

Aggies set to back up words

By Doug Walker
Assistant Sports Editor

This is the week the Texas A&M Aggies have been waiting for all season.

Now A&M gets the chance to fulfill the promise to send the second-best team in the Southwest Conference to the Cotton Bowl New Year's Day when they meet Arkansas in Fayetteville on Saturday afternoon.

At his weekly press conference Tuesday, A&M Head Coach Jackie Sherrill wouldn't make any promises. "Like I always say," Sherrill said, "Whenever you say something you should back it up."

Sherrill listed the keys to winning. "Bucky and the offense need to understand the different defensive schemes and put themselves in a position where Arkansas can't turn people loose on them," Sherrill said.

"Defensively, you have to be aggressive and patient at the same time. Any option team ends up becoming a big-play team if you're not patient with them."

The undefeated and 11th-ranked Razorbacks will severely test the Aggies on both sides of the line of scrimmage.

Arkansas leads the SWC in total defense (265.3 yards per game) and rushing defense.

Against the rush, Arkansas leads the nation, allowing only 72.1 yards per game.

Offensively, the Razorbacks rank second in the SWC in rushing with an average of 265.8 yards per game and are second in total offense with an average of 421.3 yards per game.

Sherrill said the main ingredients in the Razorbacks' success defensively are the experience of their players and complexity of their defensive schemes.

"Defensively, they have eight seniors, and an awful lot of players that have started for them the past three or four years," Sherrill said.

"I would say every senior on their defensive team would have a chance to play in the pros."

Sherrill mentioned linebackers LaSalle Harper and Kerry Owens, tackle Wayne Martin and safety Steve Atwater as leaders of the defense.

"They've got some great athletes like Martin and Atwater," Sherrill said. "Martin is playing a lot better than he was last year. They're getting

Batiste: They don't think they can beat us

By Hal L. Hammons
Sports Editor

Jackie Sherrill said Tuesday it was OK for his players to talk big about Saturday's game against Arkansas, just as long as they backed up their words on the playing field.

Dana Batiste didn't need any encouragement.

The always-vocal Texas A&M linebacker wasn't short on confidence going into the showdown for the unofficial title of "Best in the Southwest."

"I really believe we're going to send the second-best team to the Cotton Bowl," he said.

"I thought it was going to be us (in the Cotton Bowl), but we made a few mistakes earlier," he said, referring jokingly to the NCAA violations that cost the Aggies an opportunity of winning the Southwest Conference championship this year.

"I think Arkansas doesn't really believe they can beat us," Batiste said. "Does Dukakis really think he can beat Bush?"

He said if A&M beats Arkansas Saturday, the Hogs' SWC championship will be just a sidenote in the record books.

"I think Arkansas should have three asterisks by their name," he said. "Bold print across the page. It should be on the scoreboard at the Cotton Bowl — on signs on I-45 North to Dallas."

"I think the sign that says, 'Welcome to Arkansas' ought to say, 'Texas A&M beat Arkansas, but welcome anyway.'"

"I feel they're the champions as far

as the NCAA says, but who are they?"

He said he would feel indebted to the NCAA if he were on a Razorback team that won the SWC despite being beaten by the Aggies.

"I'd write the NCAA a letter of thanks — send them a Christmas card," he said.

He admitted that Arkansas' defense is strong, but he said it takes a back seat to the self-styled "Wrecking Crew II" of A&M.

"It's going to be a low-scoring ball game," he said. "Arkansas has a good defense, but they don't have the best defense."

He downplayed claims by the Razorbacks that their linebacking corps is comparable to the Aggies'.

"From what I see, they've got one — LaSalle (Harper)," he said. "Behind him they've got nothing but (All-SWC free safety Steve) Atwater."

"Our defense is more balanced. Our linebackers are more balanced. Every team has one linebacker — only Texas A&M has four."

He said the Aggies will present the first real test for the Razorbacks.

"I think Arkansas hasn't been tested at all," Batiste said. "I think we'll put them to their test."

Stopping the explosive Arkansas wishbone is just a matter of playing the kind of defense the Aggies can play, he said.

"We know what it takes to beat the wishbone," he said. "That's the advantage we have. It's discipline. If you've got that pitch man, you can't run off and try to get the quarterback at the same time."

"The key is how well the offensive line plays and how well Bucky can read the defense and adjust to their schemes."

Although many skeptics contend the Razorbacks have better defensive statistics than A&M because of a weaker schedule, Sherrill gave Arkansas full credit for being a quality defensive team.

good play from their linebackers and are much more consistent. They're good because they've got excellent talent and they can run."

Sherrill said the Razorbacks force teams to run inside and shut them down.

"They try to funnel everything inside and let Atwater make the plays on the pass," Sherrill said.

"They're leading the nation in rushing defense. They've done it every week," Sherrill said.

Offensively, Arkansas has benefited from a revitalized passing game this season after concentrating on diversifying an attack which was shut out in last year's game with the Aggies at Kyle Field.

Last year A&M held the Razorbacks to 125 yards of total offense and forced them to pass in the 14-0 Aggie shutout. This season has seen Arkansas improve the passing offense.

Quarterback Quinn Grovey is the SWC's top-rated passer and has passed for 888 yards while completing 64.4 percent of his passes.

However, the Razorbacks still live and die with the run. Arkansas has three players averaging over four yards per carry.

Grovey leads the trio with a 4.9 average per rush and has totalled 468 yards on the ground this season.

Running back Barry Foster averages 4.5 yards per tote and has gained 509 yards to lead the team. James Rouse has added 359 yards and averages 4.1 yards per carry.

Sherrill said the key for the Aggie defense is to stop the fullback dive on the Arkansas wishbone and force the Razorbacks to run outside.

Nose guard O'Neill Gilbert will have to take up the slack left by the graduation of Sammy O'Brien. O'Brien played a big part in the last three games against Arkansas in which the Aggies held Arkansas to an average of 6.7 points per game.

"If I could go find Sammy O'Brien, I'd go dress him out," Sherrill said jokingly. "They're a good, solid football team with some outstanding football players. They've played really well. I think their offensive line has really been consistent."

The Arkansas offensive line is anchored by giant right guard Freddie Childress. The six-foot-four, 310-pound senior presents a large problem for the Aggie defense because of his bulk and quickness.

He outweighs the Aggie linemen by 45 to 60 pounds.

If Gilbert and defensive ends Leon Cole and Terry Price can hold their own in the trenches, the Aggies can stop the Razorbacks.

No wonder athletes get such big heads

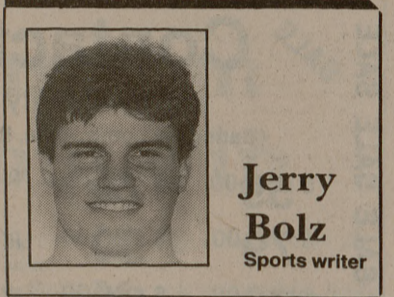
Taking a mental look through the unwritten book of sports writing ethics, I came across a big mistake. Somewhere down the line, sports writers have taken up the job of putting athletes on a paper pedestal that gets jerked out from under them later in life. The result is that the players have been forced to carry a burden not one can bear.

As sports writers, the nature of the industry calls for me to report the performance of athletes, which quite often are phenomenal performances. The problems occur around graduation time when these great athletes step out into a world that is much more real than they imagined. In the case of a top college football player who fails to make the National Football League draft, he may end up wondering if he has been lied to about his ability the past four years.

For example, I can write in a story that "Joe Slasher gained 220 yards on 15 carries to lead the Aggies in a stomping of Arkansas." The player reads that and says, "Hey, I was pretty hot this week." And all of his friends and acquaintances confront him with, "Man, you're the hottest thing on two feet. Where did you get moves like that?"

In the course of a college career, a top athlete may read that same story twenty or thirty times. Athletes, who are no more or less vain than the rest of us, learn to enjoy hearing how great they are. It becomes a charge to them to be exalted and suddenly the athlete has an image or attitude he has to keep up.

At A&M, guys like Darren Lewis and Bucky Richardson as sophomores are already getting praised for their weekly efforts. There is also a good chance that beneath the helmets of these two young



Jerry Bolz
Sports writer

stars is growing a need or desire to here just how good they are. The sports writer continues to do his job and so do Lewis and Richardson, and pretty soon the first signs of a monster ego begin to break the surface.

There's no doubt these two are exciting to watch, and Lewis has as much opportunity to win a Heisman Trophy the next couple of years as almost anyone. In fact, there is already talk of that around town.

And beyond college, barring a serious injury, Lewis will undoubtedly make it in the National Football League. But not every player is a Darren Lewis. Take Kevin Murray, for example.

The Aggie offense was built around Murray when he was here. He could throw the ball like a bullet and with the accuracy of a high-powered rifle. He heard and read all the time how great he was and what incredible talent he had. And he knew the coaches and former students thought he was worthy of all kinds of goodies.

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Lady Ags back home against UH tonight

The Texas A&M Lady Aggies return to G. Rollie White Coliseum on the tails of a three-game winning streak to face the Houston Lady Cougars tonight at 7:30.

A&M, 16-11 overall and 5-2 in Southwest Conference play, beat Rice and Texas Tech last week. The Lady Aggies dropped only one game in the two matches.

The Lady Cougars are 16-10 and 3-4 this year.

Houston is coming off a win over Baylor Friday night, which snapped a five-match losing skid for UH.

A&M holds a 20-16 series edge. The teams split last year's two meetings, with each team winning on the other's home court.

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