

1939: A year of Aggie champions

National champs use team unity to stay unbeaten

By Jan Higginbotham
THE BATTALION

This group of Aggies came to Texas A&M to do the one thing they all loved to do — play football. In 1939, no one could play the game better than them.

Forty-seven men came together that year to do what no other A&M football team has accomplished before or since; win a national championship.

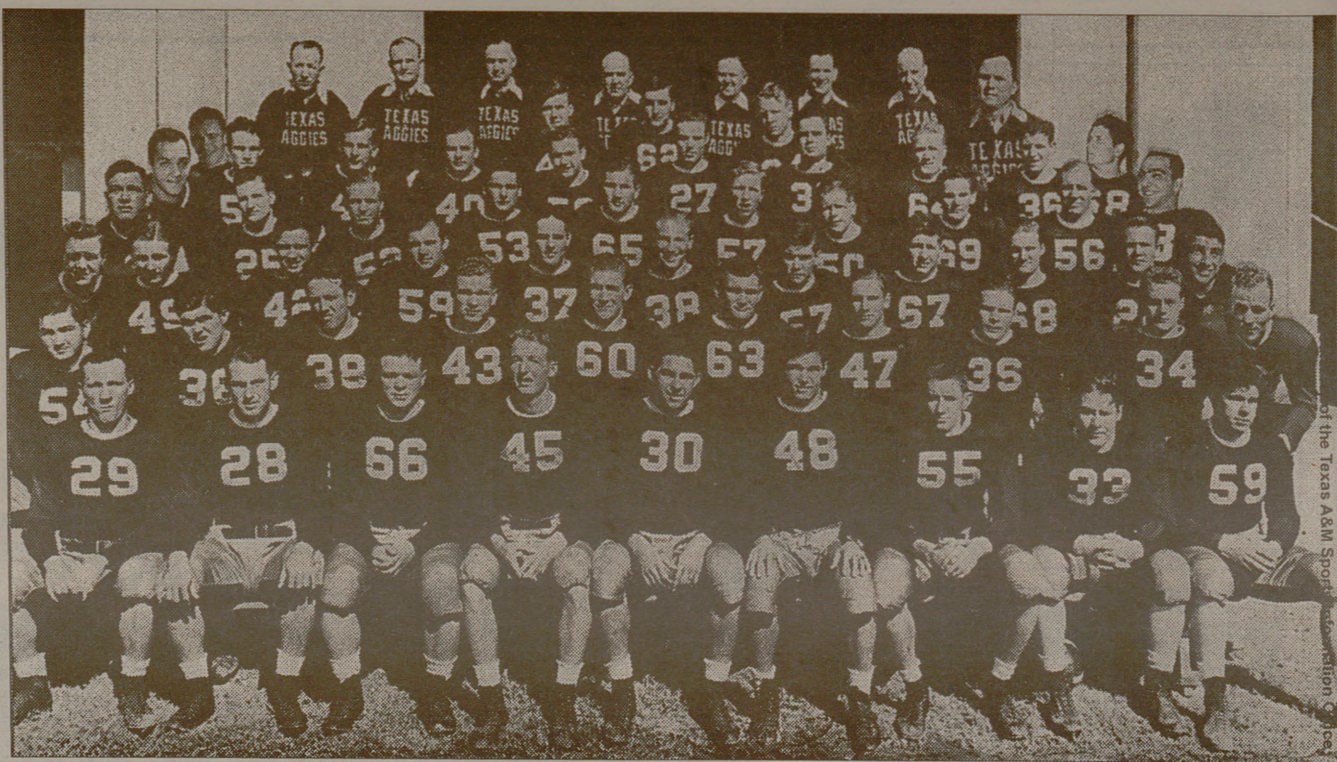
"There was a fighting, fellowship spirit," Joe Boyd, an All-American tackle for the 1939 team, said. "It was just a team filled with love. All the boys in our ball club thought in terms of winning the game, and not in terms of being heroes."

Jim Thomason, a blocking back and defensive linebacker for the championship team, said everything just fell into place for the Aggies in 1939.

"The atmosphere on campus was just perfect," Thomason said. "People bent over backwards to make things right for us."

The team members came together to form a family, Thomason said.

"They were a good class of boys," Thomason said. "They all had ambition. They were clean, decent boys who went to school to get an education, not just to play football."



The 1939 A&M National Championship team featured such Aggie legends as John Kimbrough (39). The whole team could not appear at the time of the this photo so the others were added in later through photo "magic."

But football was what that group of men did best. The team ended the season undefeated and untied, having accumulated 212 points to their opponents' 31.

The Aggies were named national

champions even before they met the fifth-ranked Green Wave of Tulane in the Sugar Bowl on Jan. 1, 1940. The Aggies played in front of their largest audience of the season that day as 72,000 fans packed into Tulane Stadium in New Orleans, La.

"They were stacked on the track, almost down to the field," Thomason said.

John Kimbrough, A&M's running back, proved to be a key in the Aggies' 14-13 win over the Green Wave, but that could have been because he felt he had something to prove to the Tulane coaches.

"They offered me a scholarship at Tulane, but they ran me off," Kimbrough said. "I never even played a down for them. A&M was about the only thing I had left after that. They had about 100 freshmen come in when I did."

"They were real straight about it. They told me, 'If we like you, we'll keep you.'"

Kimbrough stuck around and became a starter for the Aggies in 1938. He went on to win All-American honors in 1939 and 1940. The star running back finished fifth in the voting for the coveted Heisman Trophy in 1939 and second in the voting in 1940.

Boyd said Kimbrough was the spark

plug the Aggies needed for a successful season in 1939.

"John Kimbrough was the greatest fullback," Boyd said. "He was an inspiration to the team."

Boyd also garnered All-American honors as a senior for the Aggies in 1939, but he gives much of the credit to his teammates.

"If I was All-American, all those boys were," Boyd said.

Tommie Vaughn, A&M center and linebacker, said the team was successful because the players worked together.

"There were no great stars," Vaughn said. "The team was a star. Everyone played together and not for themselves. They all had high respect for one another. This team has always been tight as feathers with each other."

Thomason said the closeness of the team members led them to success on the football field.

"We were just like brothers," Thomason said. "There was no trouble between any of the players. If one got in trouble, everybody came out to help."

"Everybody knew how to play everyone else's positions. We did a lot of maneuvering out there, tricking the other teams. That's what made it so fun!"

The fun lasted throughout the 1939 season for the Aggies, as they traveled across the country meeting movie stars and seeing the United States by train.

"We learned a lot just by traveling to different places," Thomason said. "We had to take our books with us and study on the train, though. We would work out on the lawn of the train stations where we stopped."

Several of the players said Aggie head coach Homer Norton's coaching style was a key to their success.

"He was really ahead of his time," Kimbrough said.

Boyd said the extraordinary abilities of

A&M in the record books

The following are NCAA records.

Most yards gained by a freshman in the first game of his career:
212 — Greg Hill vs. LSU (1991)

Most touchdowns scored on kickoff returns:
2 — Leeland McElroy vs. Rice 1993 (tied with 7 others)

Most touchdown returns in a season:
3 — Leeland McElroy (tied with 6 others)

Most field goals made in a game, 60 yards or more:
2 — Tony Franklin vs. Baylor (1976)

Most field goals made in a game, 40 yards or more:
5 — Alan Smith vs. Arkansas St. (1983)

Highest percentage of field goals made, under 40 yards:
16 of 16 — Scott Slater (1986)

Longest field goal made by a freshman: 59 yards
— Tony Franklin vs. Rice (1975)

Most yards on punt returns:
319 — A&M vs. North Texas (1946)

Most kick returns per game:
6.9 (1943)

Lowest average yards allowed per play:
1.7 (1939)

Lowest pass efficiency defensive rating:
74.99 (1993)

Bowl Records

Most rushing yards by a quarterback:
180 — Mark Mosley vs. USC (1977 Bluebonnet Bowl)

Most extra points:
9 — Lane Talbot vs. BYU (1990 Holiday Bowl)

Kick off returns average:
60.5 yards — Bob Smith vs. Georgia (1950 Presidential Cup)

Most all purpose yards by an individual:
303 — Bob Smith vs. Georgia (1950 Presidential Cup)

Most yards gained by both teams:
1,143 — A&M vs. USC (1977 Bluebonnet Bowl)

Most total net rushing yards:
486 — A&M vs. USC (1977 Bluebonnet Bowl)

Most total net rushing yards by both teams:
864 — A&M vs. USC (1977 Bluebonnet Bowl)

Most touchdowns in a game:
9 — A&M vs. BYU (1990 Holiday Bowl)

Most points by the winning team:
65 — A&M vs. BYU (1990 Holiday Bowl)

Fewest first downs allowed:
1 — A&M vs. Alabama (1942 Cotton Bowl)

Most fumbles lost:
6 — A&M vs. Florida St. (1992 Cotton Bowl)

Longest field goal:
62 yards — A&M vs. Florida (1977 Sun Bowl)

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