

Sports

A&M closer to last season's form

By Ken Sury
Sports Editor

It was the kind of game that bruises egos. Texas A&M, coming off last week's loss to Louisiana State University, greeted North Texas State with the eagerness of a hunt for a flock of sheep by crushing the Eagles, 48-28, Saturday night.

A&M's home opener wasn't even close as the final score would indicate because the Aggies played second- and third-string players for the majority of the second half.

A&M had only two setbacks in its offensive first half. The first was an injury to fullback Roger Vick, who suffered a compound dislocation of his left little finger. On the fourth play of the game, with A&M already at NTSU's 19-yard line, Vick tried to lead an Eagle defender and landed on the pinkie. His bone was crushed through the skin.

A&M Head Coach Jackie Sherrill said Vick would miss this weekend's game with Southern Mississippi, and that the SWC opener with Texas Tech would be the Aggies' first touch-



Photo by Dean Saito

A&M fullback Ira Valentine lunges for extra yardage as a North Texas State tackler holds on.

Valentine replaced Roger Vick who was sidelined with a dislocation of his left pinkie.

down. The loss of Vick didn't hurt the offense too much, however, because senior Ira Valentine was in on the next play and he fired high openings in the Eagle defense to score the game's first touchdown.

Valentine later scored on a 1-yard run with five minutes, 17 seconds left in the first half to up the Aggie lead to 24-7.

The other setback was a turnover on A&M's second possession. Quarterback Kevin Murray tried to hit receiver Shea Walker on third down, but only found the waiting hands of NTSU's Ralph Roberson, who returned the ball 45 yards for a touchdown and the only score by the Eagles in the first half.

With the first-team offense in the field for the first half, A&M had trouble scoring against its outstanding Division I-AA opponent.

A&M's six first-half scoring plays (four touchdowns and two field goals), the longest drive only

consumed 4:46 off the clock. A&M had the ball for 19½ minutes, while NTSU held it only 10½ minutes.

Murray moved up in the SWC record books during the game. His 13 completions now rank him sixth on the all-time list with 359, while his 22 attempts and 193 yards moved him into ninth on the list with 634 attempts and 4,479 yards.

A big reason for A&M's offensive success is that the Aggie defense became more aggressive than at the LSU game. North Texas State was held to 39 yards of total offense in the first half.

"Of course we're happy with the way we played," nose guard Sammy O'Brien said, "even though it was with a team not up to our caliber."

"We had a lot more intensity on the field. We were happy after mak-

ing a big play. A lot more than at LSU."

Linebacker Johnny Holland agreed, adding, "We had our motor turned on. Last week, we didn't play as hard. We never got that motor turned on."

With the comfortable 34-7 half-time lead, Sherrill said he didn't have any problem with bringing in the second and third-team players.

"We certainly wouldn't keep our (experienced) players in and take a chance at getting them hurt," Sherrill said, adding that it was a way to get the backup players used to game situations for later in the season.

Two of the A&M backups who had good performances were senior Lance Haverda and sophomore Tim Landrum. With the Eagles punting

from their own 37, Haverda blocked the kick and Landrum scooped it up at the 18 and dashed in for A&M's final score of the game.

"It was a called play," Haverda said. "We sent 10 people in. North Texas State had their receiver split wide, so I had a gap to run through. I had a straight shot at the punter."

NTSU tried to mount some semblance of a comeback by scoring three times in the final quarter. The effort was aided by a blocked punt and two Aggie turnovers, but it was simply too little too late for the Eagles.

So if the play of the first half is any indication, the egos are back intact and the Aggies are back in form — perhaps championship form.

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