

The Battalion

Sports Section B

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Aggies poised to reclaim Arkansas' SWC title

By Jeff Osborne

Of The Battalion Staff

The 1989 Texas A&M football program combines newness with familiarity as the Aggies aim for their fourth Southwest Conference Championship and Cotton Bowl bid in the past five years.

This year, the team is expected to make a strong run for the Cotton Bowl, and is picked by SWC coaches as the favorite to unseat defending SWC Champion Arkansas to reclaim the top spot.

The team features a Heisman Trophy candidate, a Butkus Award candidate and most of last season's offensive firepower.

On defense, the "Wrecking Crew" will be back and a strong secondary should bolster a largely unproven group of linebackers.

Although this season's schedule isn't quite as menacing as last year's, when the Aggies faced several of the nation's best (LSU, Nebraska, Oklahoma State, Houston, Arkansas and Alabama), it won't be a cakewalk by any stretch of the imagination either.

A&M's first two opponents, Louisiana State and Washington, are both Top Twenty teams.

Following a September 16th clash with Texas Christian, the Aggies will face Southern Mississippi, which finished 10-2 last season and won the Independence Bowl.

In the fifth game, A&M will face Texas Tech, a contest which has traditionally been very tough for the Aggies in Lubbock.

Then, a critical mid-season tandem in Houston and Baylor will challenge the Aggies.

A&M will then battle Rice and Southern Methodist (back from a two-year death penalty hiatus). Finally, the regular season will see Arkansas and Texas arrive at Kyle Field for nationally televised games.

Coach R.C. Slocum, A&M's new head coach has served as an assistant coach for the Aggies for 16 years.

He replaces Jackie Sherrill, who resigned amid controversy and uncertainty amid a second NCAA in-

vestigation of the Aggie football program.

The Aggies also have a new assistant head coach, Tom Hayes, who served as defensive coordinator for UCLA.

Also new to the coaching staff are offensive coordinator Bob Toledo from Oregon, receivers coach Robert Ford from Texas Tech, tight ends/specialists coach John Pearce from Fort Bend Willowridge High School, and offensive line coach Mike Sherman from Holy Cross.

Defensive coordinator Bob Davie, who has coached at A&M for four years, will also play a prominent role in the Aggies' season.

The Aggies are hoping to rebound from last year's disappointing 7-5 season. In 1988, the Aggies lost to five opponents ranked in the Associated Press Top Twenty, including conference champion Arkansas.

In preseason ratings, the Aggies were picked to challenge for the national championship last year, but early losses and NCAA sanctions preventing a bowl bid quickly ended expectations of post-season glory.

Also looming over the Aggies was the George Smith scandal.

Smith claimed he had received payments of hush money, but later recanted. After he changed his story several times, the NCAA dropped their investigation.

The investigation lasted several months, and the threat of additional sanctions or a "death penalty" which would suspend A&M from competing in football for a year or more hampered recruiting.

A&M recruited only 14 players this year, a far cry from the recruiting classes of the last three years which gained national attention.

Of the 14 recruits one signed with the Minnesota Twins to play baseball and two were ruled academically ineligible.

"Houston, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State's penalties were lumped together with Texas A&M by the media," Slocum said, "and this hurt recruiting. Opposing coaches took advantage of the situation we were in."

"After 20 some odd years of



R.C. Slocum begins his first season at the helm in 1989. He also is beginning his 17th year with the A&M program.

Photo by Jay Janner

coaching," Slocum said, "I understand the facts of winning and losing."

"I hope the people we bring in here have more than just a few championship rings to show off, although I'm counting on those too."

"I hope they also have a good education and experience at A&M. The program will be dedicated to winning with integrity."

Slocum said the tradition of the 12th Man Kickoff Team will be continued. This tradition, which features non-scholarship athletes from the student body, was started by Sherrill.

Slocum plans to start a new tradition as well. This year, freshman

football players were sent to Fish Camp at Palestine.

The camp teaches incoming freshmen the traditions of Texas A&M, and what being an Aggie is all about.

"This will give the athletes a better understanding of what Texas A&M is about, and it will give non-athletes a better understanding of the football players," Slocum said.

"Some of you may wonder how I'm going to get all these guys to go. Well, we'll be working hard in the August heat out there, and I'll tell them they can take a week off at camp."

"I'll tell them there's air-conditioned buses of pretty girls waiting in

the parking lot. Any of the players who don't want to go, I'll send home," Slocum laughed.

The new coaching staff put together by Slocum and Athletic Director John David Crow is "very high quality," said Alan Cannon, director of Sports Information.

"We've got one of the finest coaching staffs in the country," Slocum said, "and there wasn't one coach I offered a job who turned it down."

"With R.C. (Slocum), the defensive side should be pretty much the same," Cannon said.

"The offensive side depends so much on your skill positions," Cannon said.

"I don't think we could have had a better or smoother transition with a new coach and athletic director, but these guys were already in place."

"There's an old saying that the defense wins championships and there's a lot of truth to that. The offense should be more balanced."

Toledo, the offensive coordinator, said the Aggies will run "more of a pro-style attack, and we won't run the option nearly as much."

"Our offensive style will be similar to the (San Francisco) 49ers style of attack, emphasizing ball control with passing. The key is balance," Toledo said.

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