

Slocum's spring begins with fresh start

By RICHARD TIJERINA
Of The Battalion Staff

As far as Texas A&M football coach R.C. Slocum and Offensive Coordinator Bob Toledo are concerned, the Aggies are already one step ahead of where they were at this time last year.

A&M opened spring football practice Monday, and the Aggies had a full season with a new offense under their belts.

When the Aggies opened their spring drills last season, players didn't even know the correct huddle formations or snap counts for Toledo's new offensive scheme. This year they're practicing more confidently, Toledo said.

"They basically know the plays," Toledo said. "Now it's a matter of the new guys catching up with the players who've been here for a year."

And yes, that includes one Bucky Richardson.

Richardson, who led the Aggies to the Cotton Bowl as a freshman in 1987 and was the starter in 1988, sat last season out while recovering from major knee surgery. In his place, Lance Pavlas blossomed under Toledo's pass-oriented offense.

Now Richardson and Pavlas are back and both are competing for the starting job.

"I don't know that much about Bucky right now, but we're going to find out about him during spring practice," Toledo said. "But I've heard a lot of good things about him obviously. He's a competitor and has a lot of courage, and I think it's going to be a good competition with Lance."

"Going into spring practice, Lance is our starting quarterback and Bucky's going to have to prove to us that he's capable of leading us in this offense."

That may be easier said than done, however. Pavlas led the Aggies to an 8-4 record last year and an appearance in the John Hancock Bowl.

"I thought Lance really did a good job of coming back," Slocum said. "He knows what he's doing right now — getting a feel for running the offense. I was pleased that Bucky moved around, and just from the physical standpoint it's obvious that he's spent a long time away from football."

"He's rusty from not having practiced, and he's rusty from being introduced to a new offense. But it was good to see him back out there and I was pleased to see him move around the way he did."

Richardson said he felt good and that his knee wasn't hampering his mobility.

"I felt like I was more comfortable than I thought I would be," Richardson said. "It's just something that I've done for so many years before, then took a year off and it was like I didn't know what to expect. I think it was just the fear of the unknown."

"I would tell you I'm 100 percent, but I don't know what the trainers would tell you. I feel like I'm ready to do anything they ask me to do."

Pavlas said the Aggies need to work on the progress they made last season offensively.

"This type of offense is the best for the type of player that I am," Pavlas said. "I'm looking at this spring as a chance to improve on that so I can get even better. It's all part of a major college football program. There's going to be competition in every aspect of life."



Photo by Frederick D. Joe

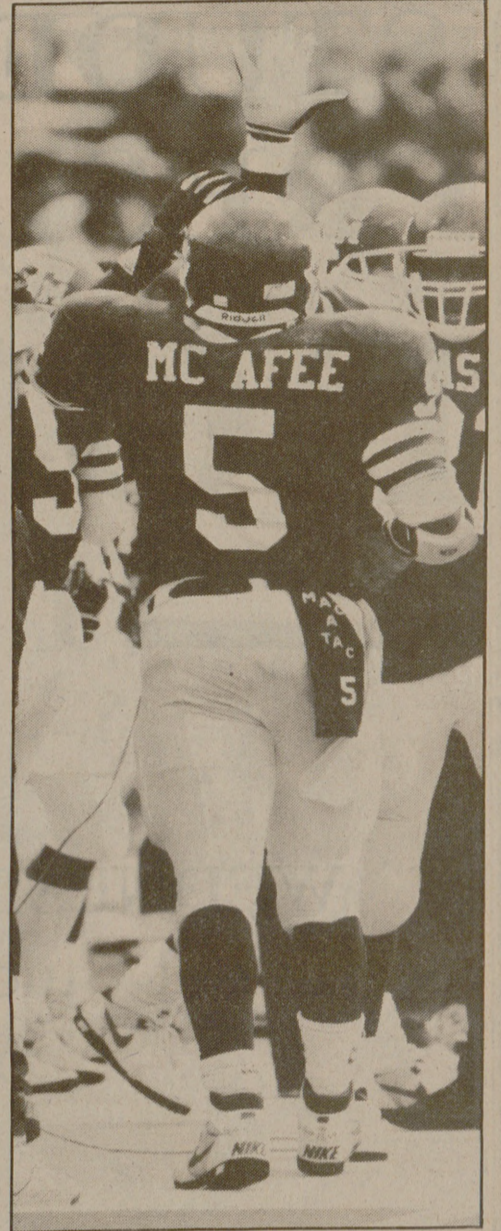


Photo by Mike C. Mulvey

Running backs Randy Simmons (above) and Keith McAfee (right) are getting a chance to impress coaches this spring with starter Darren Lewis absent.

But there's more than the quarterback position Slocum is worrying about this spring. The Aggies are missing their starting running back, junior Darren Lewis.

Lewis, who's on the verge of shattering most of A&M's rushing records, is spending the spring semester at home in Dallas for personal reasons. He told Slocum that he intends to return for his senior season. He has until March 22 to apply for entry into the National Football League draft.

With Lewis absent from spring drills, backups Randy Simmons and Keith McAfee are getting their chance to prove to coaches what they can do.

Simmons, along with Lewis, was one of the most highly rated running backs in the nation coming out of high school. But he's been slowed by injuries his first two years, and last season was his first full one as an Aggie. He played well in place of the injured Lewis in the Arkansas, Texas and the

Hancock Bowl. "Lewis' absence gives you a chance to work with those guys," Slocum said. "We know what Darren can do. When Darren's healthy and in shape, he's pretty good. Him not being here gives us a chance for these younger guys to get some reps. Randy and Keith both looked good today."

Last season's top pass-catchers, tight end Mike Jones and receiver Percy Waddle, have ended their eligibility, and their departure leaves Slocum with some large holes to fill.

"We're looking for some people to step up and rise to the occasion," he said. "We need some people to step forward and become first-line players. We'd like to solidify our tight end position. I've always looked at spring as a time to experiment, move guys around and try different things."

Those "experiments" involved some position switches Monday. Junior receiver

Kary Vincent was moved to cornerback because Slocum wanted to try and find a replacement for senior Mickey Washington.

Last year's starting center Mike Arthur worked out on Monday at tackle even as All-Southwest Conference tackle Richmond Webb looked on. Webb is expected to be a first-round NFL pick in April.

Toledo said the first day of spring practice gave the players a chance to loosen up.

"I think you've got to get the nervousness out," he said. "They've got the jitters right now. Some of the guys are now competing for a position right now where as a year ago they were either freshman or second string and didn't really have to worry about starting."

"Now they get the chance to step in and see where they stand, but they get a little nervous doing that. We just go through the first day and get the jitters out of them, put in the offense as we go and try to execute."

Ping Eye2: Is it a wonder club or a driving headache?

I sure am glad it's over. The United States Golf Association's \$100 million lawsuit by Karsten Manufacturing Corporation has finally been decided, but the score is still even.

The issue at stake was whether Karsten's Ping Eye2 golf clubs should be reinstated to tour golf.

Professional Golf Association Tour Commissioner Deane Beman broke away from the USGA and outlawed the square-grooved clubs in the professional circuit, claiming the wider-than-allowed grooves allow advantages in backspinning a ball.

The suit ended in a settlement. Karsten will begin manufacturing the clubs according to groove-specifications and the USGA would accept any clubs made prior to March 31, 1990, as conforming to the rules.

Both sides should have won this decision, but not at the same time.

The USGA should have smashed Karsten for even doubting its authority. They are "the sole rulesmaking body of golf in the United States," or so they claim.

If they are the rules, then everyone having anything to do with US golf should respect their wishes.

Representatives at Spalding, a top designer in golf equipment, claim they have been known to discontinue products if found to be "nonconforming" by the USGA. That's a manufacturer that won't "bite the hand that feeds it."

Every golfer around dreams of one day grabbing a Ping iron and letting go. The name is synonymous with the world of golf and carries about as much respect as a manufacturer can muster.

So why should a little thing like groove shape determine the fate of a famous and now infamous club?

After four years of USGA and PGA Tour testing, no one has been able to provide evidence that the grooves lower anyone's scores.

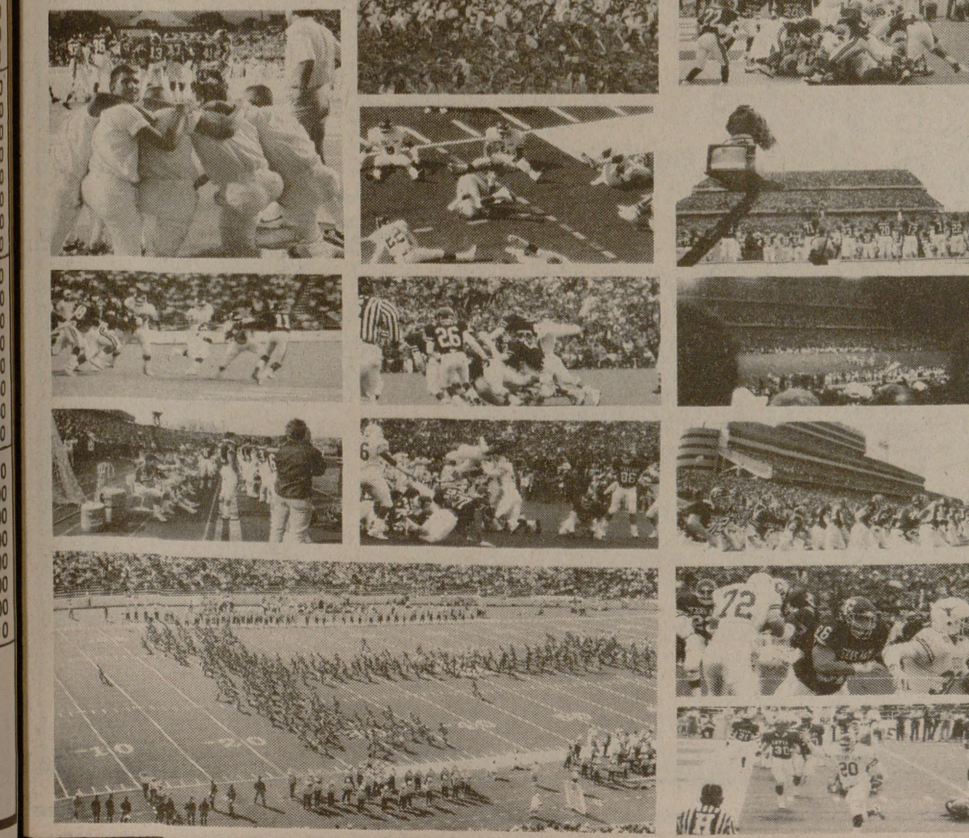
The USGA is supposed to make the rules of golf and make sure that everyone is following them.

Equipment manufacturers have an obligation to their customers to be on the cutting edge of technology.

But with this last showing by both sides, I've lost respect for each.

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