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Houston

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A&M is at the top of the SWC standings, with Texas a game back at 3-1.

If Texas loses on Saturday to SMU or the week after at Baylor, then all A&M would need to successfully defend its conference title is to beat Houston and Texas Christian at home on Nov. 21.

An added pressure is the shot that the Aggies have of playing for a National Championship. With three games and a bowl left on the schedule and an empty loss column, it's something that Slocum knows is a lurking presence.

"We're close enough to the end that you can see it a little," Slocum said. "You should have some enthusiasm to be in this situation, but at the same time, you don't want to lose what you have."

Both teams will be playing on only four days rest, but the Aggies might find it good practice for their next Thursday night match — the season finale at Austin against Texas.

Bates

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player in the first nine games this season.

"People look at statistics and think I was better then because I had more interceptions," Bates said. "But at this point last season, I didn't have half as many tackles as I have this season. Now I'm more aware of what is going on around me.

"Last year, we lost the Tulsa game, and a lot of bad things happened to me. I was up and down the entire game. I haven't really had a game like that this season. I think if anything I've been a lot more solid this year, much more consistent than I was then."

But, Bates said, he is still there if he needs to make the big play.

"If you challenge me, I will rise to the occasion. If you put me in a situation where you come at me, I will still make the play."

The numbers, not counting the interceptions, seem to agree with Bates. He is tied with linebacker Jason Atkinson for the team lead in tackles with 75, and leads the team in unassisted tackles with 52. His season best came last weekend when he recorded 14 tackles against Louisville.

With that type of junior season, some people seem to think Bates will do as many juniors do, leave for the glory of the National Football League and pass up his senior season. But anyone who asks Bates will realize that he has too many other responsibilities to take care of before leaving.

"I don't know why people would think I was leaving," Bates said emphatically. "I've only been here a couple of years, and I've still got work to do on my degree and with this team. We've got so much going for us next season with all the players we have coming back, I wouldn't even think of going to the NFL now.

"Not only that, graduating to me is more important right now. I am planning to get my degree the summer after my senior season, and if God will see to it then that I am able to get a shot at the NFL, then I will take it."

As for the future of his team, Bates feels the Aggies can finish the season 12-0 and get a shot to play for the National Championship in the Cotton Bowl. A 13-0 A&M team would, Bates said, have a legitimate title argument.

"Who is to say if we go 13-0 we're not the National Champions?" Bates asks. "If we beat a top team in the Cotton Bowl, we will have our claim. If we don't win it, that's just how things go. All we can do is take care of our end."

As for his future, getting a degree is one of the most important things to the sports management major. Keeping his integrity is another.

"What the future holds for me, I don't know," Bates said. "I want to be a respected individual around Texas A&M and around my community. I hope I always keep my integrity and my character, and I hope people can respect me for my character someday."

Don't worry, Patrick. Around the Southwest Conference, they already do.

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