



**Michael Plumer**  
Sportswriter

## Aggies differ from '88 squad

As summer melts into fall turning the stifling Texas humidity into bearable Texas heat, the 1992 Texas A&M football team is prepared to burn its opponents.

Most of the upperclassmen stayed here in College Station to take part in voluntary workouts. They lifted weights, ran sprints, and suffered together through the exhaustion and sweat thanks to the unforgiving Texas sun.

No A&M football coaches were present due to NCAA rules forbidding contact during the off-season. These workouts were not mandatory, but who would want to have to tender a reason for not showing up to A&M offensive lineman John Ellisor?

A bond was hopefully formed that will serve these Aggies well if times tend to get rough during the season—a season in which so much is expected.

Failure will not be tolerated. Nothing less than perfection will be accepted. No excuses will suffice for a let-down in play.

A word of caution should be extended. Think back to 1988. Texas A&M was coming off three straight Southwest Conference championships. All the preseason polls picked A&M to compete for a national championship.

Coach Jackie Sherrill accepted a bid to play in the Kickoff Classic against Nebraska in East Rutherford, NJ.

Does this sound like a scenario that has unfolded in Aggieland recently? One thing that is different, of course, is Sherrill's title. He is now the former

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By Doug Foster  
The Battalion

# Living in the Red

## University athletic departments try to remain above water as economies, profits take a dive



**"Costs are so much higher in athletics that it's really hard for anyone to make money now...I think the only thing the university and our conference can do is get more television revenue by setting up the best possible TV rivalries and promoting them heavily."**

—SMU football coach Tom Rossley

The fashionable term for the epidemic that hits campuses nationwide during the fall is "Big-Time" college football. But for more and more universities, it's starting to mean big-time financial loss.

As a select few major college football powers continue to thrive on the revenue created by their programs, many schools whose football team once shared the wealth are feeling the sting of budget cuts and decreased revenue.

Some are even being forced to consider the inevitable: Possible elimination of their football programs.

Schools such as Southern Methodist University and Rice University, both members of the Southwest Conference, are now are trying to find ways to eliminate deficits in the athletic programs in excess of \$1 million.

Southern Methodist's athletic department reportedly suffered through a loss of \$4.8 million last year alone. After receiving the financial reports for the year, SMU president Dr. A. Kenneth Pye said his school would analyze the budget and consider every possible solution to the deficit.

Pye said all options, ranging from complete elimination of scholarship athletics to dropping to a smaller division, would be considered by the university administration.

Southern Methodist head football coach Tom Rossley said he did not, however, see any possible way his school would ever seriously consider eliminating its football program.

"I don't think that would ever happen here," Rossley said. "I think football is too big in Texas and in the Dallas area, and I don't think the students, alumni or citizens of Dallas would ever let that happen. They all know that Southern Methodist would not be the place it is today without athletics."

Rossley said the problem concerning the deficit was directly related to tough economic times, and that once the economies of Texas and the United States rebounded, his school would be back where it wants to be.

"There are a lot of reasons why universities are having financial troubles right now," Rossley said. "I think the

biggest reason is the economy is down and everyone's costs are going up. At the same time, incoming funds are going down. We're getting less money donated from our alumni and from all our other sources, and that's just the way things are economically."

Rice athletic director Bobby May said the administrators at his school had reached a decision concerning handling their deficit. He said he didn't feel dropping the program or even going to a smaller division was a solution to the problem.

"Schools have to take on this issue individually—this is an institutional issue," May said. "I don't think dropping the football program or going to a smaller division is a solution to our problem at all. Our administration has made their decision and has reaffirmed their commitment to Division I athletics at Rice University."

"We want to compete at the highest possible level in all athletics we are involved in, and our job as administrators and coaches is to make sure we stay competitive in this division."

May said the main key to reducing the deficit, which was reported to be \$3.7 million last year, was building a competitive program and gaining more fans and television time.

"Athletic deficits have been a problem for years, and I think the main reason

athletic departments are having budget problems is because expenses are rising faster than income is," May said. "We have a job to do of selling tickets and promoting our product, and we all have to start doing a better job of that."

"We have to start putting a better product out by scheduling games that actually mean something, and by scheduling games that are not decided before the two teams even take the field."

Rossley echoed May's thoughts, saying he felt his program would be back to the competitive, money-making level in a short amount of time.

"Costs are so much higher in athletics that it's really hard for anyone to make money now," Rossley said. "Scholarship costs have gone up so much that each additional scholarship adds a major burden to your department. I think the only thing the university and our conference could do is get more television revenue by setting up the best possible TV rivalries and promoting them heavily."

"The important thing is that we stay optimistic. These are tough times in our economy and we're just going to have to weather the storm and keep our program and our conference intact," Rossley added.

One of the biggest factors concerning SMU's financial woes was the "death penalty" handed down by the NCAA in 1987, which kept the Mustangs out of

football for the '87 and '88 seasons. Rossley said that hiatus definitely made producing a money-making program tougher, but felt it was something that could be overcome.

"I think during our death penalty everyone predicted we would swing to the other end when we returned to football—and we have been, but we've got to get out of this period and get into the thick of the Southwest Conference race. We've got to find our momentum."

NCAA sanctions concerning Division I-A competition have been another factor contributing to some schools considering dropping their programs. At the conclusion of the 1991 football season, Long Beach State University in California eliminated its football program, becoming the only Division I-A school to do so in the past few years.

Athletic Director David O'Brien said budget cuts were a big part of the decision, but also blamed the sanctions for the downfall.

"The NCAA requirements went up to the point where to compete in Division I-A, you had to have a 30,000 seat stadium and average 17,000 in attendance," O'Brien said. "The fact that we didn't have an on-campus stadium and that we were only averaging 3200 fans per game would not allow us to do that."

Once Long Beach State realized they could not stay in Division I-A, the possibility of moving down came up, but O'Brien said they didn't feel that would be fair to the players or the university.

"We looked seriously at going to Division I-AA but turned it down quickly," he said. "From my perspective, I don't think it would have been ethical for us to have players we recruited to play I-AA here or force them to transfer if they want to play I-AA football. We just felt like we would be better off dropping the sport, and hopefully when things get better we can bring it back."

According to O'Brien, building a winning team with a high-profile coach does not, however, guarantee success to the program. Long Beach State hired former NFL coaching-great George Allen, who did increase attendance with a winning team, but the program still had to be cut.

"We brought in Allen and he did a

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