

Sports

Tough defense keys Ag victory

By Homer Jacobs
Assistant Sports Editor

Texas A&M's 16-7 victory over the University of Southern Mississippi was comparable to drinking a warm beer — if you have to, you'll like it.

The Aggies took this game thanks to a resurgence in the swarming defense that terrorized opponents last year.

Sports Analysis

Players like linebacker Johnny Holland and defensive tackle Rod Sandler were looking like their All-America selves. Throw in a blitzing Alex Morris from the strong safety position for good measure, and the Golden Eagles could never get off the ground.

For that matter, the Golden Eagles couldn't get anything on the ground, either.

A&M's defense held Southern Mississippi to just 99 yards in total offense, 50 on the ground, while picking up seven sacks of the Golden Eagles for a minus 57 yards.

"It was a pleasure watching our defensive team play," A&M Coach Jackie Sherrill said.

It wasn't exactly a pleasure watching the Aggie offense play in the first half, however.

A&M missed several opportunities that could have provided a comfortable halftime lead, such as:

- An interception in the endzone thrown by quarterback Kevin Murray on a second-and-goal play at USM's 1-yard line.

- A missed 45-yard field goal attempt by kicker Scott Slater on A&M's first possession.

- A blocked 41-yard field goal attempt in the second quarter.

Instead, probably to the disappointment of dating couples among the 54,988 at Kyle Field, the Aggies went into the locker room at halftime tied at 0-0.

But Sherrill said the first half was not as bad as it seemed for the Aggies.

"I felt like we controlled the ball the whole game, we just didn't score in the first half," he said. "It wasn't that they were taking it out of us, we were taking it out of ourselves."

In the third quarter, A&M began taking it out on Southern Mississippi, with typical A&M ball-control drives.

This time the drives ended with points on the scoreboard. Slater's 27-yard field goal with 9 minutes, 36 seconds left in the third quarter gave the Aggies a 3-0 lead.

On the next A&M possession, the Aggies started sending out Valentines — as in Ira.

The senior backup fullback, on a series of runs over left tackle, amassed 30 yards to set up the next A&M score. Murray hit Rod "Mr. Everywhere" Bernstine, who had eight catches in the game, for a 22-yard touchdown strike, to give the Aggies a 10-0 cushion.

But Bernstine's penalty of unsportsmanlike conduct for spiking the ball in the endzone gave the Golden Eagles good field position on the ensuing kickoff. And Aggie cornerback James Flowers' pass interference penalty on USM's possession kept a sputtering Eagle drive alive, that finally ended in a Southern Mississippi touchdown.

"There's no question the penalty on the kickoff and the pass interference kept them in the ball game," Sherrill said.

When Slater added two more field goals, including a 48-yard kick late in the fourth quarter, the Aggies sealed the win.

Holland said the job by the A&M defensive line was as the key to the victory.

"They were controlling the line of scrimmage," Holland said. "That's what a football game is all about."

One week the A&M defense sputters and the next week the offense struggles. It must be the kicking game's turn against Texas Tech this Saturday.



Photo by Tom Ownbey

A&M's Rod Harris (17) goes high in the endzone, but won't come down with the football during Saturday's game.

If A&M can ever get all three phases of the game working consistently, good things should happen to the Aggies.

Maybe this week's game with the Red Raiders will be more like drinking beer out of a frosted mug — nice and refreshing.

A&M volleyball team wins tournament title

Texas A&M's volleyball team bounced back from a tough loss to UT-Arlington last Wednesday by downing Missouri 15-9, 15-10, 16-14 to capture the Oklahoma Invitational Tournament crown Saturday.

The 14th-ranked Aggies advanced to the finals by beating 16th-ranked Georgia in four games 15-6, 15-13, 12-15, 15-11. In the opening round, the Aggies crushed host Oklahoma 15-2, 15-10, 16-14.

A&M Coach Al Givens praised the play of all-tournament selections Chris Zogata and Margaret Spence, as well as the performance of senior Stacey Gildner.

"She was left out of the all-tournament team but she's really come on strong for us," Givens said. "She hit 400 and she led the team in digs with 20."

A&M opens Southwest Conference play Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. in G. Rollie White Coliseum against Texas Tech. Givens said he hopes to have a good home crowd on hand for the match.

"Tech plays tough," he said. "We need a really good home crowd to help us start off well in conference play. Since the football team is also playing Tech, hopefully we can start things off well by beating them."

Top Twenty Action

How The AP Top Twenty college football teams fared Saturday:

1. Oklahoma (2-1-0) lost to No. 2 Miami 28-16.
2. Miami, Fla. (4-0-0) beat No. 1 Oklahoma 28-16.
3. Alabama (4-0-0) did not play.
4. Nebraska (3-0-0) beat Oregon 48-14.
5. Michigan (3-0-0) beat No. 20 Florida State 20-18.
6. Washington (2-1-0) lost to No. 12 Southern California 20-10.
7. Penn State (3-0-0) beat East Carolina 42-17.
8. Auburn (3-0-0) beat Tennessee 34-8.
9. Arkansas (3-0-0) beat New Mexico State 42-11.
10. Arizona (4-0-0) beat Colorado 24-21.
11. Arizona State (2-0-1) tied Washington State 21-21.
12. Southern California (3-0-0) beat No. 6 Washington 20-10.
13. Maryland (3-1-0) lost to North Carolina State 28-16.
14. Texas A&M (2-1-0) beat Southern Mississippi 16-7.
15. Iowa (3-0-0) beat Texas-El Paso 69-7.
16. UCLA (2-1-0) beat Long Beach State 41-23.
17. Baylor (3-1-0) beat Texas Tech 45-14.
18. Louisiana State (1-1-0) did not play.
19. Michigan State (2-1-0) beat Western Michigan 45-10.
20. Florida State (1-2-1) lost to No. 5 Michigan 20-18.

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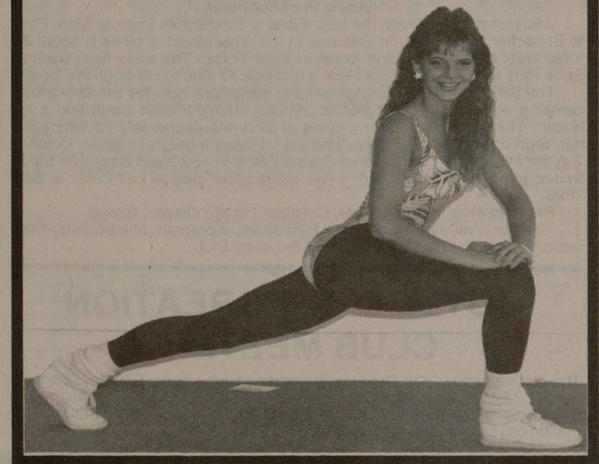
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