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Stump enjoys new role as starter

Senior QB considers long wait worthwhile

By Tricia Carroll
Reporter

Chants of "Stump it, Stump it," rang through Memorial Stadium in Austin in 1984 as a large Aggie crowd watched freshman quarterback Craig Stump lead the Aggies to a major upset victory over the University of Texas, 37-12.

Those cheers soon became echoes of the past because Kevin Murray, returning from an ankle injury, reclaimed the starting role in 1985, putting Stump in an undesirable backup role for two years.

Stump's frustration came to an end with the departure of Kevin Murray. Now Stump is number one.

"Good things come to those who wait," Stump said with a boyish grin, grazing the brim of his white Cotton Bowl cap.

"I'm really looking forward to the opportunity," he said. "I think I'm prepared for it and I have an advantage over most quarterbacks through age and experience."

Stump said he has always believed if people worked hard and patiently, the breaks would come. He said it might take two weeks or five years, but breaks finally come. Stump's break has arrived.

His blond hair was still glistening with perspiration from his daily workout as he sprawled his 6-foot frame into a cozy chair in the Memorial Student Center.

"I'm sure most people would have transferred, but I came here for other reasons than football," he said. "I mean, sure, I got depressed, but it was never to the point of leaving school because in my mind, A&M has always been the place for me."

"My dad played a big role as far as encouraging me and so did my older brothers," he said.

"Dad just kept saying to be patient and stay in good shape and good things would happen. Well, they finally did. He tugged at the brim of his cap again."

Everything about him was patient. His thought before answering a question, the way he spoke, and even the way he sat in the chair arranging the keys on his keyring.

"I know I am going to be one of the more experienced, older guys this season which puts me in a leadership role," he said. "I think all quarterbacks are in a leadership role, though."

"Some of them do it by hollering a lot or just trying to keep everyone else up. I like to lead the team through what I do. Actions speak louder than words."

Stump has been noted for his ability to run the option. An option play is when the quarterback rolls out and he can run, pitch the ball out to a trailing back or throw.

"As far as the plays we will run, some will be called more than others, but I don't think our offense will change that much," he said.

"There will definitely be more quarterback sprint-out plays than in the past because we want to start putting more pressure on the defense."

The Aggies have been hit hard with graduation, especially with the loss of All-America tight end Rod Bernstine and wide receiver Shea Walker.

"There are really the only two guys that know the offense at the receiver position," he said. "A lot will depend on how these young guys come through for us. The key is learning the offense to the point of being confident and self-assured."

"I know it took me a long time to reach that point. You have to do more than watch films because

teams never seem to do the same thing on the field as they did on film. It takes first-hand experience, and that is something that I have going for me."

He looked downward mostly, either pulling at his cap or arranging his keys. He spoke softly, but very confidently. He had a voice of experience, but there was an excitement or eagerness about him one would expect to find in freshmen rather than fifth-year seniors.

It has been a long wait for Stump. So long that many people in his position might have slacked off in work habits or just given up.

"I don't feel like my work habits have ever changed very much," Stump said. "I had to be prepared to play in case something were to happen to Kevin."

"I mean, what would have happened if I had been called on and I was unprepared?"

Stump said his main goal was to lead A&M to another conference championship and a Cotton Bowl berth in Dallas. He said his second-most important goal was to stay healthy.

"Staying healthy will be very important for me," he said. "I think players have a lot of control over their own health."

"If you don't keep your leg muscles in good shape, you will be more likely to have a leg or knee injury. The same thing with other body parts. You have to focus in on everything and keep it in good shape."

Stump said the health of the entire team was very important if the Aggies were going to repeat as champions for the third straight year.

A key question in the minds of many was whether or not Stump would have another battle on his hands for the starting role with freshman sensation Lance Pavlas.

"There is no battle," Stump said. "Coach Sherrill and Coach Amedee told me the job was mine to have."

Stump said he had personal goals as well as team goals.

"Sure, I would like to lead the conference in passing and in total offense, but you have to keep things in perspective," he said.

"If I can lead the team to a third-straight championship and do my job like I want to, then personal honors will take care of themselves."

Stump said he has enjoyed his stay here at A&M, but he is prepared for life after football.

"I'm not counting on a professional career, but I would give it a chance if I get any offers," he said. "I always have my degree in physical education to fall back on."

"I would like to coach either baseball or football."

Stump, an all-state quarterback at Port Arthur Jefferson High School, was also recruited by many colleges as a baseball player.

He said he was offered the opportunity to play baseball at A&M, but turned it down.

"It would not have been beneficial to play both," Stump said. "I decided to just concentrate on football."

Stump put aside his keyring, took off his cap, and suddenly sat erect.

"Do you want to know what my favorite food is?" he asked. "Barbecued crab! Oh man. You buy this special kind of seasoning that they have down on the coast where I'm from, and you go out and catch the crabs fresh and roll them in the seasoning and fry them until they get real tender."

"I guess I don't know why they are called barbecued crabs though," he said with a grin.

Stump is the youngest of four boys. He said his family and school sweetheart, Mary Beth, played a big role in his encouragement during game days, especially this season.

"Yeah, we all like to go out after games and maybe watch a movie or just sit around and talk."

"Sometimes Mary Beth goes out to a club or something. But it can't be anywhere near country music. I don't like to see someone cry in their eyes."

"Besides, I can't handle all that love stuff," he said, grabbing and pulling it back down his eyes.

"I like rhythm and blues music," he said. "On an evening I might even rap to my friends," Stump said laughing.

Stump said he also enjoyed and horse racing on the Louisiana.

"I have a pit bulldog named Butkus, but he's back at home. He's the kind of bulldog you fight for. Butkus doesn't fight though. He's just kind of like I am."

The 1987 Aggies are very young but exciting. Sherrill's spring recruiting ranked the best in the country, many experts.

Craig Stump is the number one man at the helm of that team. He's been waiting for a long time, but he's not surprised.

After all, good things come to those who wait.

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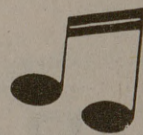
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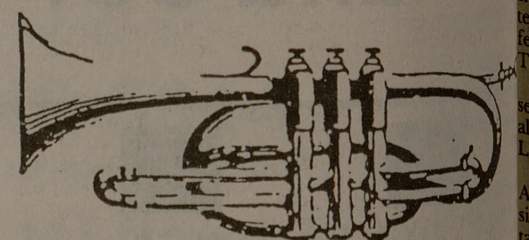
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