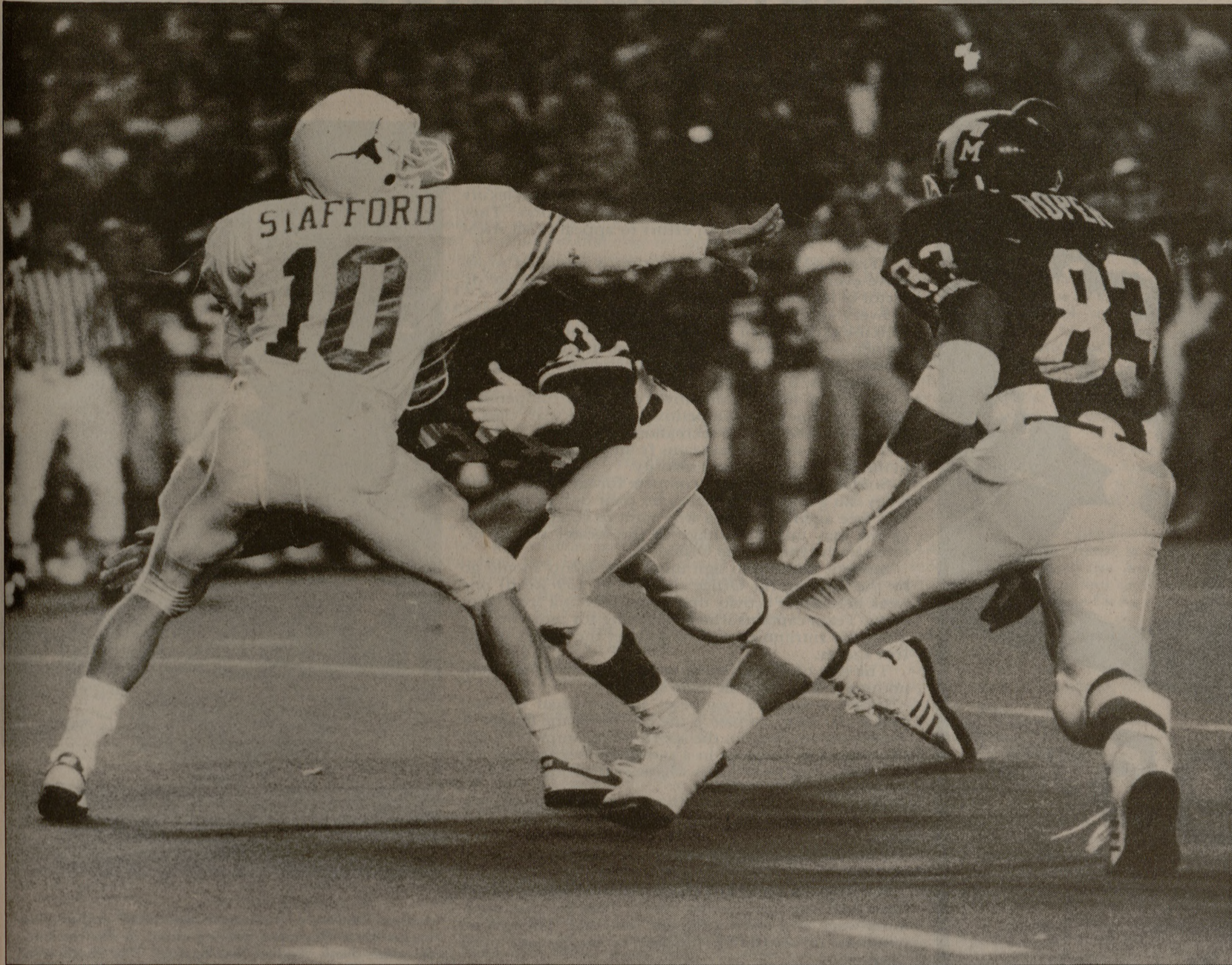


Shadow of 'The Star'



(above) By the end of the season Wallace was doing about as much damage as Roper, although he wasn't quite as easy to spot. . .

(below) since it was his teammate whose name and number were always considered synonymous with the Aggies' "Wrecking Crew" defense.

Photo by Jay Janner

came here and had a lot of ability and didn't know what to do with it. We probably started from scratch with him as much as with anybody else I've ever worked with in terms of playing football. But he had as much ability as anybody I've worked with as well."

Batiste: "I think he should have gotten the attention last year. He got 12 sacks — you can't write that off. I think Wallace is going to get his fame if he keeps going in that direction."

Wallace himself: "I intend on being on some All-America team. Last season was good, but I can get better. I know I can get better. I just want to be one of the top two in the nation. I think that's a pretty realistic expectation. I know (Roper) will be there — I just hope to get there too."

Confidence obviously is not Aaron Wallace's weak suit. But it hasn't always been like that.

"I was just uncomfortable at first," he says. "I think the last five regular-season games I was confident with what I was doing. Coach Davie said don't worry about messing up. Toward the end he told me to cut loose, and that's what I did."

Opposing quarterbacks will back him up on that. Word didn't take long to get spread across the SWC that overprotecting against the rush on John Roper's side of the line only made them more vulnerable to someone on the other side that was just as big and even faster.

One play in particular may illustrate it best:

Last year against Arkansas Wallace flushed quarterback John Simpson out of the pocket on an attempt at a passing play. Simpson wheeled away from Wallace, and the first thing that met his eyes when he got turned around was Roper. Huge. Airborne. Spread-eagled. Screaming, no doubt.

What fans remember is Roper. What isn't remembered so vividly is that the sack was actually made by Wallace.

Roper still gets the majority of the hoopla. But Wallace doesn't let it bother him.

"I'm the kind of person that hype doesn't matter with me. He's better at talking than I am. I like to be out on the field, and I do my talking there."

Slocum thinks Roper being on the field actually helps the more inexperienced Wallace.

"It really helps him that John is such a sound player," Slocum says. "People look at John, and he's a great player. They don't want to run at him. And then Aaron gets a lot of opportunities to make plays."

"If people want to do that, that's fine with us, and I'm sure it's fine with Aaron. We don't care which way they run — we're not at a disadvantage either way."

Davie thinks Roper has helped his younger teammate along in his maturation process.

Davie says, "John is one of those emotional players, and he has brought that out in Aaron."

"John Roper plays football on a different level than Aaron played (when he came to A&M), and he's bringing Aaron to the realization that he has to play at that level."



"I think Aaron has come out of his shell and is enjoying football. I don't think he knew how to enjoy football before. I don't think he knew enough about football to enjoy it."

He's having fun now, though. "People say I don't get excited," Wallace says. "I do. I just don't make a big hoopla about it."

He even qualifies all the Roper-Wallace comparisons as enjoyable, and the two of them make the most of it.

"It's fun to compete with him, seeing who can have more sacks in a game and stuff like that. It's all in fun, there's no rivalry. I push him, he pushes me."

But that doesn't mean Wallace is anything but all business on the field.

"I'm coming out there to beat somebody," he says.

And when asked whether he meant beat teams or beat on individ-

ual opponents, he quickly responds, "Both."

And despite the teams on A&M's schedule that present sizeable obstacles in the path of the Aggies, he thinks they can pull it off.

"My attitude is, we're going out to beat everybody. I feel we can. We're going to play them one at a time, but I feel we can win them all."

Not exactly the words of last year's insecure sophomore.

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