

Sports

Year's time makes Sherrill Ag saint

By PETE HERNDON
Sports Writer

What a difference a year can make. Even after the Texas A&M football team had upset Texas, 37-12, in Austin last year, Aggie fans still kept one foot in the water, preparing to jump off Coach Jackie Sherrill's ship if A&M didn't produce in 1985. Several times last season, especially after losses to Texas Tech and Baylor, some Aggie faithful considered standing Sherrill in front of the cannon cadets fire after an A&M score.

"Why not?" one A&M student said. "We ain't scorin' any points. If we don't do something, that ol' Howitzer is jes gonna get rusty again."

But during the course of a 9-2 season, a Southwest Conference Championship and a Cotton Bowl matchup with Auburn, Sherrill has gone from being in front of a cannon to being canonized — at least in the minds of Aggie fans.

"Saint Jack of Aggieland" wandered through the Memorial Student Center and had his picture taken with Cotton-frenzied A&M fans. "Cotton Bound" T-shirts were everywhere, and this year, everyone wanted a shot with Sherrill instead of a shot at him.

However, Sherrill's worst knocks Thursday came in the locker room after the 42-10 rout of Texas. Wads of cotton flew everywhere as the team gathered in the center of the dressing room and sang the "Aggie War Hymn."

Sherrill found himself outside the huddled group of players and against a brick wall. Apparently Sherrill thought he needed to get closer to the center of the group and help lead the song, so he tried to scoot around a Twelfth Man kickoff team member.

That was a mistake. Just as Sherrill made his move, the players started swaying and singing "Saw Varsity's horns off!" Sherrill got

banged into the wall and the player, so he backed away.

But since he is a coach which preaches, "Never give up," Sherrill tried again.

Same result. One more time? Same thing.

Finally, Sherrill just grabbed a player's shoulder pads from behind and swayed with the team.

Oh well, every saint must endure a little hardship. And, despite his locker room folly, Sherrill's 42nd birthday was as close to perfect as you could get. After the UT game, Sherrill said he may be getting younger.

"I'm a lot youger today than I wa yesterday," Sherrill quipped.

Even one of Sherrill's most avid critics, *Houston Chronicle* sports writer Al Carter, wrote after A&M's victory that the best team in the SWC was going to the Cotton Bowl on Jan. 1.

What could Sherrill have possibly done to make all this happen?

A&M defensive end Rod Saddler, who teamed up with cornerback James Flowers to stop Texas running back Edwin Simmons short of the A&M goal line on the big fourth and inches play, said it all started with the team's attitude during spring practice.

"I told you this spring we were going to win the SWC and go to the Cotton Bowl," Saddler said. "This summer our whole team stayed down here and worked. Everyone knew that we were going to go to a major bowl."

And Saddler said the team owes it all to Sherrill.

"He brought me down here (from Georgia) and wouldn't let me quit and go home when things weren't going well for me," he said. "Now look how everything's turning out. What can I say, I love the man."

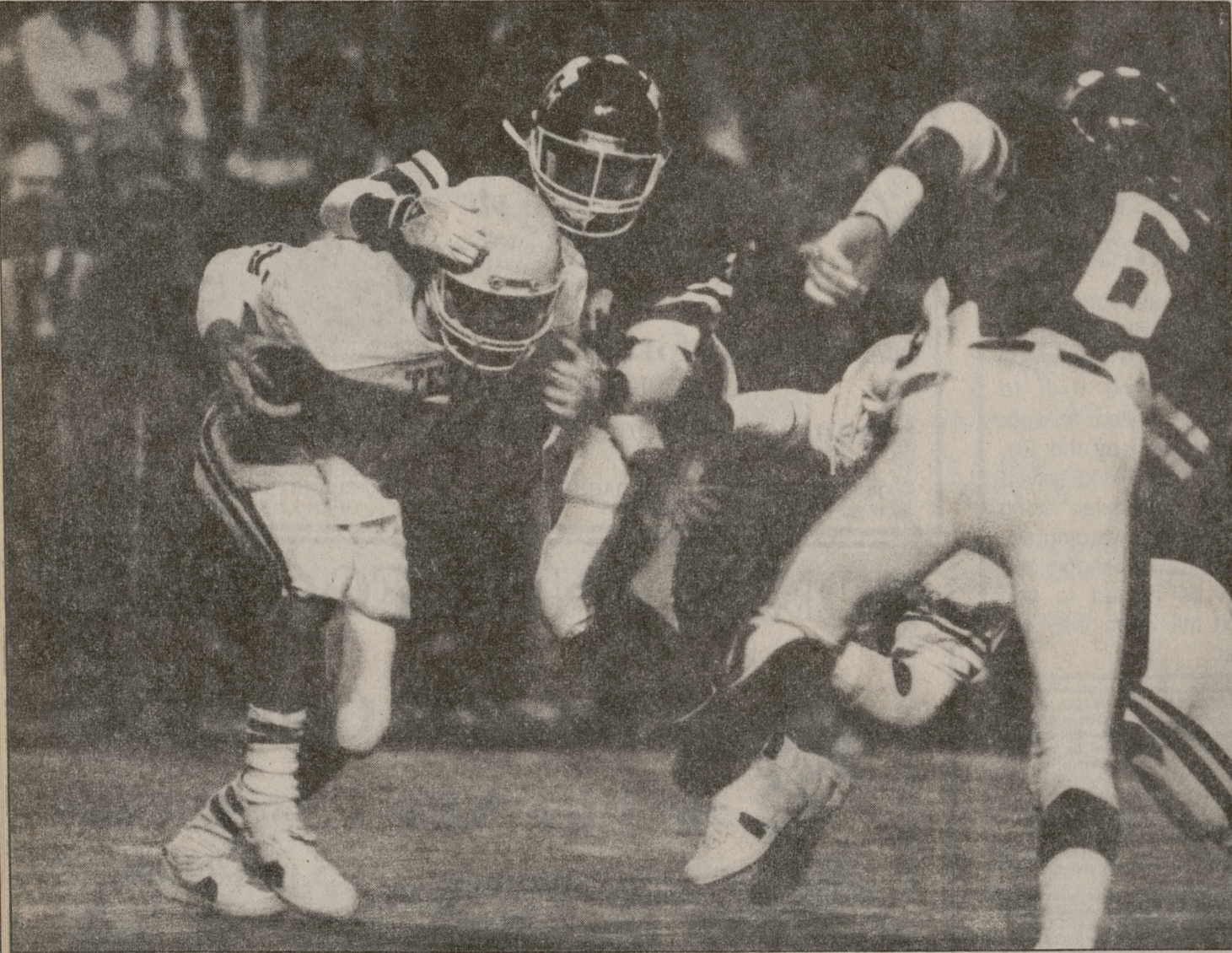


Photo by JOHN MAKELY

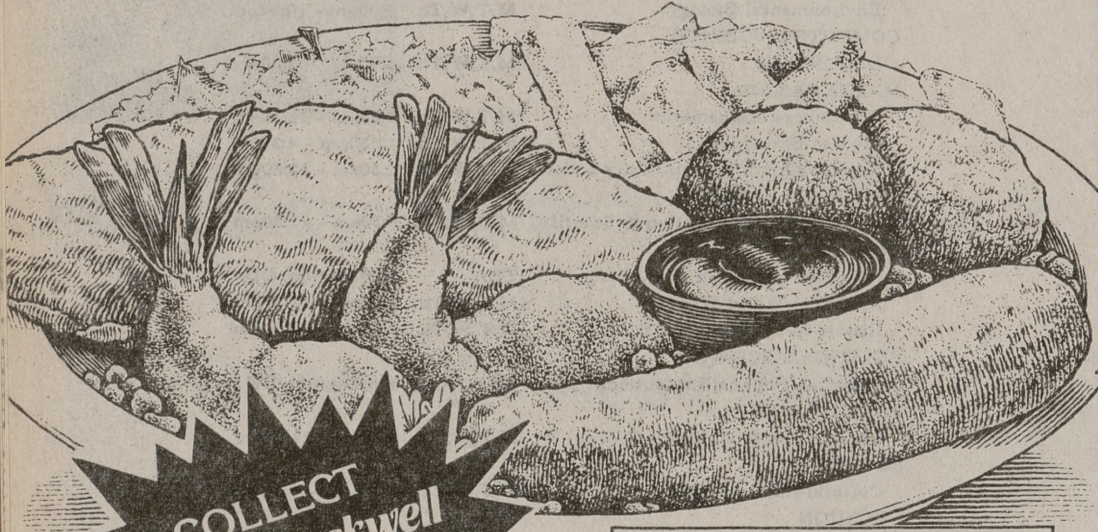
Texas A&M's Alex Morris sacks UT quarterback Bret Stafford as safety Domingo Bryant charges in from the outside to help

The No. 15 Aggies defeated the No. 18 Longhorns, 42-10, to win their first outright Southwest Conference title since 1967.

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A&M

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