

Secondary pours talent into vacant positions

By Julie Chelkowski

THE BATTALION

Just about the only thing the A&M defensive backfield won't hit you with this season is the experience they have had from years past.

The Aggies may not have the maturity that has characterized their secondary recently, but the players and coaches say they will not let that slow them down.

Defensive backs coach Trent Walters said his players possess the talent, confidence and the determination to live up to the "Wrecking Crew" standards.

"The big thing with us now is overcoming the lack of experience," Walters said. "We have a lot of ability, but I think the key thing is we don't have the game experience that (last year's) group had."

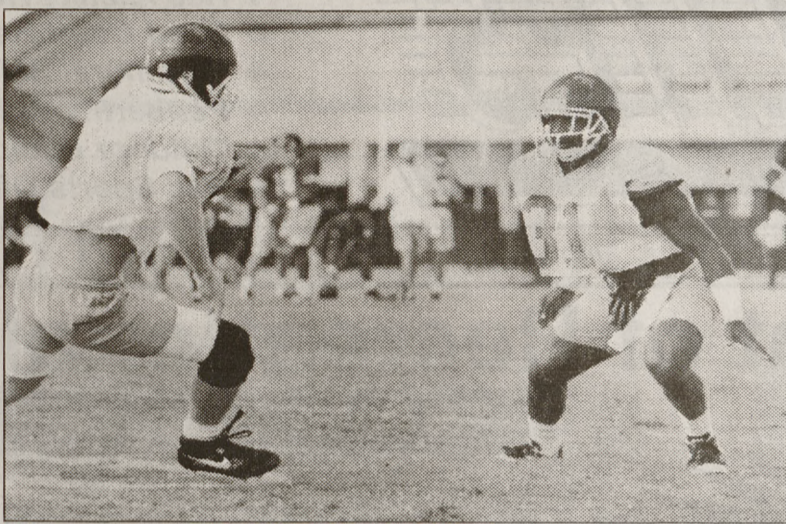
The two positions left open by the departures of free safety Patrick Bates and cornerback Derrick Frazier have been filled by Junior White and Ray Mickens, respectively. Both White and Mickens have had some limited playing time, but have never started in a game.

Walters said that although the two have an obvious disadvantage because they have never started, he thinks they will perform well.

"Going into the game is a little different as a starter than being a back-up," Walters said. "When you're a back up, you don't have that tension, pressure and nervousness that you have as a starter."

"But they've been looking forward to it since last year and I have confidence that they'll play well."

Mickens, a sophomore, has an added disadvantage to his



Kyle Burnett/THE BATTALION

Cornerback Aaron Glenn (31) sets up in a one-on-one pass drill at a recent A&M practice.

lack of playing time - he is 5-foot-8. But according to Mickens, he will have no problem handling even the toughest opponents such as Lovell Pinkney, the 6-foot-5, 232-pound wide receiver from the University of Texas, and Lloyd Hill, the All-American split end from Texas Tech.

"I'm going to break them down," Mickens said. "The only way to take care of that is when I play, I will play the heck out of them. I just push them off their route."

As far as the goals Mickens has set for himself, they are simple yet sound.

"My main goal is to play hard and play with a lot of confidence and try to break up as many balls as I can. Don't slack off on even one play," he said. "And if I play hard on every snap, I'll feel I've accomplished

Glenn, a returning starter, has been named to several pre-season All-America teams.

my goals." Cornerback Aaron Glenn and strong safety Michael Hendricks, however, are A&M's expectations to the 'inexperienced' backfield.

Hendricks took over last season for starter Steve Kenney, who was injured in the Kickoff Classic against Stanford. Hendricks surpassed his coaches' expectation and logged in a solid season as only a sophomore.

Glenn, the only senior and a candidate for All-American honors as well as the Thorpe Award, has become a leader to the younger players through his actions and words.

"He's the only guy back there who has a lot of experience," Walters said. "He's doing a great job with leadership by performance and he's doing a better job this year inspiring the guys by talking to them and mo-

tivating them."

Even though Glenn led the team last season in two categories - six interceptions and 20 broken-up passes - he said he has improved his game with the help of former teammates Frazier and Bates.

"With Bates and Frazier, they got you on top of your game," he said. "They told you what you're doing wrong. With them doing that, I've just stepped up my game. My reaction time and covering ability improved a lot since last year. I think I'll have a better year than last year."

Walters said Glenn has refined his style by becoming a smarter player.

"Glenn is being a little smoother and being more consistent," Walters said. "He's more conscious of technique, more exact in execution."

Another improvement Glenn said he and his teammates have made is in their confidence.

Throughout last year's season the team "got caught up in the polls a little too much," Glenn said. But after the loss to Notre Dame at the Cotton Bowl, he said that the team's confidence was briefly stripped.

"That was a hard loss. They didn't just physically beat us, they mentally beat us. They pushed the ball down our throat," Glenn said. "But now, we know there are teams that can run on us and we're getting that confidence back. We know we're the Aggies and we play that reckless type of defense."

Glenn quickly bounced back from the shock of the Notre Dame loss and has exhibited a no-nonsense attitude anticipating his season's toughest opponent, Hill from Texas Tech.

"Hill is a great receiver, but the boy is covered."

Front seven set to anchor Aggie defense

By Drew Diener

THE BATTALION

Last season, the spotlight shined on former A&M All-American linebacker Marcus Buckley. But he has taken his talents to the National Football League.

Now in the glare of the bright lights, the linebacking corps, led by Steve Solari, will be joined by an emerging defensive line that features three returning starters: defensive ends Sam Adams and Eric England and noseguard Lance Teichelman.

Defensive coordinator Bob Davie said he is confident that Solari will follow in Buckley's path while comparing Solari to some former A&M linebacking greats.

"Steve Solari gives us that Marcus Buckley, Aaron Wallace, John Roper player," Davie said. "He's the one player we have that can do that."

Solari's teammates also seem quite impressed with the Sugar-

land Willowridge product.

"Steve's a very good outside linebacker," Adams said. "He's strong, quick, and he's going to be a tremendous help to this team."

Solari will be flanked by sophomore Antonio Shorter at the other outside spot. Davie said Shorter's development is vital to the success of Solari.

"The critical thing for Steve Solari is for Antonio Shorter to develop so Steve Solari can stay right where he is and become the Marcus Buckley," Davie said.

While Solari and Shorter solidify the outside linebacker spots, senior and Butkus Award nominee Jason Atkinson, a three-year starter, anchors the inside along with Larry Jackson and Jessie Cox.

Atkinson and the rest of his linebacking counterparts will be aided by the defensive linemen in front of them. The unit is considered one of the best in the nation by some observers.

The linebackers know that

how well the line plays this season will also effect their performance.

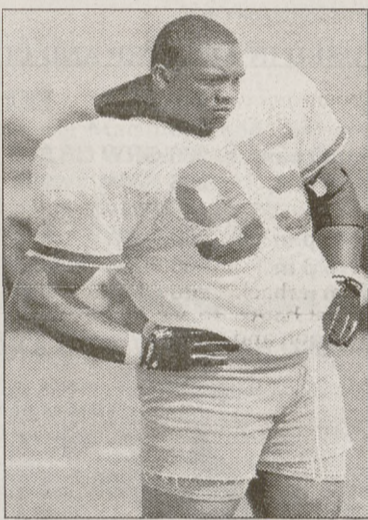
"With guys like Eric (England), (Lance) Teichelman, and Sam (Adams), offenses have to double team at least one of those guys and that will leave me in a lot of one-on-one situations," Solari said. "That will be important in us having success this season."

Another factor that will help yield a powerful force is the establishment of positions in the line. Last season, Teichelman started off at end with England at nose guard.

But this year, the players switched and it was a move that benefitted everyone.

"This past year I earned a real good job at noseguard I feel comfortable with and its nice to just sit back and work to get better instead of having to fight for position," Teichelman said.

"Since everything is settled, everyone is fitting into their position. Everyone is clicking right now," England said.



Kyle Burnett/THE BATTALION

Defensive end Sam Adams bolsters a seasoned line that returns all three starters.

Adams said his teammates have one real goal for the upcoming season.

"We're not going out there to maintain, we're going out there to become better," Adams said.

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