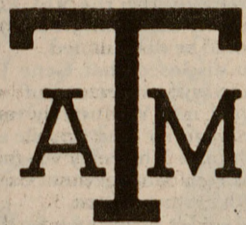


Sports

A&M's openers both good and bad 22 "birthday" games leave many memories

By Tim Stanfield
Sports Writer



What more could a Texas A&M football fan want for his birthday than for the Aggies to win the game closest to that day (in my case September 18)?

Though 1954 was my first year as an A&M fan, I didn't adopt the first game of the season as my birthday game until the following season.

For my sixth birthday all I wanted was for Texas A&M to travel to Los Angeles and defeat the mighty UCLA Bruins.

Alas, Bear Bryant's record at A&M would fall to 1-10 that day, as the Bruins shut their visitors out 21-0.

Paced by All-Americans Jack Parkins and John David Crow, and Charley Crueger, the 1956 Aggies not only produced a win for me, but they defeated Villanova 19-0.

One year later, playing an excellent Maryland team in the Cotton Bowl stadium, Texas A&M outlasted the Terps 21-13. That squad would eventually win eight straight games, including the way becoming the last Aggie squad to reach the top spot in the national polls.

For the next 12 seasons the only birthday game A&M didn't lose was in 1961, a 7-7 tie with Houston.

The Aggies even provided some "A&M history" with the 1958 loss, which was 15-14 to Texas Tech.

In that game (which was non-conference at that time), both the Aggies and Red Raiders used the new two-point conversion successfully.

Only Tech also kicked an extra-point, so I got beat.

After losing to LSU in 1960, I had had enough! Making a vow that only in 11-year old kid would do, I decided that, until A&M again won an opening game, I would accept no birthday presents. All I wanted was for them to win, which usually meant that they had to beat the Tiling.

A&M had the ball and was marching down the field for the possible winning touch-down late in the 1964 game, trailing 9-6.

Coach Hank Foldberg motioned for the ball to be thrown out of bounds to stop the clock.

The quarterback sailed the ball right back to my way, only to have a receiver jump up and tip it into the arms of a waiting Tiger defender to end the rally.

1966 brought a new opponent, Georgia Tech, and new hope of victory. This 17-year old boy listened happily as the Aggies "built" up a 3-0 halftime lead.

But the Yellow Jackets scored 10 points in the third quarter and deliberately ran up the score in the final quarter, winning 38-3.

SMU and A&M moved up their third period when reserve A&M quarterback David Beal ran 80 yards down the home sideline to break the game open and give the Aggies the win.

Having won nine birthday games in a row, I was a little cocky when A&M took on Brigham Young in Houston in 1979.

Up 14-3, A&M Coach Tom Wilson put in some reserves and soon the game was much closer.

The Aggies led 17-10 late in the game, but Brigham Young drove for a touchdown and made a two-point conversion to win 18-17.

Bitterly disappointed as I was, that game was an excellent example of a typical Wilson-coached A&M game: usually close, but often leads were blown at the end resulting in defeat.

Mississippi fell 23-20 in Jackson in 1980, but I will have more on that game in two weeks.

Place-kicker David Hardy kicked three field goals to help the Aggies overcome a 28-16 halftime deficit to defeat Cal-Berkeley 29-28 in 1981.

Again I became cocky, especially when I heard that Jackie Sherrill was coming to be our coach.

Doug Flutie ruined Sherrill's first game, leading Boston College to a 38-16 mercy killing.

California came to Kyle Field in 1983 and promptly took a 17-0 lead. A&M chipped away, though, and tied it up in the final period.

Cal's new coach, Joe Kapp, took a field goal off the scoreboard late in the game in order to get a first and goal situation.

Naturally, the Bears lost a fumble on the next play. But A&M ran a deep pitch that had the running back alone in the end zone, where he was tackled for a game-winning safety.

The Aggies proceeded to the wrong end of the field to kick off, and, once they were lined up properly, declined an onside kick. Cal ran out the clock and won.

I had elbow surgery on August 15, 1984, choosing that date so that I would be able to drive myself to Bryan to see A&M demolish pitiful Texas El Paso.

Only the Miners took an early lead and, after A&M took over 20-17 late in the game, had a tying field goal hit the left upright behind the south end zone to preserve the "great" win.

1985 took the Aggies to Birmingham, Alabama, where that game was tied 10-10 in the fourth period.

But Alabama kicked two field goals, after which the Aggies let down and allowed the Tide's fullback to run for a touchdown right up the chute of their defense.

LSU returned to the birthday game in 1986. I knew that the defending SWC champions wouldn't let me down and that I could once again celebrate my birthday.

Little did I know. While keeping statistics for the A&M radio network, I watched in stunned disbelief, as the Tigers torched my guys, 35-17.

I was mortified and bitterly disappointed that again I had seen a possible victory turn into a terrible beating.

But I learned my lesson that night. Now that I am a student here in Aggieland and loving every minute of it, I realize that there are more important things than getting a birthday win, especially over LSU.

So, in view of my new concept of life and losing football games, let me say, "Thanks for the three points, Jackie."

Article in magazine adds insult to injury

By Doug Hall
Assistant Sports Editor

Talk about adding insult to injury!

That's exactly what *Sports Illustrated*, with the help of LSU's fleet running back Harvey Williams, did in its Sept. 14 issue.

Viewpoint

For two years the Aggies dominated the Southwest Conference, made back to back Cotton Bowl appearances, were consistently ranked in the Top 20 and made one Top-10 finish.

And SI treated A&M like a football version of the bubonic plague.

Maybe a mention here, or a reference there. And even a short story of the annual match-up with Texas.

Oh yeah, they did throw in a piece on the January Interception Bowl against Ohio State in Dallas.

But the Aggies didn't deserve a four-page article with cover-page picture that showed LSU quarterback Tom Hodson and a caption that read, "LSU Shocks Texas A&M."

In all fairness, the A&M vs. LSU match-up deserved the coverage it got. After all, both schools were returning conference champions. LSU had the top Southeastern Conference newcomers returning (Hodson and Williams), not to mention an All-America candidate in wide receiver Wendell Davis.

For their part, the Aggies had the longest home winning streak in Division I football, a No. 15 national ranking, ESPN coverage

and a big quarterback question. And though the Aggie's mediocre performance produced more questions than it answered, LSU has a doggone good football team. They weren't ranked No. 6 nationally because they raise good crawfish.

So "shocked" is probably not an incredibly accurate verb choice.

The word does apply, however, to some of the statements made by Williams, the Hempstead product who shunned the Aggies at the last minute for life along the Mississippi.

For starters, on A&M in general, Williams said, "All that military and uniforms and yell leaders. I don't get off on that stuff. And that dog — Reveille — that dog is so sorry. I can't stand that dog."

Thank you, Harvey. On the Aggies' vaunted 12th Man Kick-Off Team, the sophomore tailback said, "Come on. I ought to break it on them."

Any other comments to really get that maroon blood to boiling for next year, Harvey?

How about, "I should get 160 to 180 yards and two touchdowns." He said before the game, in reference to what he evidently considered a porous A&M defense.

It's not entirely improbable that, should A&M win the SWC and LSU finish second in the SEC, a rematch could be arranged in Dallas on Jan. 1, 1988.

Until then Harvey, sleep easy. Because old wounds heal slow and harsh words surely come back to haunt you.

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Valentine's feud grows against ump's

ARLINGTON (AP) — Texas Rangers coach Bobby Valentine says he's tried to keep his temper with American League umpires who he thinks are trying to drive him out of the game.

"I've been a church boy," Valentine says.

And owner Eddie Chiles thinks Valentine is doing a good job of staying cool.

Valentine accused umpires Wednesday of taking advantage of the knowledge that Chiles asked him in May not to get himself ejected from ballgames.

"It makes me understand a lot of the smirk I've gotten on the field and a lot of the confrontations I've been egged on," Valentine said.

Chiles, however, saluted Valentine Thursday for the coach's efforts to avoid conflicts with umpires.

"Bobby Valentine has my unconditional support," Chiles said in a prepared statement. "Earlier this season I was attempting to defuse in-game conflicts between American League umpires and Bobby Valentine. I salute Bobby for his efforts in this regard."

Valentine made his accusation after being ejected for the fourth time this season during a 12-1 victory over the Oakland A's Tuesday.

"Jim Evans (umpire crew chief) told me I don't know how to argue — I'm out of control," Valentine said. "He said, 'What does your owner think about it?'"

Evans said he "doesn't mind a coach arguing as long as he does so in a professional manner. "I said, 'If you expect to please your owner and please us, you've got to know how to argue,'" Evans said.

Ryan's 16 K's, low ERA outshines poor record

HOUSTON (AP) — Astros catcher Alan Ashby has caught three no-hit games, including Nolan Ryan's fifth no-hitter in 1981.

But he has never seen Ryan better than when the 40-year-old right-hander struck out 16 San Francisco batters Wednesday night in a 4-2 Astros victory.

"I've never seen him stronger or better," Ashby said. "The eighth was the best. In eight years, I've never seen him better."

Ryan, 7-14, finished with 130 pitches, well over the 110-pitch limit imposed by General Manager Dick Wagner to keep Ryan's arm from being overworked.

Ryan had five strikeouts through the first four innings but after Mike Aldrete's single in the fifth inning scored the Giants' second run, the

Alvin fireballer struck out 10 of the last 12 batters.

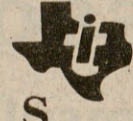
He retired the side in the eighth inning, his last, fanning Candy Maldonado, Clark and Bob Brenly.

Astros second baseman Bill Doran thinks Ryan should be a Cy Young Award candidate despite his poor record.

"He's one of a kind," Doran said. "You'll never see a guy at 40 that amazing or athletic. It's a crying shame we haven't supported him better. He should be considered for the Cy Young Award."

Ryan has a league leading 226 strikeouts and a 2.76 earned run average, but has only a 7-14 record to show for his outstanding season.

Ryan's 16 strikeouts increased his career strikeout record to 4,503.



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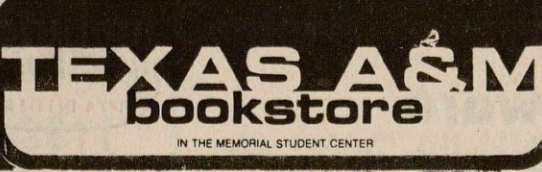
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