

Ford and Holland: double trouble

By JEFF GRAUNKE
Sports Writer

When inside linebackers Ken Ford and Johnny Holland get together on the football field, the Aggies get their defense MTV style — in stereo.

Until last Saturday's game against Texas Tech, Ford and Holland, Mr. Everywhere and Mr. Anywhere, as A&M coaches fondly call them, were the defensive machine. Saturday they just couldn't get it together. A&M Head Coach Jackie Sherrill agreed. Sherrill said one big reason why the Aggs lost to Tech was missed tackles.

"They (Ford and Holland) played hard, but missed a lot of tackles," Sherrill said. "It's unusual."

The Aggies play a 3-4 defense, so the linebackers, in theory, should make most of the tackles.

"Linebackers are supposed to make a lot of tackles in that scheme of defense," Ford said. "Me and Johnny (Holland), we kind of missed a lot of tackles. Between the two of us we missed about 20 tackles. That gave the (Texas Tech) backs time to get past the second defense, and they gained more yardage."

"I think the weather and the rain had a lot to do with it," Holland said. "This is really my first time playing defense and my first time really tackling. I think (lack of) experience hurt me a little."

"We weren't wrapping up," Ford said. "It was kind of wet. I'm not going to blame it on the weather. We missed a lot of tackles, maybe because of the wetness, but mostly because we weren't wrapping up like we're supposed to."

Ford and Holland are both new to the linebacker position. Ford moved from starting strong safety and Holland switched from free safety.

"I was moved from a starting position at strong safety to linebacker, a position I had never before in my life," Ford said. "People said, 'What are you doing there when you could stay at strong safety and start?' I say 'Well, it's to help the team.' What

else could you ask for from a guy? "They saw that I played good and they said keep it up. I just got the confidence."

Ford's seniority and success at his new position has helped Holland adapt.

"He's (Ford) an upperclassman," Holland said. "He's a senior. I look up to him. I respect him. He's a good leader. He's a pretty good motivator too."

"I like working with Johnny," Ford said. "Johnny helps me out and I help him out. By helping each other out, we don't make that many mistakes. If he didn't ask me and I didn't ask him, then we'd make a lot of mistakes."

"I know Johnny will cover for me if I get blocked or I get knocked down. I know he's somewhere behind me and he's going to cover (for me). I know that I can cover for Johnny after I do my assignment, if he gets out of place or something."

Ford feels confident about Holland's abilities at linebacker. "Johnny is a big, strong, physical guy and he adapted to the run very well," Ford said. "So, in turn, he helps me out because he knows all the coverages. He helps me with my coverages and I help him support the run."

"We kind of blend together and make a lot of tackles, making a lot of things happen."

Both Ford and Holland are quick, sprinting the 40 yard dash in 4.6 seconds.

"I think one of my strong points is my ability to run, and my quickness," Holland said.

"Ken and I play pretty fast and we find ourselves not really taking care of our responsibilities. We're leaving our positions too fast. That hurts us."

Ford echoes Holland's sentiments. "I'm so fast and I get out quick, I don't hold my ground and read (the opponents' offense)," Ford said. "Who wants a 280-pound lineman coming down on you, if you wait in there that long? I know I don't."

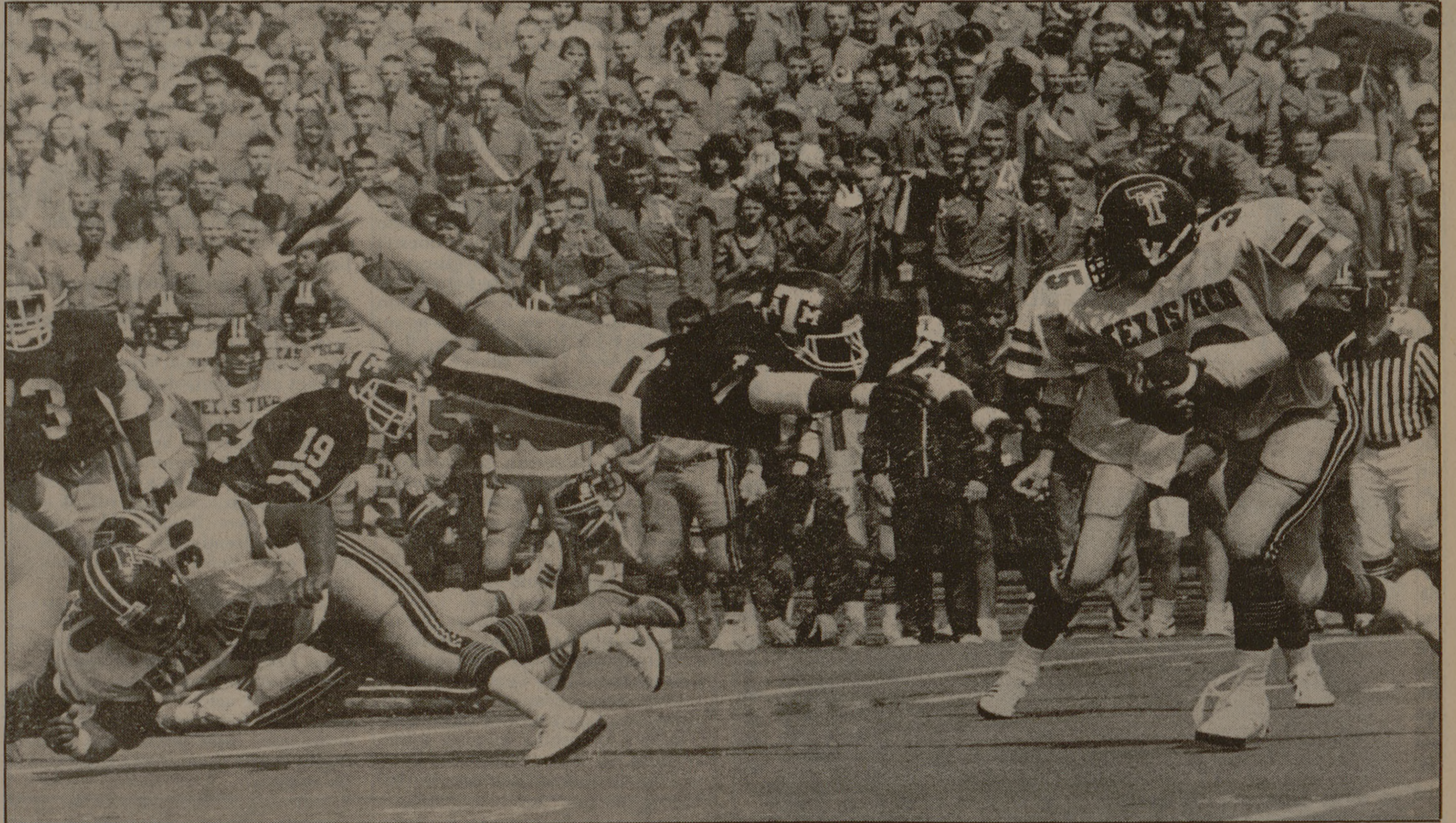


Photo by FRANK IRWIN

Texas A&M linebacker Johnny Holland flies across the line to stop Texas Tech I-back Timmy Smith. Ken Ford (19) and

Holland lead the Aggies in tackles after four games and have made a smooth transition after playing in the secondary.

The Aggies have had some problems with consistency and concentration on defense.

"We've had so many mental mistakes and mental busts that if we just cut out half of them, we'd be so much better," Ford said. "Somehow we just have mental mistakes and it

costs us at times. If we just learned to concentrate and take one play at a time and not have those mental mistakes then, hey, who knows where we could be."

Ford and Holland are definitely geared up for this week's game in Houston.

"I think I'll be a lot more aggressive this week and I'll concentrate on wrapping up in my tackles," Holland said. "I'll try not to miss so many tackles. Practice has been pretty tough. Everybody's been fired up."

"We know what we have to do to win. We need to win."

Holland said the 30-12 loss to Tech is still on the Aggies' minds.

"I think it will help us," Holland said. "We haven't been playing up to our potential. It (the loss to Tech) let us see how we need to improve. It'll make us play a lot better."

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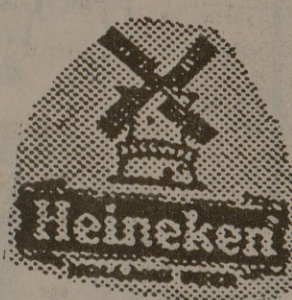


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