

# Building a dynasty: A&M in the '80s, '90s

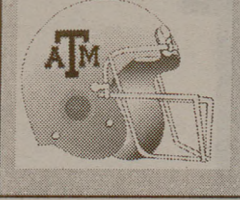
By Nick Georgandis  
THE BATTALION

In the past decade, Texas A&M football has returned not only to the top of the Southwest Conference ranks, but also back into a position of national prominence. Six times during the past ten years, the Aggies took the SWC title and appeared in the Cotton Bowl.

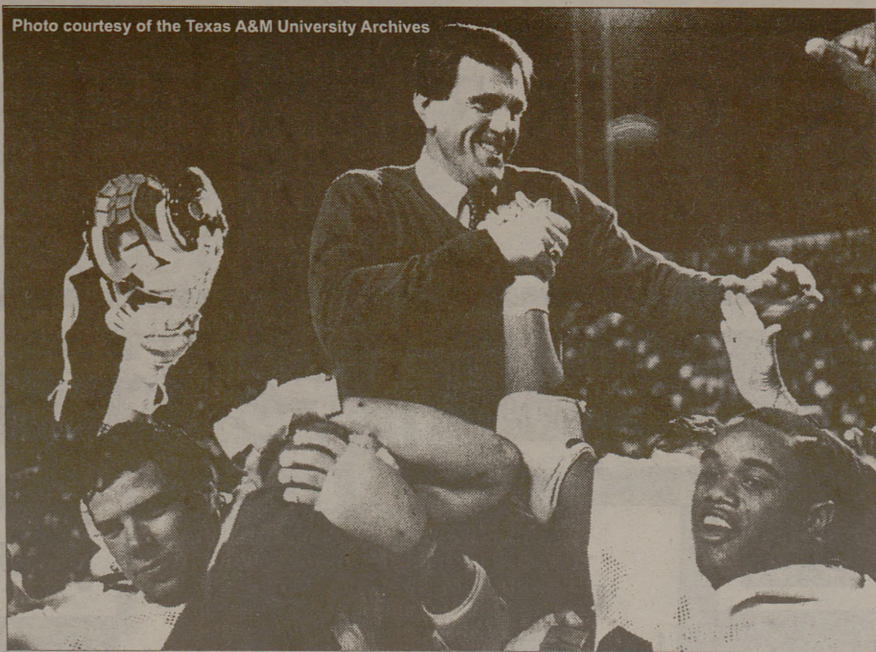
After a 6-5 record in 1984, the Aggies ran off three straight SWC championships from 1985-87. In 1985, the Aggies ran off seven consecutive regular season victories, including a 42-10 demolishing of Texas on Thanksgiving Night. A&M's opponent in the 1986 Cotton Bowl, the Aggies' first post-season appearance in Dallas since 1968, was Auburn, with their remarkable running back and Heisman Trophy winner Bo Jackson.

## The Decade in Review

- Decade record: 91-28-1 (.763)
- Best record: 12-1 (1992)
- Worst record: 6-5 (1984)
- SWC Championships: '85, '86, '87, '90, '91, '93
- Highlights: Darren Lewis becomes 5th back in history with 5,000 yards.



The key series of the game came early in the fourth quarter with the Aggies leading 21-16. The Tigers had driven to a first-and-goal position at the A&M seven-yard line, and seemed poised to wrest the lead away from the Aggies. But the Aggies stopped Jackson from scoring four straight times to take the



Then A&M coach Jackie Sherrill is carried from the field by Ray Childress (left) and Sammy O'Brient (right) after defeating Texas in 1984 37-12.

ball on downs. A&M's offense then put the game away as Kevin Murray threw for a Cotton Bowl record 292 yards and Anthony Toney ran for 122 yards and two touchdowns, as A&M pulled away for a 36-16 win and a No. 6 final ranking, their highest finish since 1956.

"We were fired up because we wanted to play the best to see how good we were," Johnny Holland, a linebacker on that year's team, said. "Bo Jackson was the best that year, one of the greatest running backs of all-time, so we wanted to play him. I think that game helped turn the tide and start A&M winning for the

next ten years." The next year, A&M repeated as conference champions, but not without some difficulty. The No. 11 Aggies hosted Cody Carlson's 20th-ranked Baylor Bears at Kyle Field, and turned in one of the most remarkable comebacks in school history. In this early SWC showdown, Baylor led 17-0 after a quarter, and 27-17 at the end of three. But Murray marched the offense down the field time after time, finally throwing a four-yard strike to Tony Thompson to put the Aggies ahead 31-30. Murray finished the day 25 of 40 for 308 yards, with three touchdowns and no interceptions.

The following year saw the Aggies return to Dallas for the third year in a row. This time, the opposition was perennial powerhouse Notre Dame and their Heisman trophy winner, Tim Brown. But Brown, even in his Dallas homecoming, was no match for an A&M freshman quarterback named Bucky Richardson. Richardson rushed for 96 yards and two touchdowns en route to being named offensive player of the game as the Aggies crushed the Fighting Irish 35-10.

Nine months after their Cotton Bowl triumph, A&M was placed on probation for three years for recruiting violations, and head coach Jackie Sherrill resigned. Three months later, assistant head coach R.C. Slocum was named the Aggies' new head coach.

After an 8-4 1989 campaign, including a loss to Pittsburgh in the John Hancock Bowl, A&M returned to the national scene in 1990 by demolishing yet another Heisman Trophy winner. The scene was the 1991 Holiday Bowl, the opponent was Brigham Young and quarterback Ty Detmer. The Aggie defense separated both of Detmer's shoulders while the offense poured it on for a bowl-record 65 points.

The following year, the Aggies again became the cream of the SWC crop, a position they have yet to leave. From 1991-1993, the Aggies put together a 32-5 record, including a 22-0 mark against SWC opponents.

Richardson, who was a part of several of the great moments of the decade, best summed up what it meant to play in such a successful decade.

"It was a great decade for Texas A&M," Richardson said. "Our program was on a roll. We were getting new facilities, had great recruiting classes and won many games every year in this decade.

"This past decade put Texas A&M on the map in college football."

# A&M becomes Linebacker U. in latest decade

By David Winder  
THE BATTALION

In 1983, then-defensive coordinator R.C. Slocum decided to change up the Texas A&M defense. By switching from a 4-3 to a 3-4, Slocum figured he could create problems for opposing offenses. What he created was Linebacker University.

Since the switch, every starting Aggie linebacker that has finished his career at Texas A&M has either been drafted or signed as a free agent by a NFL team.

"The style of defense that A&M has is a pro style defense," former A&M linebacker Johnny Holland said. "In the pros, they want linebackers that can stop the run and the pass. At A&M, they have the type of linebackers who can run and cover."

At A&M, they also have the type of linebackers that can dominate games. Holland and Larry Kelm combined for over 725 tackles from 1983-1986. The "Blitz Brothers", Aaron Wallace ('86-'89) and John Roper ('85-'88), kept the tradition going with 78 career sacks between them while helping to create the "Wrecking Crew" defense.

They were followed by the versatile William Thomas ('87-'90), the bone-crushing Quentin Coryatt ('90-'91) and the speedy Marcus Buckley ('90-'92).

"Players like Holland, Wallace, Roper and Thomas are what the 'Wrecking Crew' is all about," Buckley said. "The other team was going to have to earn everything they got because we were going to blitz them."

Led by the linebackers, the "Wrecking Crew" led the nation in total defense in 1991. Since 1983, the defense has finished in the top ten in the country four times.

"We played for stats, every week we would walk in and see where we were," Holland said. "We wanted to have the best defense. We played with pride."

Since 1985, the Aggies have recorded 431 sacks for 2,910 lost yards, about 1.65 miles. In the last 109 games, A&M has averaged close to four sacks a game.

"You have to love to play defense," Holland said. "Coach Slocum said that you always had to play every play like it was your last."

A&M has also had great success taking other position players and turning them into linebackers. Holland and Thomas both came to A&M as quarterbacks.

"When I first got there, they moved me to free safety," Holland said. "I was more of a hitter and really didn't have the speed to play defensive, back so they switched me to linebacker."

"(Former head coach Jackie) Sherrill and Coach Slocum did a great job of putting players at the right positions. Sherrill and Slocum were great coaches and teachers. They gave me the confidence I needed."

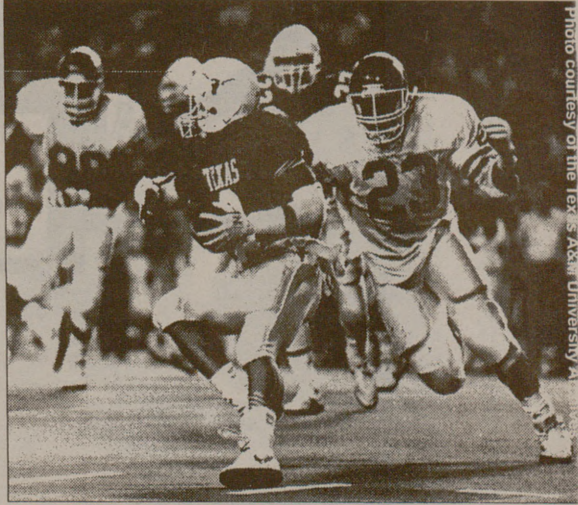
Buckley was recruited as a linebacker by the Aggies after being a star running back in high school.

"Everybody else who recruited me wanted me as a running back," Buckley said. "A&M was the only one who knew they wanted me to play linebacker."

"They had a plan of what they wanted to do with me. Out of high school, A&M guaranteed me that I would have a chance to play linebacker in the NFL."

Before the 1980s, linebackers Bill Hobbs, Ed Simoni, Garth Ten Naple and Robert Jackson were All-Americans for Texas A&M.

"When I first came to A&M, we had great linebackers



A&M linebacker Aaron Wallace (23) tackles Texas Eric Metcalf.

and had good linebackers even before then," Slocum said "Guys like Billy Hobbs, Garth Ten Naple and Ed Simoni. From there it just kept going with guys like Jef Fuller, Ken Forth and Billy Cannon."

Wallace said that through the years all A&M linebackers have had one common denominator.

"What we always did as linebackers was play hard," Wallace said. "Through it all, we just wanted to stand out."

Photo courtesy of the Texas A&M University Archives