

Tradition of Excellence

A&M secondary remains stingy against the pass

By DOUG FOSTER

Living up to high expectations can be one of the toughest things in the world to do. Just ask the Texas A&M secondary.

After starting the 1991 season as the top-ranked secondary in the nation in one preseason publication, the Aggie defensive backs had to deal with teams shooting to knock them off week after week.

Thanks to the performances of All-American cornerback Kevin Smith and All-Southwest Conference safety Chris Crooms, the secondary had no trouble in protecting their reputation as one of the best.

But in 1992, there is no Kevin Smith or Chris Crooms. Yet, the expectations to be the best are still there.

Two members of the 1991 secondary who have returned are cornerback Derrick Frazier and safety Patrick Bates.

Frazier, a senior from Sugarland, played the corner opposite from Smith last season and said he sees many similarities between this year's and last year's teams.

"I think if you talk two-deep wise, our players on this squad are just as capable as last years," Frazier said. "I think the guys in this secondary are talented enough to start anywhere else in the country."

Frazier said the big difference, however, was the lack of experience in this year's defensive backfield.

"We're as talented as last season. We just don't have near the experience we did last season," Frazier said. "Chris Crooms and Kevin Smith were both great players, but the best thing last year was that they both had game experience."

Bates, a junior from Galveston, said losing Smith and Crooms was tough, but felt the Aggies had capable replacements, and that the crown of leadership would simply have to shift this year.

"It's tough to replace the experience of those guys," Bates said.



DARRIN HILL/The Battalion

Junior free safety Patrick Bates stretches with his teammates prior to a two-day practice earlier this fall. Bates and his fellow defensive backs will

try to continue the recent tradition of stingy pass defense set forth by A&M secondaries in the past few seasons.

rience and leadership Chris and Kevin gave to this team, but talent-wise, I think we have the guys to do it," Bates said.

"I think Aaron Glenn has the talent to be just as good as Kevin Smith ever was. He just needs to get some game time experience."

"The talent is there, but our leaders are gone. That means that Derrick and myself will have to step up and provide leadership to the younger guys until they feel more comfortable with our defensive scheme."

Glenn, a junior college transfer from Navarro, has the task of replacing Smith on the left corner. He impressed his teammates and coaches in practice and made a key interception in the fourth quarter of the Aggies 10-7 victory over Stanford in the Disneyland Pigskin Classic last Wednesday.

Although he feels he is physically capable of playing his position, Glenn said replacing someone like Smith will not be easy.

"It will be tough to come in here and replace a guy like Kevin Smith because of all the hype here about him," Glenn said.

"I can't say that I will do things exactly like he did them because I play my own game, but I think if I just use my head and study our defense well, I will be able to do the job."

The man the Aggies had planned to use to replace Crooms, sophomore Steve Kinney, started the season off with a solid game and a few key tackles early in the game against Stanford only to go down with a knee injury which is expected to keep him out the entire season.

Glenn said the Aggie defense huddled together after Kinney went down and decided to make that game a special win for him.

"When Steve went down, it got a lot tougher on our entire defense," Glenn said.

"We hated to see him gone for the season, and after that we dedicated that game to him and decided we weren't going to let them have anything else offensively."

A&M defensive backs coach Trent Walters, who has been the general of one of the nation's top backfields over the past few years, said playing up to last year's level will be tough for his squad.

"We have some really talented players who we have yet to see in many game situations," Walters said. "You never know how those guys will react until you get them into those tough game situations. Not only that, we lost some guys who were not just talented but also had a lot of experience and were great leaders for this defense."

"But I think we'll do all right if the young kids play to their potential."

Getting the 'upper hand'

A&M receivers, tight ends look for time in run-oriented offense

By RULY MEDRANO

Sports Writer of THE BATTALION

During the 1991 season, Texas A&M quarterback Bucky Richardson and running back Greg Hill were getting quite a bit of attention with the success of the Aggie offense.



Schorp

Meanwhile, the A&M receiving corps was quietly developing into a serious offensive threat on its own.

To begin the 1992 season, the Aggies return last year's top receivers in junior Tony Harrison and sophomore Ryan Matthews of Houston, who teamed up with Brian Mitchell for 63 catches and 10 touchdowns. Mitchell was expected to be a member of the squad until he broke his foot in the season opener against Stanford.

Also back is junior tight end Greg Schorp of San Antonio, who

is regarded as an excellent blocker with good receiving hands. Schorp got the chance to show his abilities in the Stanford game as he caught four passes for 68 yards, one of which was a 21 yard reception that was A&M's only touchdown. He was named A&M's MVP of the game for his efforts.

With strong passing quarterback Jeff Granger and this returning group of ends on the same side of the ball, the A&M offense plans to be more balanced than last year. The Aggies are hoping that teams may not be able to afford to concentrate on stopping the running game.

"This year we'll have more of a passing attack," Harrison said. "But what we do will depend on the situation."

Mitchell, a former high school quarterback, seems to be pleased with the altered Aggie offense.

"Supposedly, we're going to go to pass a little more," Mitchell said. "The passing should replace the options of last year."

According to A&M wide receivers coach David Culley, the receiver trio arrived in fall camp prepared for a solid season.

"They came back stronger and

faster than they were last year," Culley said. "They obviously did what they had to do over the summer."

Culley said he is not ready to agree that all is totally well in Aggieland. He emphasized that improvements need to be made with his receivers.

"We need to be more consistent this season," he said. "Everybody's going to play the run against us, so it's going to force us to throw."

Joining Matthews and Harrison as receivers will be sophomore Wilbert Biggens and red-shirt freshman Percy Singleton and true freshmen Kevin Beirne and Danny McCray.

Culley said that Biggens and Singleton have had good early season workouts.

The 6-3, 233-pound Schorp is another person looking forward to catching the ball more this season. Built like a Mack truck, he's equally content with banging heads with a defensive end.

"I hope to catch a lot more (passes) this year," Schorp said. "But if they want me to block, that's fine. I enjoy doing both."

When the Aggies use a two-tight end set, Schorp will be joined on the line by 6-4, 225-

pound sophomore James McKeekhan of Willis. McKeekhan, who is considered a hard-nosed blocker, suffered a broken foot last season and missed the final two games of the season.

Returning letterman Jason Mathews of Bridge City, a former Brigham Young defensive lineman who possesses good strength (314 pound power clean), should also see playing time this season.

Senior Kent Petty of Dallas is taking a crash course in tight end after being moved from quarterback earlier this fall. He's working on adding mass to his once 211 pound frame.

Although the A&M receivers and ends may surprise some opponents, the nationally ranked Aggies as a team should be high on everyone's hit lists. They won't be able to sneak a win from anybody.

And what do the receivers think of all the national championship talk? Schorp and Mitchell each reacted with a confidence not to be confused with arrogance.

"A national championship, as a team, is everyone's goal," Schorp said. "If you work hard, good things happen."

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