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Even without Buckley, Walsh still wary of Aggies

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Even without its best pass rusher, Texas A&M's defense gives Stanford coach Bill Walsh plenty to worry about when the Aggies and Cardinal get an early start on the season Wednesday night in the Pigskin Classic.

Senior outside linebacker Marcus Buckley hasn't practiced all week because of swollen ankle and knee joints. Texas A&M coach R.C. Slocum said Buckley may have rheumatoid arthritis, but a complete diagnosis hasn't been made yet.

"Our team is a defensive team and we've known for a week or so that it's unlikely Marcus will play," Slocum said. "I don't think it will have a great impact on our defense."

Bill Walsh doesn't think so, either. But the prospect of facing what last year was the nation's No. 1 defense, allowing just 222.4 yards per game, still has the Cardinal coach concerned.

"They have extreme quickness, speed and they play very, very disciplined football," Walsh said. "I don't think an individual will make any great difference as far as Stanford is concerned."

"We hope he recovers because he is a great football player. In the meantime, we're going to see a squad that is just much faster than we are as a team."

Simply put, Walsh thinks No. 17 Stanford, with a schedule that includes Notre Dame and Washington, won't face a tougher defense this season than that of the seventh-ranked

Aggies.

"I think the system of defense that A&M is using is the best one for their athletes and could very well be the best in football," he said. "They have a way to get to the passer, they can blitz freely, they have the defensive backs who can cover."

Trying to stop the blitz will be Stanford's formidable offensive line, which last season gained celebrity as the NCAA's biggest. It averaged 6-foot-7 and more than 300 pounds.

"We have big athletes on the offensive line and they're experienced," Walsh said. "They've lost about 15 or 20 pounds per man since we've established

a new style of football. It remains to be seen if we're quick enough to stay with the A&M defensive front. That'll be an interesting matchup."

Four starters return to the line — Brian Cassidy, Glen Cavanaugh, Chris Dalman and Steve Hoyem.

That kind of experience is something the Aggies don't have. Although they return 16 starters, A&M is young.

"You look at 18 senior starters and four junior starters, compared to — without Marcus — one senior starter on defense and two on offense," Slocum said. "There's a tremendous disparity in the experience factor and that concerns me in an opening ball game."

"There's a number of guys I've never seen in a game that will be starting in the opening series."

derdog. If you are the underdog, people will often overlook you and that's when you can gain the upper hand on them.

"I think our defense plays much like the A&M defense in that both teams offer a pressure period. Just like them, we like to come at you from all directions."

Dalman said that with both teams ranked in among the top 20, the winner of this game would have a good shot at going on and possibly competing for national post-season honors.

He also said he felt no matter what the outcome, both teams had what it takes to be successful throughout the year.

"This is a big game and a big chance to prove to everyone that we are a national power," Dalman said. "But no matter who wins I don't think the other team will fold after the game, and I think both will finish the season in a bowl game."

"Both of these teams are too good to whither away after one loss."



Bill Walsh

Whitley

Continued from Page 11

They were picked by everybody to win the national last August only to have wheels come off after the loss of the season to Miami that same story was played 1988 and 1989.

Such might be the fate of Aggies as the 1992 season and talk of a national championship looms.

That's why A&M should get down on their knees and thank the Lord for the Pigskin Classic.

Leaving College Station, all that was heard dealt with Aggies' beginning their unbeaten season. But in San Francisco, the talk revolved around Bill Walsh.

The return of the three-per Bowl champion coach has updated the television press and the newspaper articles, press conference Tuesday, Coach R.C. Slocum was about the return of Walsh, more than their own expectations.

Granted, when someone the name-recognition Walsh has comes out of retirement to coach college football after seasons as an analyst on television, it is definitely a But not the only one.

Now the pressure felt in Heim Stadium on Wednesday night lies not with the Aggies with the young Stanford who ultimately will decide whether or not Walsh's return will be a success or a failure.

The Cardinal (yes, it's singular) had a successful year in 1991 under Dennis Green, ending an 8-4 record and winning out of their final 8 games, plus the return of their old coach who made good in the NFL, out optimism and high goals this year's team.

But as expectations soar, member that this is a new era, running a new system. Not that, but a coach that stepped out on the sidelines in 1988. Also, Stanford's team not typically shown on national television much, especially in games with as much fanfare as this one.

So, even though the talk of nothing but the Aggies coming successes back home, assured that they will have confidence while their opponents are the team with something to prove.

If A&M had to open its season against Louisiana State in Baton Rouge, the story would be different. All the pressure would be waiting there for the Aggies in an opener against an arch-rival thirsting for revenge.

Instead, the Aggies have been enjoying the warmth of the California sun, taking in a few rides Disneyland and putting enough time aside to prepare tonight's game.

Stanford

Continued from Page 11

in the Pac 10," Walsh said. "He excels at all phases of the game, whether he is running the ball or getting open on passing routes and catching it."

Defensively, Stanford hopes to give the Aggie offense the same kind of problems the A&M defense gives their opponents.

With three down-linemen and four linebackers, the Cardinal tries to utilize the speed of outside linebacker Ron George in pursuing offensive backs.

Inside linebacker Tom Williams said the stress on this game has been the Stanford offense against the A&M defense, and said this was a big chance for the Cardinal defense to shine and earn a name for itself.

"Defensively, I think we are severely underrated," Williams said. "That's all right though, because I don't mind being the un-

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