

Opinion

Lights! Camera! Action! The saga continues . . .

The plot thickens.

Act I, Scene I: Former A&M fullback George Smith and *Dallas Morning News* reporter Doug Bedell collaborate on a potential book. During eight hours of taped interviews Mr. Smith, an honorable man, claims several improprieties regarding NCAA rules and his relationship with Professor/Head Coach/Superior Being Jackie Sherrill, also an honorable man.

Among Smith's allegations are his being paid several hundred dollars for doing Prof. Sherrill's yardwork (Talk about some serious weed-eating.) and for not selling his complimentary game tickets at inflated rates (an honorable thing for an honorable man not to do), and his receiving of free plane tickets for flights to his hometown of Atlanta and "hush money" from A&M Assistant Coach George Pugh, another honorable man.

Act I, Scene II: The honorable Mr. Sherrill, doing his best Houdini, disappears from the face of Aggieland Friday. Of course, he made a cameo appearance in the A&M locker room for a team meeting at which he didn't, I repeat *didn't*, tell his players how to defend him in response to the media's questions.

But Mr. Sherrill (did I mention that he was an honorable man?) did not feel the need to defend himself to those dishonorable, muckraking, two-percenter media scoundrels. Nor did he feel the need to coach his team against those lowly Horned Frogs of TCU — too many distractions, don'tcha know. I guess he was afraid that after the game, TCU Coach Jim Wacker would forego congratulations to say, "Nyahh, nyahh!"

Act I, Scene III: The once-and-for-ever honorable Mr. Smith receives a phone call from the spouse of the equally honorable Coach Pugh. And lo and behold, Georgie Porgie (Smith, not Pugh) changes his story and refuses to stand behind his previous comments. He was overheard telling A&M's Director of Public Information Lane Stephenson, "Damn the eight hours of audio tape, the sworn statement and the Federal Express envelope stuffed with \$500 on the inside and Pugh's return address scribbled on the outside that I gave the *News*, man. Full speed ahead to the polygraph."

Act II, Scene I: The big game. Assistant Head Coach and Defensive Coordinator R.C. Slocum, the man sent in to mop up the Frogs, leads his team onto Kyle Field for the traditional rendition of "The Spirit of Aggieland." Three hundred and eighty-six photographers,



Anthony Wilson
Opinion Page Editor

each carrying three cameras with lenses the size of canned hams, gather round Slocum as he goes into his hump. (Nope, no distractions here.)

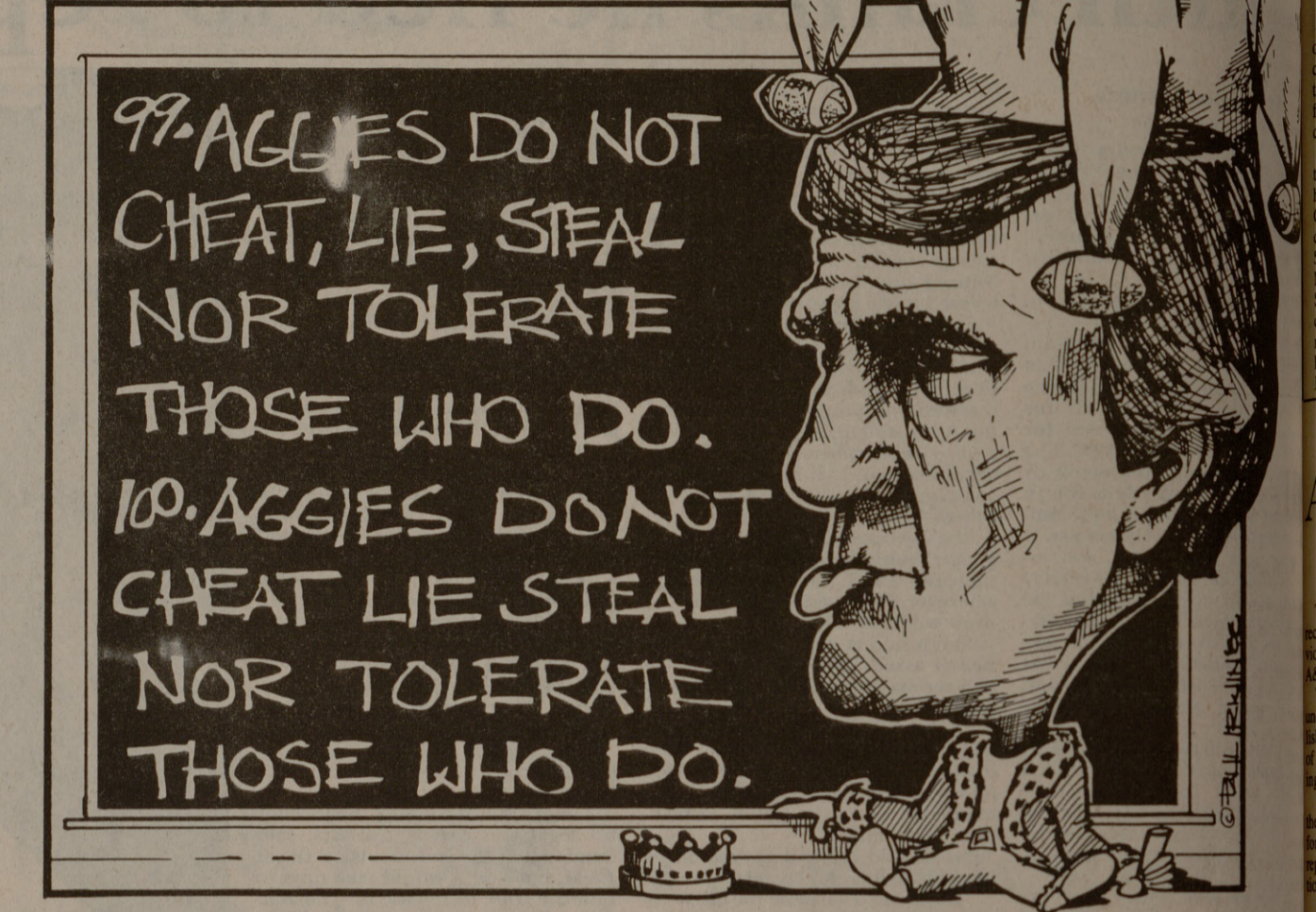
The Aggies easily beat the Frogs 18-0. And despite the controversy of a looming death penalty for the A&M football program, none of the players are worried. It's fine when seniors John Roper and Dana Batiste say that; they'll be toiling in the National Football League next year. But when sophomore Bucky Richardson says, "It had nothing to do with us" and "... We can't worry about it," you have this burning desire to break out the semaphore flags and spell it out — "YOU MAY NOT BE PLAYING FOOTBALL FOR A&M NEXT YEAR. THIS SHOULD BE A CONCERN, BUCKY!!!"

Act II, Scene II: The big press conference. Dr. William Mobley begins his statement with a brief rundown of the 112-year history of the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College. An airhorn is sounded to awaken the media when he begins to say something of substance. He doesn't have time to answer any questions — an important social function awaits his arrival.

Trumpets sound and George Smith, the hardest working man in literature, enters the room. The basis of his statement: "I swear I was lying!" Mr. Smith, ever the honorable kind of guy he is, says the only reason Jackie, an honorary honorable guy, gave him money was because George was having a hard time sans degree and he and Jack have this father-son relationship. (Gee, my dad never gave me \$300 for mowing the lawn.)

Mr. Smith, who also happens to be the hardest working man in blackmail, fields reporters' questions with the grace of a retarded rhinoceros. For example: When asked why he thought he could get away with the lies in a book, he deftly answered, "Next question." He may not have gotten a bachelor's at A&M, but he did get an education in Sherrill's school of public relations.

The only thing missing from this event was an itsy-bitsy car containing all the clowns who arranged the confer-



ence. The attending reporters leave trusting Mr. Smith and the University about as far as they can spit bowling balls.

And now a rundown of the cast of characters and their possible fates:

Jackie Sherrill — Mr. Sherrill, an honorable man, has acted strangely throughout this ordeal. One would think he is attempting to cover up a murder, rather than an infraction concerning football, a form of entertainment millenniums from real life. Sherrill has a veritable plethora of options from which to choose, three of which are:

- A.) Come out of hiding, defend himself and answer all the unanswered questions, such as "If you were simply loaning George Smith money, why did you send cash instead of a check?" and "Why have you refused to stand up to these accusations if you are innocent?" He would then have to decide whether to carry on as coach or resign in the best interest of the team and the University.

B.) Live up to his word and resign as he said he would if something else went wrong when A&M received its penalties in September from the NCAA.

C.) Take his act to the pros where paying players is perfectly acceptable.

Dr. William Mobley — As University president, Dr. Mobley must take complete control of the situation, have A&M's internal investigation completed ASAP and make an immediate decision concerning Sherrill's fate. And to drive the point home, he should also advise the system's Board of Regents to strip Sherrill of his professorship.

George Smith — Watch and be amazed as Mr. Smith, an honorable man, laughs all the way to the bank. A television movie will be made of his escapades starring Mr. T as our hero. Michael Dukakis will win an Emmy for his emotional portrayal as Smith's (T's) father/coach/mentor.

A&M football players — If the death

penalty hits, these men will see combat in Recruiting War II. Darren Lewis will surrender all hopes to a Heisman for his junior year because of the adjustment period of learning a new offense. However, others, such as Lance Pavlas, Cliff Osgood, Larry Horton and Keith McFee, will flourish with more playing time. Attendance at A&M volleyball also skyrockets.

George Pugh — A&M's receiver coach will get his wife to call college campuses across the country collecting begging someone to give Sherrill's honorable pawn a job.

So what's the conclusion? You'll have to continue checking in at the same *Batt*-time on this same *Batt*-channel to find out. Because this story is definitely to be continued.

Anthony Wilson is a senior journalism major and opinion page editor for The Battalion.

Why Battalion staffers must do what they do

To put it mildly, the Texas press has been getting a lot of heat recently.

Aggies from all over are complaining about the way the recent scandal has been reported. "Sloppy journalism." "Yellow journalism." "Printing rumors as facts." I heard it all Saturday.

But special criticism is being focused on *The Battalion*. I was surrounded by an angry horde of supporters by the Aggie Diehards' bus, and all wanted to know why we as a whole — and I individually — did what we did.

For those of you who may not have seen Friday's *Battalion*, we ran a story based on and attributed to the *Dallas Morning News* article concerning George Smith and his accusations leveled at A&M (that he has since retracted).

We ran two editorials that said Jackie Sherrill should be fired and the A&M football team deserved the "Death Penalty" if the allegations proved true.

I wrote a column stating my opinion on the matter. That is, I believe them, and I am embarrassed and insulted that Sherrill would think we could believe all his talk about cleaning up the program — and even more embarrassed and insulted that he appears to have been right.

Two basic statements need to be made concerning our treatment of the issue:

First, to get all speculation out of the way, I and *The Battalion* stand by every word we have said about Jackie Sherrill and the A&M football program today and Friday.

I firmly believe the allegations reported by the *Dallas Morning News* Friday are true. If true, I believe the A&M program deserves anything the NCAA is capable of dishing out, including the "Death Penalty." In fact, I'm more sure of it now than I've ever been.

I believe Sherrill should be forced to resign, and I don't think the ax should stop there.

I believe fans of Texas A&M football, perhaps without knowing it, are taking "innocent until proven guilty" to mean "innocent until confession." They are not giving the *News* any credit for intelligence or ethics — after all, this is recognized as the best newspaper in this part of the country by almost everyone who knows journalism.

I believe deep in their hearts, most of them believe the story but are just unwilling to admit it. After all, even without any proof, the story is pretty believ-



Hal Hammons
Sports Editor

able. And the *News* supplied ample proof.

Secondly, there needs to be some clarification about our peculiar situation here at *The Battalion*, being journalists and Aggies simultaneously.

There seems to be a wide-spread misconception among Aggies everywhere that *The Battalion* — "the school newspaper," as they are given to call it — is especially to blame, since it is shooting down its own school.

Many of the Aggie Diehards seemed to assume I didn't like Texas A&M because of the stand I took. One, in fact, offered to buy my ring from me. He assumed, I suppose, I didn't really care whether or not I owned one.

My response told my story in five words: "I'm proud of my ring."

And I am. And proud of Texas A&M. I haven't regretted a single minute I have spent in College Station since defecting from Austin more than four years ago.

I am not, however, proud of the football program. I am not proud of the football coach. And I certainly am not proud of three Cotton Bowls and four wins over the University of Texas that seem to have come by reprehensible means.

I see no intrinsic conflict between being an A&M student and being a responsible journalist. If anything, the tendency would be to slant the news toward A&M. And I fight the urge every day.

I do not see why it is un-Aggie to speak out against the school's existing problems.

There is absolutely nothing unprofessional, unethical or illegal about printing allegations that have not been proven. That's the case with every law of the land. If someone has been accused of a crime, and evidence or circumstances make the accusation plausible, that is news. Especially if it is a person of stature such as Mr. Sherrill.

Why should we think that an NCAA violation allegation — not even a crimi-

nal act — involving someone who is receiving so much of Texas A&M's money should be treated with kid gloves?

There is nothing wrong with a newspaper going to press with a story of this nature. Not even *The Battalion*.

In fact, we of all news media should print a story like this. We print what is of interest to our readership. Our readers, for the most part, are Aggies. Obviously this story has significance to Aggies.

Once and for all, let me say in print what I have said hundreds of times verbally:

We are *The Battalion*. We are a newspaper, with the purpose of giving our readers the news. Just like any other newspaper.

We are not a branch of the Sports Information Department or A&M's Office of Public Information. It is not our responsibility to support the team through thick and thin.

And we will not shirk from our responsibility to tell the facts — good or bad.

If you don't like the facts, don't read *The Battalion*.

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by Berke Breathed



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