

Football season proves A&M still top SWC team

By Nick Georgandis
THE BATTALION

On January 6, 1994, the NCAA handed down probation to Texas A&M for the school's scandal involving players paid by an A&M alumnae for summer jobs they did not perform. The immediate punishment called for the 1994 season to be played without the rights of television coverage or post-season appearances.

On April 15, 1994, running back Greg Hill, defensive lineman Sam Adams and cornerback Aaron Glenn were all selected in the first round of the National Football League's annual draft. Football forecasters began to call A&M's upcoming 1994 campaign as a "re-building year."

On November 19, 1994, the Aggies trounced Texas Christian University, 34-17, defying the odds and the experts by finishing with an undefeated mark of 10-0-1, the best by an A&M squad since 1956.

Although the Aggies were preseason consensus top 25 picks, most publications felt that A&M's reign as king of the hill in the Southwest Conference was over, and that the year of probation would only weaken the Aggies' standings in the eyes of the national media.

"Texas A&M has become a solid program, but the Aggies aren't at the Notre Dame level," wrote Craig Ellensport of Sport Magazine in his preseason report. "Texas A&M has produced six first-round draft picks in the last three years and the losses

will be noticed."

As the season approached however, A&M players paid no heed to what was being written about them.

"We are the SWC champions and will be until someone knocks us off," senior inside linebacker Antonio Armstrong said before the Aggies' season opener. "Probation or not, we are still going out with the idea to win every game."

The Aggies very nearly accomplished that goal, winning every game but one, a stunning 21-21 tie with Southern Methodist University at the Alamodome in San Antonio on Oct. 29. Up until the tie, A&M had been inconsistent, despite putting together a 7-0 record. At times, the team played brilliantly, such as in wins over Oklahoma (36-14), Southern Mississippi (41-17) and Baylor (41-21).

But interspersed with the big wins were struggles against seemingly lesser opponents. The Aggies escaped disaster twice at Kyle Field, first when a Texas Tech "Hail Mary" pass fell incomplete in a 23-17 squeaker, and again when the "Wrecking Crew" thwarted a late Rice Owl drive in a 7-0 defensive struggle.

The tie against SMU canceled out any A&M hopes for a national championship. The week after the non-win, Aggie players had a no-coaches allowed meeting to assess their situation and rally around each other.

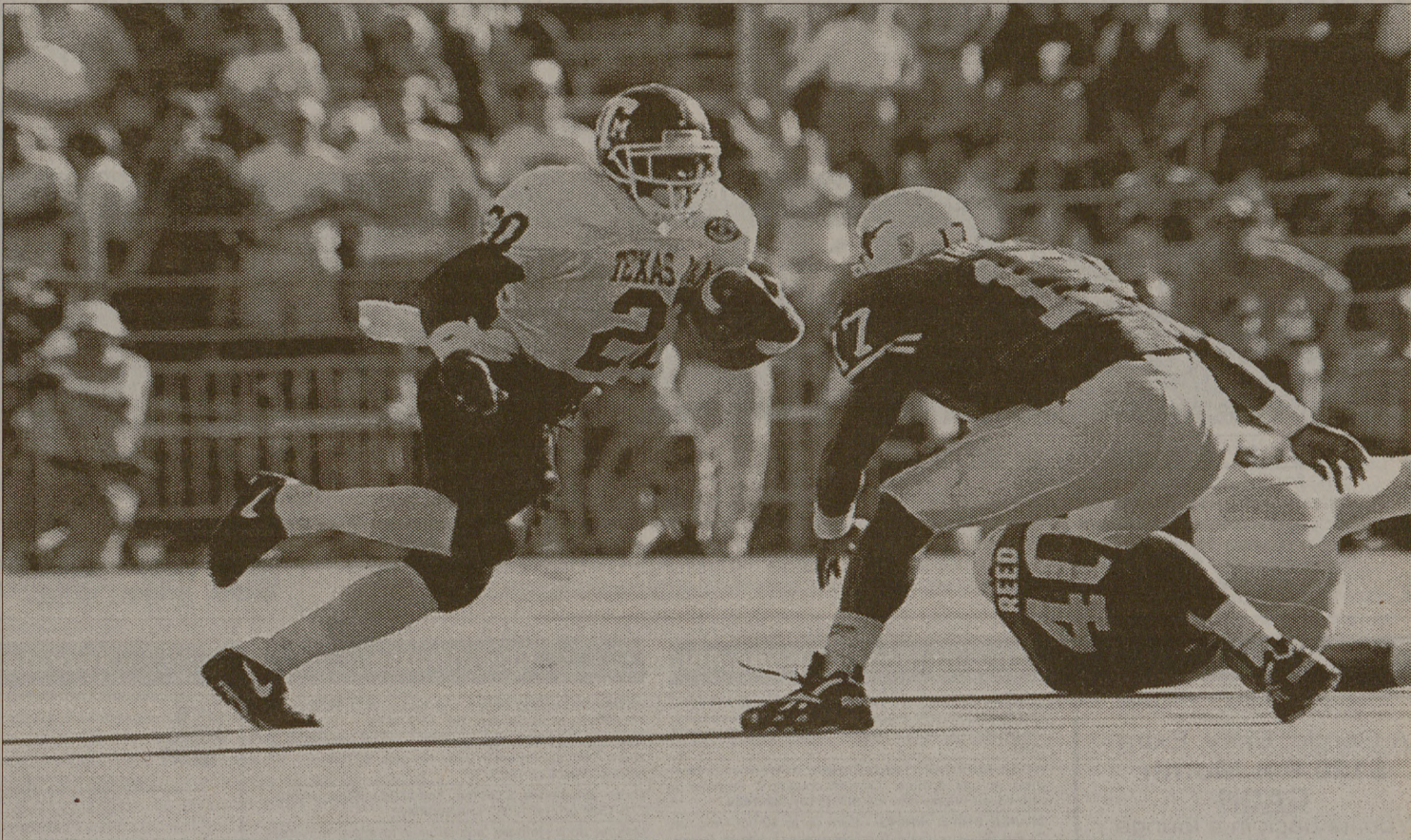
"I think back to that tie, and I think what's important is who we've become," senior cornerback Michael Hendricks said. "We've played as hard

"It was like we told everyone else (in the SWC), 'We took the challenge, and when all the smoke settled, we'd let all of you fight for second place.'"



-R. C. Slocum,

Texas A&M football head coach



Senior running back Rodney Thomas makes a move to run around a Longhorn defender in A&M's 34-10 victory over the University of Texas.

as we could. All the goals we've had, we've achieved. After the tie, I'm glad the guys responded the way they did."

The Aggies responded by thrashing arch-rival Texas, 34-10 in Austin. Much was made of the big win as being the Aggies' "bowl game" for the year, but Armstrong dismissed such talk.

"My Cotton Bowl is every game,"

Armstrong said. "Today we proved that Texas A&M is still Texas A&M."

Had the Aggies not been on probation, the win over Texas would have clinched them their fourth straight SWC championship. Although they have no official title, senior linebacker Reggie Graham said just knowing who's the best is worthwhile to him.

"We know the second-best team is going to the Cotton Bowl," Graham said. "We can't say officially that we are the SWC champs, but when they look back in the history books, they'll see who was the best."

Head coach R.C. Slocum agreed with Graham, saying that the team had to

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An Open Letter to McElroy

TOM DAY

Sportswriter



Dear Leeland:

Now that the football season is over and A&M's first undefeated campaign since 1956 is in the bag, it's time to end the suspense. Your teammates, fans and fellow Aggies realize you have a decision to make soon, and a tough one at that.

Will you turn pro next season, or will you return to A&M to help lead the Aggies back to the Promised Land?

There are several advantages in heading to the NFL right now, Leeland. You're healthy and would most likely be an early pick in the first round of the NFL draft next spring. With that comes the big bucks and financial security for life. But, there are Aggies everywhere who would love to see you stay and could probably give you just as many reasons to don the Maroon and White garb once again next fall.

Imagine, Leeland, you would be the featured back on a team with national championship aspirations. This season, in a limited role, you ran for over 700 yards behind an inexperienced offensive line. Starring

behind a more seasoned line next season, you could be a legitimate Heisman Trophy Award candidate.

More importantly, your team is going to need a star player who can step up and help guide his teammates past all the obstacles that lie ahead. As a player that is capable of changing the flow of a game in one play, you would be the most qualified man for the job.

With next year being the Aggies' Southwest Conference farewell tour, it would be fitting that they go out on top. You would be the man to help the team climb to the top of the hill one last time and finally get that elusive Cotton Bowl victory. After everything is said and done, you will have achieved Aggie immortality.

To top everything off, A&M games will be back on television next season, further enhancing your national image as a premiere back. With more exposure on the college scene, your stock will rise along with your future position in the NFL draft. This adds up to a more lucrative contract offer before you even step foot on the NFL gridiron.

So come back next year, Leeland, and be a part of something special. Your team and your school are counting on you and there would be nothing sweeter than to see ol' No. 34 in the backfield again next season.

Sincerely,

Your Fellow Aggies

Aikman, Peete recover from injuries

Garrett to lead Cowboys against Packers in Thanksgiving match-up

IRVING (AP) — Jason Garrett will start at quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys against the Green Bay Packers on Thanksgiving Day while Troy Aikman and Rodney Peete recover from injuries doctors have decided weren't as serious as first feared.

The Cowboys also brought in veteran quarterbacks Mike Pagel and Tommy Hodson, and team spokesman Rich Dalrymple said they'd decide Tuesday which of the two would be signed as a backup.

Pagel, a 12-year-veteran, has played for Indianapolis, Cleveland and the Los Angeles Rams. He played under Dallas offensive coordinator Ernie Zampese with the Rams in the early 90s.

Hodson, 27, played three seasons for the New England Patriots before he was cut in August 1993. He signed as a backup for the Miami Dolphins last season when Dan Marino went on the injured reserve.

To make room for the quarterback and offensive lineman Frank Cornish, both free agents, the Cowboys put offensive lineman Erik Williams on the injured reserve, and cut defensive lineman Toddrick McIntosh and practice squad player tight end Coleman Bell.

Aikman, who suffered a left knee ligament sprain in Sunday's 31-7 victory over Washington, walked with a limp around Valley Ranch on his 28th birthday.

"I'm still stiff and sore but it feels better than it did last night," Aikman said. "I'll just have to see what my body tells me on this one. I'm going day to day and see how it goes. It could be two weeks or it could be five weeks from now. I'd be shocked if I felt good enough to play on Thursday. I don't see that as a possibility but I'm not going to rule it out."

Aikman had a sprained knee ligament in 1991 and missed five games.

"I was suited up for the second game and could have played," said Aikman, still miffed that former coach Jimmy Johnson went with Steve Bueherlein into the playoffs. "It wasn't my choice but I could have played."

Coach Barry Switzer said Garrett would start and added "I believe in fairy tales. I believe in Disneyland and Tinker Bell and Captain Hook. I like situations like this. We could have us a new hero."

Peete's ligament damage in his right thumb wasn't as severe as first feared.

"Peete was not as bad as the doctors thought he might be," Switzer said. "It won't have to be operated on. He might be back for the Philadelphia game on Dec. 4."

Owner Jerry Jones said "we thought Peete might be gone for the year but he just has a strained ligament. He could get back quick."

Switzer said the team has confidence in Garrett, who has been on the active roster for two years and has completed 10 of 23 passes for 65 yards.

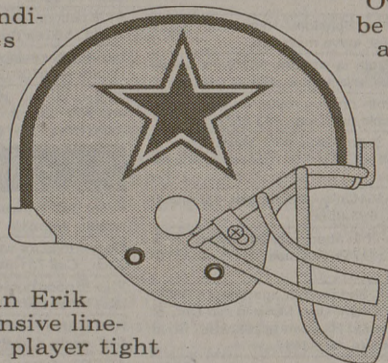
"He's an extremely intelligent player like most Princeton kids are and he knows our offense as well as any quarterback," Switzer said. "He has the ability to do certain things. He doesn't have a lot of arm strength. He's not like Aikman or Peete who can throw the deep cuts. But he won't get you beat."

The Cowboys picked up Cornish, whom they cut earlier in the year, because of nagging injuries to the offensive line. Guard Derek Kennard has a toe injury that could keep him out of the Packer game.

"We had to get some help," Switzer said. "We've got a real depth problem."

The Cowboys listed 15 players on an injury list, including running back Emmitt Smith, who is bothered by a sprained shoulder.

"The injury is there and it's going to hurt but I'm going to play," Smith said.



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