

# New man at the helm

## Granger comes back to replace A&M's winningest leader

By RULY MEDRANO

Sports Writer for THE BATTALION

The French had Napoleon. The Allies had Ulysses S. Grant. The French had George S. Patton.

Leaders extraordinaire, a necessity for victory.

Around Aggie land, there were questions in the spring as to who would lead the Texas A&M football team into battle against Stanford in the Aggies' season opener.

Red shirt freshmen Tommy Preston and Matt Miller, senior Kent Petty and sophomore Steve Emerson each were candidates to replace 1991 general and Southwest Conference Offensive Player of the Year Bucky Richardson.

Although Miller came out of spring workouts as the No. 1 quarterback, none of the quartet currently holds a position on the Aggies' two-deep chart.

Sophomore Jeff Granger of Orangefield returned from his one-semester hiatus to claim the starting quarterback position while true freshman Corey Pullig of Houston earned the backup job.

Granger, a 6-4, 195-pound southpaw, decided to return to Aggie football after being cut from the U.S. Olympic baseball team this summer. He was once a twelfth-round pick of the Min-

nesota Twins, so playing big league baseball became his top priority.

But the thought of just watching the Aggies, who have been ranked in the top ten in most of the preseason polls, didn't sit well with Granger.

"The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to go back," Granger said about his absence. "It tore me up inside, and I wouldn't have been able to live with myself."

Even though the highly-touted Aggies return 15 starters, they are still a young team with only nine seniors. Consequently, there is talk in College Station of a national championship within the next two years.

"It's in the back of everyone's mind," Granger said. "But you can't go undefeated if you lose the first game. We need to win every game, and if it's there at the end, then that's great."

A year ago this time, Pullig was on his way to becoming a Parade All-American quarterback at Deer Park High School. He made recruiting visits to Notre Dame, Miami and UCLA who have all produced great throwing quarterbacks such as Joe Montana, Vinny Testaverde and Troy Aikman.

So what made the 6-4, 205 pound Pullig decide to play for A&M, a school which is more renowned for its tradition of great linebackers and strong running game?

According to Pullig, the fact that Aggie offensive coordinator Bob Toledo and head coach R.C. Slocum said the Aggies will open

up the offense in the future was his major deciding factor.

Psychologically, Pullig is ready to step in and handle the pressures of big-time college ball.

"I don't get pressured as Pullig said. "I've dealt with sure my whole life so I'm used to it."

According to Slocum, Pullig has already begun to adapt to the first few fall practice sessions.

"You can't look at a high school guy and project how he'll be a major college," Slocum said. "The mental part can't be taught. I was surprised how quickly (Pullig) picked things up mentally."

The forte of both Granger and Pullig is their strong passing game. According to Granger, the Aggie running game will complement the potentially dangerous aerial attack.

"As a quarterback, I'd like to throw on every down," Granger said. "But with guys like Hill, Rodney Thomas and Carter, we can't keep the ball out of their hands."

"They draw in the defense backs and that opens up the running game. It works hand in hand. My passing will help their running backs running."

The spring's quarterback competition has apparently been answered. Now arises the question of how the A&M quarterback will do in hostile war zones as Baton Rouge and Austin.

For an answer to that, check where the Aggies are playing on New Year's Day.

# A&M kickers look for opportunity to shine

By K. LEE DAVIS

Sports Writer for THE BATTALION

Welcome to the 1992 Texas A&M kicking game, where the incumbent place kicker is the Manhattan born son of a former Greek professional league soccer player and current owner of country and western honky tonks, and the punter is from a tiny Texas town in the panhandle that plays six-man football.

You more likely remember them better as Terry Venetoulis and David Davis, and in spite of their backgrounds, they appear to be fairly normal. —At least for kickers.

Venetoulis, a junior from Deer Park, handled all of A&M's place kicking chores throughout last season. He heads into 1992 as an All-Southwest Conference candidate after nailing 13-of-18 field goals, and 49-of-50 extra points last season.

A&M specialists coach Shawn

Slocum said despite Venetoulis' solid numbers last season, he expects even better things from his kicker this year.

"In the last two years Terry Venetoulis has really gotten a lot better and a lot stronger and has improved his accuracy," Slocum said. "We are expecting him to be a vital member of our club this season."

Venetoulis said he thrives on pressure situations, and set forth his perfect scenario for his rise to stardom.

"I would like to have two seconds left, in a driving rain, with a 50 yard kick to win the national championship," Venetoulis said. "But what I try to do when I go out and practice is to be prepared for each and every situation."

Venetoulis was also a stand-out soccer player in high school, garnering All-state honors his junior season after leading the state in goals scored.

"I played soccer since I was

three years old, and soccer was supposed to be my main sport," Venetoulis said. "I was going to follow in my father's footsteps, soccer, but then came football."

The two-sport star was impressive enough as a place kicker to earn All-American honors as a senior.

Davis followed a different path to College Station after playing virtually every position at Deer Park High School in the Texas panhandle.

Davis flourished in this environment and was able to walk at A&M as a non-scholarship freshman to later become a scholarship starter after an impressive performance in last season's opener against Louisiana State.

"David Davis is definitely a good one," Slocum said. "We're good shape with him back there. I'm ready to play, I can wait!" Davis added.

# Aggies

Continued from Page 1

hesitation gave the job to San Diego native Matt Miller over Tommy Preston, Steve Emerson and Kent Petty.

Enter Jeff Granger. After being cut from the U.S. Olympic baseball team, Granger came out of football retirement to rejoin the Aggies, and he quickly took over the starting job.

The one question mark had seemingly been answered. After all, Slocum had a man in Granger who was backup to Richardson last season, who knew the team's system, and who was already an accomplished athlete.

The question mark, however, reappeared against Stanford last week.

Granger was pulled in the second half after completing only 6 of 21 passes and failing to get any points on the board.

After incoming freshman

Corey Pullig and Miller each were given tries to move the offense, Granger came back in. The offense turned up a notch, and the Aggies scored ten points in the fourth quarter, just enough for a narrow victory.

The No. 1 defense in the country last season had few question marks going into this season. The answer to the main one might have been answered in the form of Aaron Glenn, a junior college transfer who took over for All-American cornerback Kevin Smith, now of the Dallas Cowboys.

Glenn had one interception and six tackles against Stanford as the defense consistently kept the Aggies in the ball game by keeping the Cardinal to seven points.

"Kevin Smith left me some big shoes to fill, but I am confident I can do the job," Glenn said.

The Aggies will rely a great deal on their tenacious defense, as indicated by the Stanford game. The players agree that the talent amassed from last year's squad is equal, or even topped, this season.

"I think this is a better defense than last year," defensive end England said. "The guys have been making big plays, trying to swarm the ball, everybody getting up to make tackles. This is just a great team effort."

If the Aggies are ever going to win a national championship, their schedule this season points right into their hands. The toughest obstacle is the two opening road games in Anaheim and Baton Rouge, against Louisiana State on Saturday.

After that, the Aggies play four of the next five games at home, including Texas Tech, who looks to be the strongest challenger to A&M's throne. On the road, Aggies play Southern Methodist, Houston, and Texas, with the latter two on national television.

The tools are there for Texas A&M to field a team that will contend nationally. But the talk summer has been replaced with the action of fall. The question now is will they have enough to make the season-long trip from Disneyland to Dallas?

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