

Collision in College Station: Aggies, Hogs

Inside track to SWC crown to be decided

By Clay Rasmussen

Of The Battalion Staff

It was earlier this year in August. The 1988 Southwest Conference Coach of the Year, Ken Hatfield, said he had one goal for his Arkansas Razorbacks in 1989: A victory on Jan. 1, 1990.

"That's our goal, to win the Cotton Bowl," Hatfield said during the SWC media tour this fall.

And three months later, the No. 9 Razorbacks (8-1) are well on their way to repeating their 10-1 regular season finish and

Arkansas at A&M

- Site: Kyle Field (72,387 cap.)
- Kickoff: 1:30 p.m.
- Ranking: A&M (14th), Ark. (9th)
- Records: A&M (7-2), Ark. (8-1)
- TV/Radio: The game will be nationally televised by CBS-TV; KTAM (AM 1240)

Cotton Bowl appearance of 1988.

The only thing standing in Arkansas' way is No. 14 Texas A&M.

A&M meets Arkansas Friday afternoon at 1:30 at Kyle Field in a matchup that could decide who will capture the SWC title and make the coveted trip to Dallas on New Year's Day.

And A&M Coach R.C. Slocum wouldn't have it any other way.

"(A&M or Arkansas) can take the conference championship and the Cotton Bowl berth, lay it out there on the middle of the field and go after it," Slocum said. "That's what makes this game so important and so exciting."

"This is the way (football) is supposed to be."

The two teams mirror each other and are so evenly matched in ability, size and speed that the game could go down to the wire. Factors that might be small in other games, with other opponents, are magnified.

Hatfield believes the difference in the game could come down to the kicking and special teams.

"When you've got two really good defensive teams fighting it out, that limits the offense's outputs," Hatfield said. "That makes the kicking game real important."

Hatfield credits the Aggies with the better kicking game, but believes his team has the ability to perform just as well.

"Our kicking game isn't as strong as A&M's," Hatfield said. "We're capable of kicking better, but we just haven't been able to do it consistently."

"We've got a great field goal kicker in Todd Wright. He's 16-of-18 and has done a good job of kicking all year."

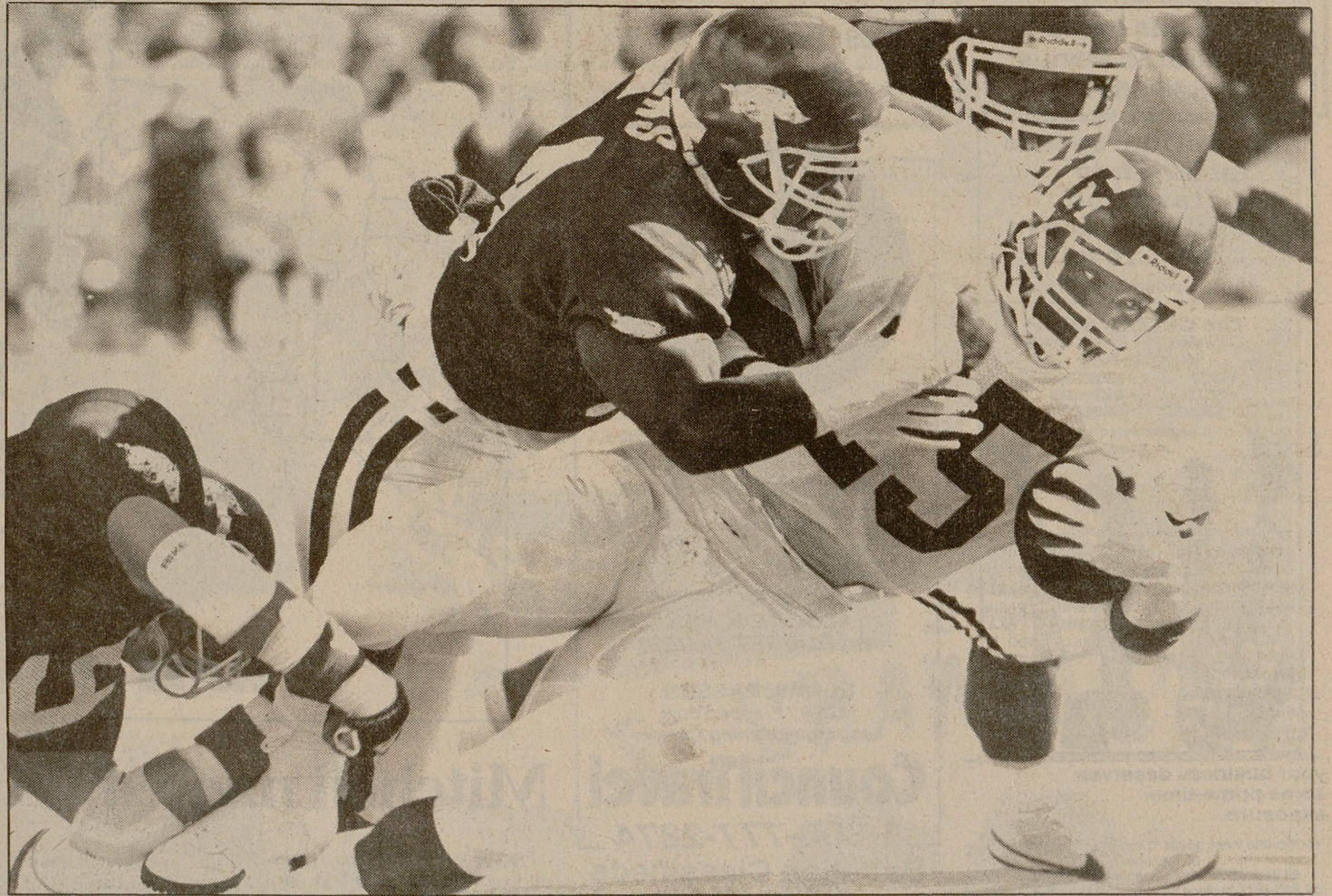
However, the Aggies have a great kicker of their own in Layne Talbot.

Talbot is having an outstanding year, converting 69.2 percent of his field goals and 100 percent of his extra points. He is the team's second leading scorer behind Darren Lewis with 60 points.

Another critical factor Arkansas must face is A&M's home field advantage.

The Aggies haven't dropped a SWC game at Kyle Field since 1984.

Still, Slocum tried to downplay the Aggies' good fortune in home games.



Battalion file photo

A&M running back Darren Lewis carries two Arkansas defenders in last year's 25-20 loss in Fayetteville, Ark. Lewis will lead A&M Friday against the Razorbacks, as A&M hopes to take the inside track to the Cotton Bowl.

"We don't talk about that stuff," Slocum said. "I'm sure other teams talk about it, but we don't think it's that important."

"We just happen to play well at home because we get such great support here."

Both A&M and Arkansas base their philosophy around an aggressive defense.

"A&M has great team speed and they attack the ball well," Hatfield said. "They've got everything a good solid defense needs to have a team succeed."

"I believe A&M has one of the better defenses in the league."

Hatfield should know. His Razorbacks have been able to muster only 2 offensive touchdowns against the Aggies' defense over the last two years.

Last year, A&M kept Arkansas out of the endzone all day, but gave up five field goals. The Razorbacks' defense also logged a touchdown on a blocked punt. Arkansas won 25-20.

However, Hatfield isn't concerned about his offense's poor showings over the past two years.

"I'm not worried about our teams that were on the field two years ago," Hatfield said. "These guys are a totally different bunch of players."

Razorback quarterback Quinn Grovey also has learned first hand about the Aggies' aggressive defense.

Grovey was knocked out from a vicious hit by A&M safety Gary Jones last year.

A&M offensive coordinator Bob Toledo sees Arkansas' defense much like Hatfield sees A&M's.

"They're a sound defensive team," To-

ledo said. "They don't do a lot of things scheme wise, but what they do, they do real well."

"Arkansas has been noted for its defense the last few years, and this year is no exception."

Toledo has instilled some of his respect for the Razorbacks into Aggie quarterback Lance Pavlas.

"They're a very sound defense," Pavlas said. "They're not going to make mistakes and they're going to force you to either beat them or beat yourself."

A&M plans to mix up its running and passing games equally to counteract Arkansas' defense.

"We're going to have to have a balanced attack," Pavlas said. "The most important thing is when we have the ball, we're going to need to put some points on the board."

"We need to score when we have the ball."

Slocum said it was vital that the Aggies make the most out of every possession.

"Arkansas eats up so much time off the clock when they have the ball," Slocum said. "They'll let the 30-second clock wind down to 15 seconds before they run in a play and Grovey will wait till the clock gets to two seconds before he snaps the ball."

A&M will rely heavily on its offense to take control of the game and keep the ball away from Arkansas.

Both Slocum and Hatfield are somewhat concerned, wondering whether or not their teams will come out in top form or play flat.

Although Slocum is thankful for the two

weeks off, he worried about pacing the team. He did not want the team to lose intensity, and at the same time he didn't want to run them into the ground practicing them too hard.

"Preparing for the game, we tried to pace ourselves over the two weeks off," Slocum said. "We came out practicing in full pads this week and we will continue to have live scrimmage-type drills up to Thursday."

However, Hatfield is a little more assured that his team will come into Friday's game with the intensity they've played with all year.

"The team has shown every indication of being up for the game," Hatfield said. "The intensity is definitely there."

The A&M-Arkansas game has been a conference deciding game four of the last five years. While the game may decide the conference championship and Cotton Bowl berth, both teams, if they win Friday's game, still must win their final games to clinch the SWC.

They'll both be playing as if this game were the final one of the season.

"We're going to go all out," Slocum said. "We will not hold anything back Friday, worrying about Texas."

Hatfield and the Razorbacks face a big challenge Friday. If they're to accomplish their preseason goal of two consecutive Cotton Bowls, then they'll have to go through Slocum and his Aggies. Aggie cornerback Derrick Frazier said it best.

"This game is for all the marbles."



Richard Tijerina
Assistant Sports Editor

12th Man may be biggest asset Ags have against Hogs

Q: What do you get when you have a crucial matchup involving Texas A&M at Kyle Field?

A: Trouble. Decibels worth.

Friday's A&M-Arkansas matchup is for all the marbles this year in the Southwest Conference. The two teams practically are even on paper, but the Aggies have a decided advantage.

Specifically, A&M will have about 66,000 reasons why they'll have the edge Friday against Arkansas.

The 12th Man.

How many times has a Top Ten opponent visited Kyle Field this year in a big game against the Aggies? And how many times has Kyle Field's faithful thrown the other team off balance? And how many times has A&M turned that home field support into an upset?

Let me count the ways.

• Sept. 2, 1989. Louisiana State, ranked seventh in the country, traveled to College Station to play unranked A&M in the first game of the season.

There was 61,733 at the game, and LSU's offense unraveled in the fourth quarter with the game within reach. The Aggies went on to win, 28-16.

• Oct. 14, 1989. In what was considered A&M's most important game of the season until Friday's matchup with Arkansas, Houston brought its explosive Run-and-Shoot to College Station. No. 8 UH was a nine-point favorite over unranked A&M. The Cougars were called for delay of game penalties because of the crowd noise several times, including a crucial one in the final minute that sealed the Aggies' 17-13 upset.

That's just this season. Let's also remember 1987, when Arkansas and Texas traveled to College Station. The home field advantage always has been crucial in the A&M-Arkansas series, and it held up in the Aggies' 14-0 win.

The win gave the Aggies the inside track to the Cotton Bowl. The Razorbacks who were there still remember the noise at Kyle Field.

"Kyle Field is the worst place to play for an opposing team," Arkansas cornerback Anthony Cooney said.

"Their fans are loud but you can't get caught up watching the fans. You have to just play your game. A&M will do a lot of things to distract you."

Arkansas Coach Ken Hatfield said he thinks the noise at Kyle Field is going to be something the Razorbacks will have to deal with Friday.

"It's loud, no doubt," Hatfield said.

"When you've got more than 70,000 people down there screaming for A&M, it tends to drown everything else out."

"But I heard how nice and hospitable A&M plans to be Friday. Tell (the Aggie fans) to eat some extra turkey and See 12th Man/Page 6

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