

#4 TEXAS A&M VS. HOUSTON

A&M, Houston face off on national television

Aggies try to end jinx of playing in Dome

By CHRIS WHITLEY
Sports Editor of THE BATTALION

Just when Texas A&M's offense gets into tip-top shape, it finds itself facing the third-best offense in the country.

The run-and-shoot that has become an institution at the University of Houston will be in full effect tonight at 7 p.m. when the Cougars host the fourth-ranked Aggies (9-0, 4-0 in Southwest Conference play) at the Astrodome in the first of two Thursday night appearances for A&M. Unfortunately for Houston head coach John Jenkins, his high-powered offense has been one of the few things the Cougars (3-5, 1-3 in SWC) have had to brag about lately.

Houston is trying to recover from a humiliating 41-16 loss on Saturday to Southern Methodist. For the Mustangs, it was vindication for a 95-21 pounding that the Cougars leveled on them in 1989.

A&M head coach R.C. Slocum said that he expects a much better effort from

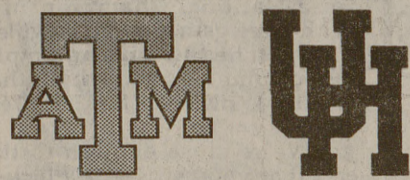
Houston this time around.

"That will be a different team that plays Thursday night in the Astrodome than the one that played at Ownby Stadium last week," Slocum said. "As much as they threw that ball, if a couple of those were caught, it could have been a different story."

"It looked to me like they had a bunch of chances to make some plays, and they didn't quite make them."

The Aggies made the plays on offense they needed to make last Saturday in their 40-18 win over Louisville. Part of the offensive rejuvenation can be attributed to Corey Pullig, the freshman quarterback who started for the first time against the Cardinals.

Pullig will get the nod again on Thursday. It is a rare thing for a 19-year-old to



Time: 7:00 p.m., Thursday
Place: Astrodome-Houston
TV/Radio: ESPN (Cable channel 32)-KTAM 1240-AM
Records: A&M (9-0, 4-0), Houston (3-5, 1-3)
Line: A&M by 10 1/2

be at the helm of an undefeated top-five team, yet Pullig said he takes the responsibility in stride.

"It's a day-by-day thing, and tomorrow it might all be taken away," Pullig said. "Whatever the Lord gives me, I'm blessed."

He noted that his performance against Louisville was a far cry from the six plays that he ran in the Aggies' season opener

out and have fun."

Houston's explosive offense has been a concern for opposing defenses all year long, but A&M linebacker Marcus Buckley said that the Cougars' offense suits him just fine.

"We like to fly around the field, and they do things that allow us to do that, like throwing the ball all the time," Buckley said. "It gives me a chance to pass rush. That's what I like to do."

Buckley said that Houston quarterback Jimmy Klingler might want to get his track shoes ready because the improved play of A&M's defensive line might cause Klingler to be on the run a great deal.

"If I was an opposing team, and I had guys like (defensive lineman Lance) Tichelman coming at me, I wouldn't stay in the pocket," Buckley said.

However, A&M has had a history of frustration in the "Eighth Wonder of the World." Two years ago, the Aggies came into the Astrodome riding high until they committed eight turnovers. They blew a 24-7 lead and lost, 36-31.

That loss ruined their chances at a trip to the Cotton Bowl, and the Aggies don't want that to happen again. Currently,

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Run-and-shoot can be stopped by great athletes

It's the best against the best. A battle between those that are looked up to by all the rest.

The top-ranked pass offense on the face of the earth, maybe in the entire galaxy, will take on the Southwest Conference's top-ranked pass defense.

Houston, and its run-and-shoot gadget offense, will be hosting Texas A&M and the "wrecking crew" defense, one which thrives on offenses that try and spread the field. Those offenses, of course, play right into the hands of the Aggie "D," allowing it to use its main weapon, its speed, to pursue, chase and swarm all over any man who has the ball.

So finally, the pressure is off A&M offensive coordinator Bob Toledo. It's defensive coordinator Bob Davie's day on the hot seat. Step into the dunking booth, Davie, the pressure is now on your back. After nine weeks of wondering when the A&M offense was going to take off, now Davie has to answer to "How you gonna stop them?"

One question. Why should we even ask him? This guy has shown over the past few seasons that he can stop Houston better than anyone else. And he stops them in a different way.

While the entire world tries the bend-not-break plan to stopping the Cougar offense, they are not really trying to stop the Cougar offense. Everyone else's scheme: put in all your defensive backs to keep from getting burned deep, but let them have the nine-yarder all night long.

Davie doesn't buy this one. Linebackers, linebackers. Davie loves them. He lives by them, he'll die by them. But he probably won't die by them anytime soon. Not when he has so many that can run the way the A&M linebackers can.

It has to be a pride thing. Nobody, but nobody, would actually play four or five linebackers against Houston, forcing them to have to cover the Cougars' speedy receivers at times.

But then again, nobody else has Marcus Buckley, Steve Solari, Jason Atkinson, Reggie Graham and Jessie Cox playing linebacker for them. With linebackers who run like receivers, a game against Houston just opens up the "wrecking crew" to go out and play the fun game they like to play.

"A lot of people don't have the kind of players we have on our defense," Davie said. "We're not a bend-not-break defense. We like a pressure, attack-type scheme."

"We like to put it out there on the line, put our guys against their guys and see who has the best athletes. I think that's the way our players like it."

It's the truest of tests. Last season the Aggies had the top-ranked defense in all the nation, and when the Cougars brought their potent offense to town, A&M held that offense to 277 total yards, with 247 of those yards coming through the air. The Aggies sacked Houston quarterback David Klingler 11 times for 90 yards. Not only that, Klingler did not have a touchdown pass for the first time in his career as a starter at Houston.

In '89, the Cougars came to Kyle Field with, do we need to say it again? The number one pass offense in the nation. That year, Houston was averaging 62 points-per game, carrying an undefeated record. Final score: Texas A&M 17, Houston 13.

Funny, since '88, every time the Aggies and Cougars have hooked up, Texas A&M has come away with more yardage, and all but one of those times came away with more points. As a matter of fact, since 1987, the Houston offense has averaged less than one passing touchdown per game against the "wrecking crew."

And people questioned A&M's offensive prowess?

You can pretty much expect the same kind of results tonight. Houston's offense hasn't changed in five years, and neither has A&M's defense. It's only gotten better.

Basically, what it boils down to is Houston does have a potent offense when they are playing the right opponent. But it doesn't matter how good your system is when you are playing a team with 11 athletes that are better than your 11 athletes. And A&M's 11 defensive athletes are as good as any.

Especially when a team like Houston plays right into their hands.



J. DOUGLAS FOSTER
Sports Editor

Bates handles transfer, trauma to become one of nation's top safeties

By J. DOUGLAS FOSTER
Sports Editor of THE BATTALION

Like lifelong dreams, shots at each big-time, high-impact recruit come only once for college coaches.

But for coaches at Texas A&M, Galveston Ball's Patrick Bates was the rare star that offered them a second chance. And when the Aggies got that second chance, they made sure they didn't let Bates get away again.

Bates, now a junior free safety for the Aggies and one of the top-ranked safeties in college football, took possibly the longest and most difficult route from Galveston to College Station. And that trip opened his eyes to where his heart really was.

After the onslaught of recruiters finally backed off Bates and his family in the spring of 1989, he made his decision about where he was going to play college football. His choice: The University of California at Los Angeles. The NCAA investigations and continuous probation plague that was sweeping through the Southwest Conference had cost the Aggies one of the top defensive players in the state.

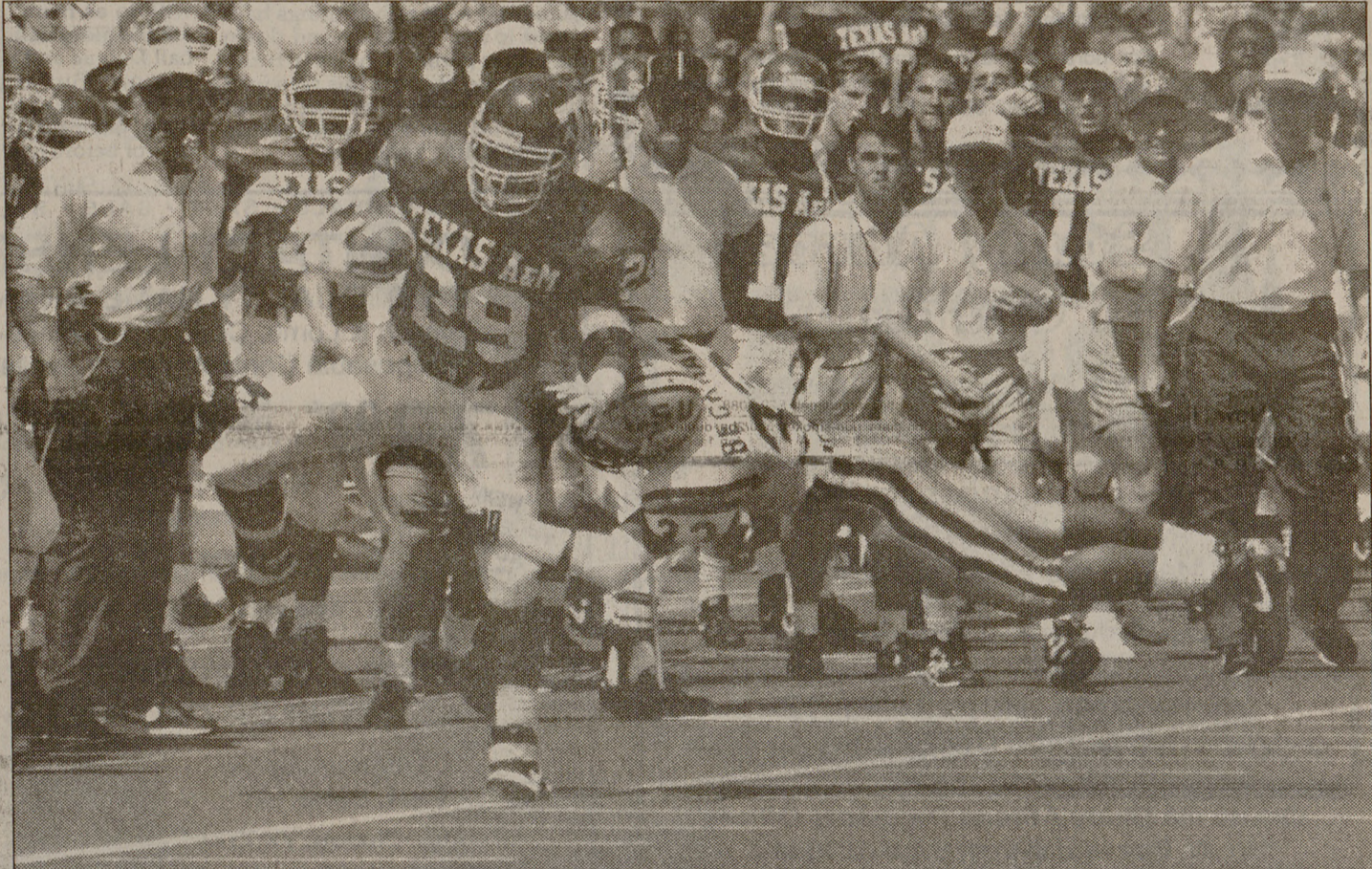
"A&M recruited me out of high school, but there was so much going on in this conference, I didn't think it was a good idea to stay," Bates said. "They lost a lot of good players that would have come to the schools in this state but didn't because of the trouble the schools were getting in."

So off to UCLA Bates went. Heading to the PAC 10 just as his hero Ronnie Lott had done more than ten years earlier at USC.

And it didn't take long for him to make an impact on the Bruin defense. Before the season was over, he was one of only two true freshmen to start a game, and he had gained national attention by making the freshman All-America team. Not bad for someone who didn't turn 19 until the regular season was over.

Yet, during his time in Los Angeles, Bates never really felt he was in the right place. UCLA was a big place that was a long way from the Gulf Coast of Texas, and he didn't feel the same, hometown atmosphere he noticed in the Lone Star State. And, he always kept Texas A&M in the back of his mind.

"I was very quiet when I was at UCLA because it was a big place in a big city, and I didn't really know anyone," Bates



A&M free safety Patrick Bates tries to elude LSU running back Odell Beckham after intercepting a pass during the Aggies' 45-7 win in 1991. Bates, a junior from Galveston,

originally left for UCLA but transferred to A&M in 1990 after the death of his mother and grandmother made him realize he should be back in Texas near his family.

admitted.

A happy man, he was not. But when the spring of 1990 rolled around, something would happen that would make UCLA seem even farther from home. Within a span of a few months, Bates' mother and grandmother both died, taking two of his closest loved ones during the same school semester. Right then, he decided he didn't want to be away from Texas any longer.

To hear him tell the story, to see how emotional of an experience it was for him, no one would realize he is a dangerous, 225-pound defensive back who flies all over the field in a manner so violent that he could seriously injure an opposing receiver.

"UCLA is a great school and a great place to play football, but after that first season I felt I wanted to come closer to home and play," Bates said. "Some unfortunate things happened to me concerning my family that told me that then it was time to come home. My mother and my grandmother both passed within

about a two-month span that spring, and that was the final push that made me come back home.

"After all that had happened to me, I knew I needed to be close to home. I wanted to be near my family. I wanted my family to see me play every week."

"I wanted to be back in Texas." Bates had his release signed by the UCLA administration, then talked to A&M recruiting coordinator Tim Cassidy about returning to Texas and playing for the Aggies. When Cassidy asked Bates to visit the A&M campus, Bates reassured him that Aggieland was where he wanted to be.

"Even when I went to UCLA, I said if I went to school in Texas, it would be at A&M," Bates said. "Once I decided I was coming back, I knew it was A&M. I never wanted to go to Texas. I had watched A&M play Notre Dame in the Cotton Bowl, and when I visited, it was a great atmosphere. Anyone who visits here will tell you they are amazed by the atmosphere."

So, the freshman All-American was on his way to College Station. And no one was happier to hear that he would have a safety with big-game experience than A&M defensive coordinator Bob Davie.

"When I heard he was coming, I felt like I was getting a starter for our football team," Davie said. "It's not like when you take a high school player and bring him in, you're really not sure. But when you get a young man who was a starter in the PAC 10 and that we knew so much about from high school but couldn't get, it is really exciting for you."

Because of NCAA requirements, Bates had to sit out the 1990 season after transferring. But in 1991, he was primed and ready to be the Aggies' starting free safety. He took the job, and made his mark quickly. Bates led the nation's top-ranked defense in interceptions (4) and fumbles caused (3). But, Bates said, the season was not all a highlight film for him. He also said he has been a better

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Lady Aggies fall to Baylor in final home game

By K. LEE DAVIS
Sports Writer of THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M Lady Aggies were outthit, outblocked and outplayed Wednesday night at G. Rollie White Coliseum as they dropped a four-game Southwest Conference match to Baylor, 7-15, 16-14, 9-15, 9-15.

A crowd of 673 came out to watch the final home game for the Lady Aggies.

A&M (14-13, 3-7) had defeated Baylor earlier this season in Waco, but the Lady Aggies were not able to get going in any facet of the game this time around.

A&M managed to hit only .062 for the entire match, and hit a mere .053 in the fourth and deciding game.

A&M head coach Al Givens made no

excuses for his team, and stressed that they must come together and regroup before the season is over.

"It's hard to beat people when you hit .062," Givens said.

Junior setter Genny Wood had the highest hitting percentage on the night at .200, as she posted seven kills and 20 assists.

"Baylor's a good ballclub, and tonight they beat us," Givens said. "They played better than we did, and we have to terminate more balls and eliminate our hitting errors."

Junior outside attacker Amy Kisling agreed that the Lady Aggies were going to have to improve their team play.

"We just didn't have it tonight," Kisling said. "I know this is the lowest

point of our season. We needed to speak to each other, we needed to do something to get some momentum, but we didn't."

Senior outside attacker Elizabeth Edmiston, who led the team with 15 kills, was upset with the team's performance and her own after playing the final home match of her career.

"We were dead, and I don't think we came into the match overconfident, or that we were taking Baylor lightly," Edmiston said. "But we absolutely, positively, did not execute on our side of the court."

Givens said he did not know why his team had broken down so completely.

"I really thought we were ready to play to tell you the truth," Givens said. "We had good practices and we were pre-

pared, but we struggled to get into a rhythm and that was really frustrating."

"No excuse got beat tonight and we need to get it if we're going to compete harder."

Baylor head coach Tom Sonnichsen said blocking and team defense were the keys to victory for his team.

"I think we gained the advantage in blocking this evening," Sonnichsen said. "The key was that we did block better than A&M did, and we played pretty good defense behind the block."

"They were ready for us, but we weren't ready for them," Kisling said.

Sonnichsen added that while his team won, the Lady Aggies could have been successful if a few more balls had fallen in for them.