken ankle.

"I'm sure it's (the loss of Murray) going to have some effect on some people, but hopefully everybody will be able to pull together and realize what we have to do, regardless whether he got hurt or not. It hap-

pens all the time, anybody can get hurt," Sanders said.

Craig Stump will fill Murray's shoes in the Texas Tech game Saturday, and Sanders said the Ags know he's capable of handling the pressure.

"You have to have confidence in him (Stump)," he said. "I think he'll

do fine. I'm sure he has a lot of pressure on him, but I think he can handle it."

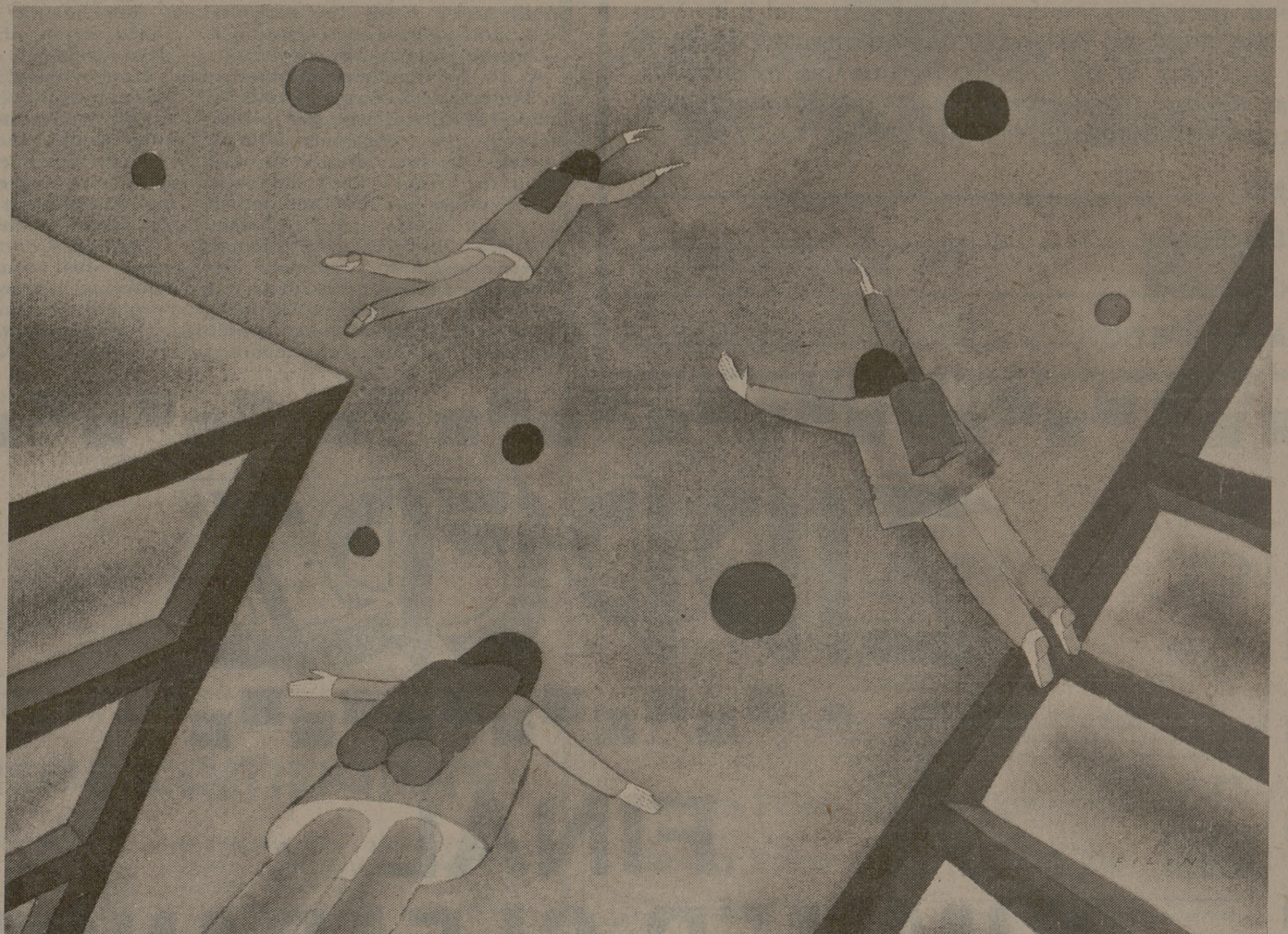
Looking back on his career at A&M, Sanders has mixed emotions.

"Basically, there hasn't been a whole lot of highlights," he said. "The most exciting part was my first year. I played quite a bit, for a

freshman. I was part of the team that beat Texas in '80 (24-14 in Austin), and I scored a touchdown in that game. It was real exciting for me.

"Other than that, most of it's been agony as far as I'm concerned. I've been injured a lot."

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