

Richardson returns to scene of injury

By RICHARD TIJERINA
Of The Battalion Staff

The Memorial Stadium turf that claimed Bucky Richardson's left knee since has been replaced, but the memories still linger. Thanksgiving night, 1988.

Richardson, A&M's sophomore starting quarterback, had led the Aggies to an early 28-0 lead over Texas when Richardson's world turned black. The injury came on a simple option play, the same play Richardson has run so well so many times.

He rolled left late in the first quarter, looking for an opening in the front line. Richardson saw Darren Lewis, waiting for the pitch, in the corner of his eye but decided to cut upfield.

Then, it happened. Richardson went one way, his left knee went another. The pain that cut through him was sharp, and he knew he was through for the night. What he didn't know was he'd be out for much longer.

"I just tried to cut back against the grain," Richardson said. "Nobody hit me. It was just one of those freak accidents where I planted my foot and my knee just buckled out from under me. I knew I was hurt."

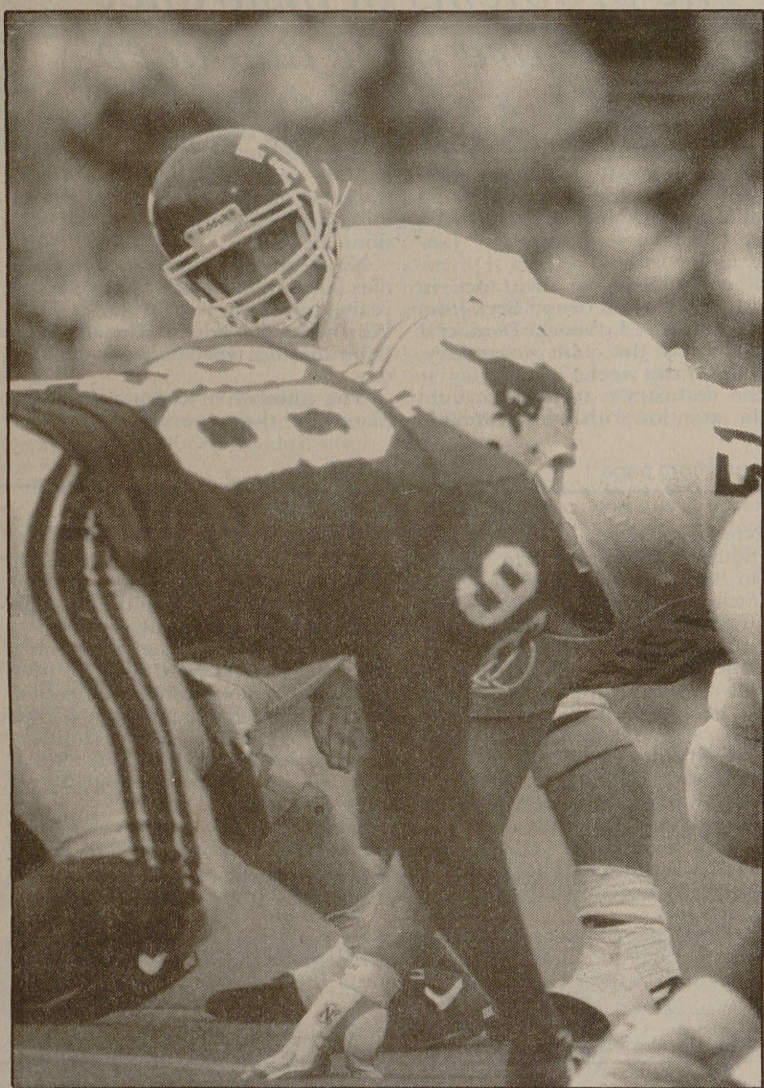
It has been a long two years for Richardson. He spent 1989 on the sidelines, rehabilitating his knee and watching Lance Pavlas become the Aggies' starting quarterback. There were doubts that Richardson, the Offensive Most Valuable Player in the 1988 Cotton Bowl win over Notre Dame, would be able to return completely from the injury.

He did. Richardson returns to Memorial Stadium for the first time since that Thanksgiving night, and will be the Aggies' starting quarterback in their biggest game of the season.

A&M stands at a crossroads. The Aggies (8-2-1) face two top five teams in their last two games: Saturday against No. 5 Texas and Dec. 29 against No. 4 Brigham Young in the Sea World Holiday Bowl.

A sellout crowd of 78,000 is expected for Saturday's game. Emotions should be high — A&M and UT players have been exchanging verbal potshots at each other all week long — but Richardson said the Aggies won't be intimidated.

"It's the same type of atmosphere when they come here," Richardson said. "We've played in it before,



HUY THANH NGUYEN/The Battalion

A&M's Bucky Richardson returns to Austin for the first time since he suffered a career-threatening knee injury in 1988.

we're used to it and we know what to expect. We know what kind of players they have — a lot of them are the same players they had last year. (A&M Head Coach (R.C.) Slocum's been here a bunch of years, and he's played this game a lot of times. We know what type of ballgame it's going to be."

A&M has won the last six meetings between the two teams, but hasn't faced a Longhorn defense

during that streak as stingy at this year's. However, Slocum said the Aggies wouldn't have too many problems moving the ball.

Slocum and Offensive Coordinator Bob Toledo revamped the Aggie attack midway through the season. With Pavlas starting, the Aggies struggled in consecutive games with Louisiana State, Texas Tech, Houston and Baylor.

Slocum said that after the Texas

Tech game, he and Toledo decided to make the switch from Pavlas to Richardson because they wanted A&M to do what it did best: the option.

"We were trying to be balanced, but we weren't completing passes," Slocum said. "And if we were, we were completing them to the wrong team. It didn't matter that we were getting guys open, and open deep in particular, we weren't getting the ball to them. Let's do some of the things we are doing well, and know we can do — shorter passing game, more options."

Enter Richardson, who has become A&M's career leader in rushing yards for a quarterback. Pairing him in the backfield with tailback Darren Lewis, the SWC's all-time leading rusher, has given opposing defenses a lot to think about.

"It's very frightening from a defensive standpoint to see a quarterback do the things Bucky does," A&M linebacker Anthony Williams said. "He'll take a good shot, jump up and talk to you like *he hit you*. You say, 'What's wrong with this man? I gave him all he could and he jumped right back up and told me I'm not any good.'"

"He's a quarterback with a linebacker's attitude. He's going to take some more hard shots, but he's going to bounce back up and laugh them off, as usual."

Slocum said Richardson would have been a great wishbone quarterback in the 1970s, and that the junior's confidence spills over onto his teammates.

"He's got a great temperament to play the game of football," Slocum said. "He's a competitor who's confident. When bad things happen to him, he's not affected beyond that play. He'll shake it off and come back to fight you just as hard or harder on the next play. He's got a great temperament to be a football player at any position — linebacker, running back, quarterback or whatever."

Richardson is no stranger to the Longhorns. As a freshman, he came off the bench and scored the winning touchdown late in the fourth quarter. With two crucial games left this season, Richardson said it's make or break time for the Aggies.

"Whoever wins always ruins the other team's season," he said. "You've got bragging rights for the year. You only get one shot a year. You only get one shot a year, so you've got to make the best of it."

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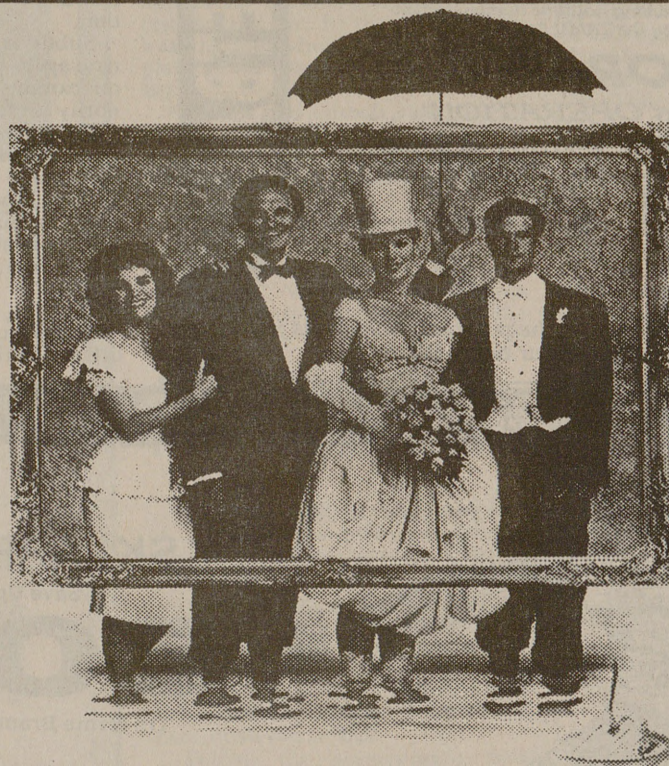
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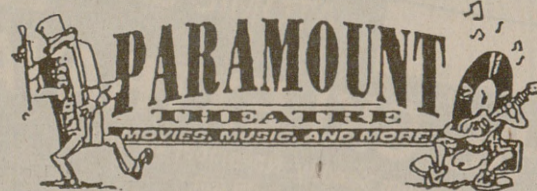
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