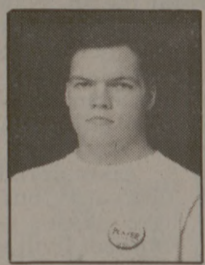


Television could provide NHL needed support

The self-proclaimed "fastest team sport in the world" opens its regular season tonight. And for the first time in many years, more than a meager handful of lucky cable subscribers will get to see it on television.



DON NORWOOD
Sports Writer

When the Philadelphia Flyers and Pittsburgh Penguins face off on ESPN this evening, it will mark the National Hockey League's return to the network after a lengthy stint on SportsChannel, a competing network with most of its viewers in the Midwest and the East Coast.

If you find yourself wondering why you should care about having the NHL on television, think back to the early 80s, when the NBA was floundering amid dwindling attendance and puny television contracts. Hopes for the future were bleak until Magic Johnson, Larry Bird and new commissioner David Stern came along and turned the league into the hottest thing on hardwood since the Cotton-Eyed Joe.

The correlation between the two leagues is eerie. Although NHL stalwarts Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux are no spring chickens, the league has two young studs in the form of St. Louis' Brett Hull and Chicago's Jeremy Roenick who are rising at the same time and in the same division. The Blues and the Blackhawks already have a fiery rivalry, and an individual duel between the two stars would be just as appealing as some of those Bird-Magic hookups.

See Norwood/Page 8

Linebacker tries to keep reputation of Aggie defense

By MICHAEL PLUMER

Sports Writer of THE BATTALION

When deciding what college to attend in 1989 after a standout high school career at Sugar Land Willowridge, Steve Solari narrowed his choices to Purdue and Texas A&M.

The main question for Solari at that time was whether the Aggies were going to be put on probation due to an investigation by the NCAA.

He chose the Boilermakers and played in all 11 games as a true freshman. But the pull of playing in the state of Texas became too much, and Solari decided to return to his home state.

"I decided to transfer from Purdue because I wanted to get back close to home," Solari said. "I figured also it would help to get a degree from a school in Texas if I wanted to work here."

"Plus, I wanted my family to watch me play."

Solari also cited A&M's tradition of producing professional linebackers as a key ingredient in his decision to transfer to Aggieland.

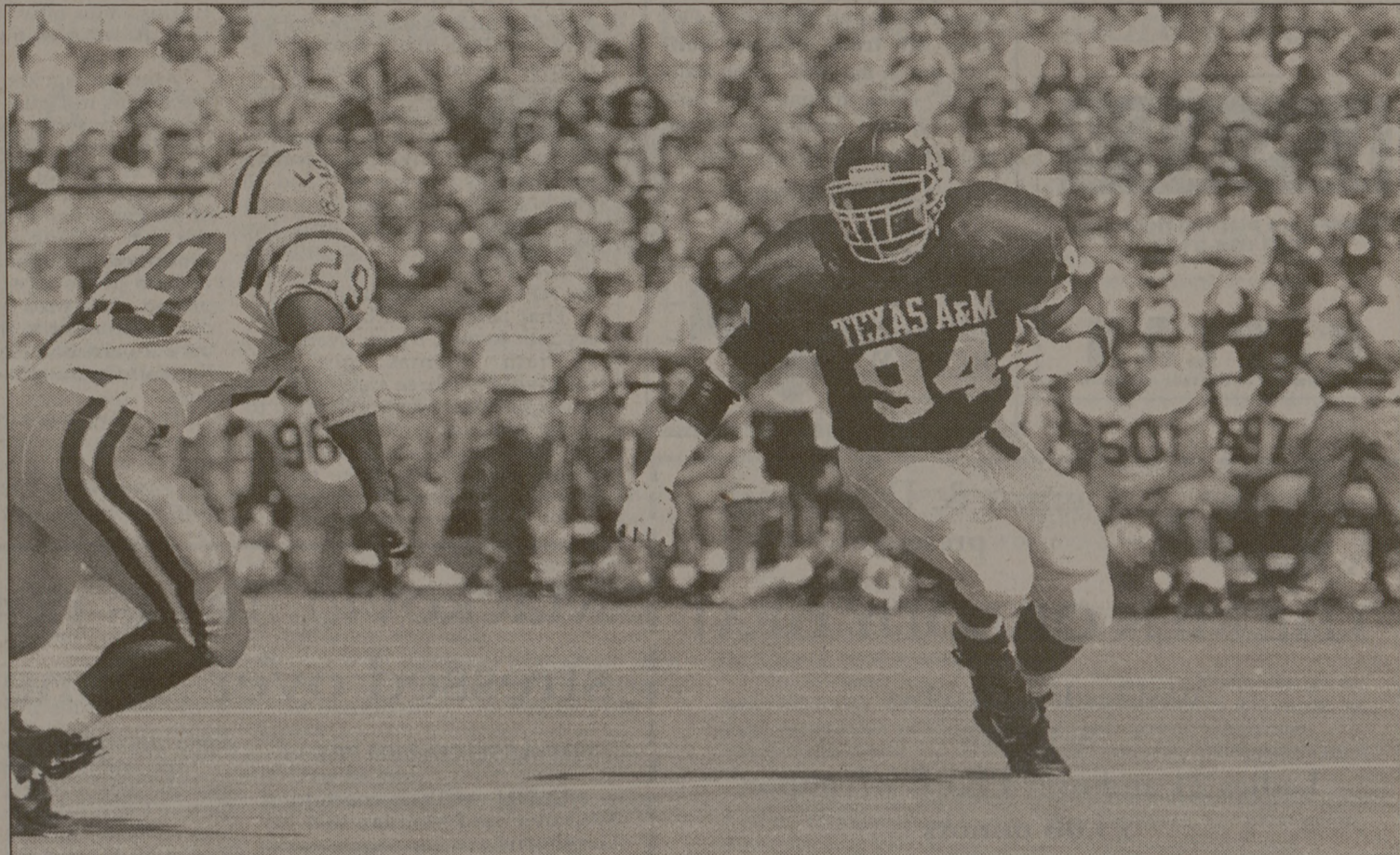
"Every starter has signed a professional contract since, I think, 1984," he said. "Anybody would like to make a million."

"Also, I thought this would be a great place to play for a national championship."

After Solari transferred to A&M in 1990, he was forced to sit out a year due to NCAA rules. A&M also gained another transfer in 1990, free safety Patrick Bates from UCLA. But unlike Solari, Bates' transfer was heralded as a major coup for the Aggies due to his being named to a freshman All-American team for the Bruins.

Solari said he does not think he was overshadowed by Bates' transfer.

"That was a situation of two good athletes coming in at the same time and playing for a great program," the soft-spoken but confident junior said. "Everybody has potential but you have to show it on the field."



A&M outside linebacker Steve Solari (94) blitzes around the right end and tries to avoid a block from Louisiana State running back Sammy Seamster during the Aggies' 45-7 win

in 1991. Solari is continuing the A&M tradition of aggressive outside linebackers which has helped the Aggies challenge Penn State for the title of 'Linebacker U.'

Solari showed his abilities in short spurts last year for the Wrecking Crew defense as he logged 16 tackles, made three sacks, and caused two fumbles while playing behind Otis Nealy at outside linebacker.

But the 1992 season has seen Solari blossom into a starting role. He is mentioned as a possible All-Southwest Conference selection and has 30 tackles, ranking him fourth on the team. Solari also has one sack.

In the Aggies' 26-13 win over the University of Missouri, Solari posted eight tackles and caused a fumble.

A&M defensive coordinator Bob Davie has taken notice of Solari's increased

presence on the field.

"People want to talk about Jason Atkinson and Marcus Buckley, but I think right now Steve Solari is really playing good, consistent football," Davie said. "He has not had the opportunity to make big plays in games, but from a consistent standpoint he has been outstanding."

Davie also noted that Solari has made great strides in his recognition of the action that is occurring around him.

"He knows the defense, and from an assignment standpoint he has not had one busted assignment all year," Davie said. "He has a lot more confidence, and the big thing is because he knows what he's doing so his ability is starting to show."

"Last year he had the ability but he just never really showed it because he was always thinking about what he had to do."

Solari said he now feels that he has a chance to show A&M fans what he is capable of doing between the goalposts.

"I feel like I am a linebacker who can do it all," he said. "I am not a one-dimensional type player and I think that the fans will like what they see from me."

Davie qualified Solari's self-description with some praise of his own.

"He is a prototypical A&M linebacker," Davie said. "He is a guy that can do a lot of things for us. We have used

See Solari/Page 8

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