

High school playoffs bring excitement

TOM DAY

Sportswriter



It's that time of year again. It's the time when the fans come out in force, the band strikes up and the pom-poms are waving. The cameras roll and the spotlight shines bright. Friday night heroes become champions.

It's high school football playoff time, and it's an exciting time for Texas football fans. But it's an even more exciting time for the players, students, parents and hometown fans involved.

Small towns and communities come alive in support of their high school team. Banners and posters pop up, car windows are painted and pep rallies are held. Television crews invade the playoff-bound schools to capture the immense spirit and excitement of the student body on camera.

Parents and fans form caravans and make road trips to the games. As the victories mount, the road heads to the big cities. Here, youthful dreams come true as players get their chance to play in the big time.

Instead of sitting in the stands and watching the action as spectators, these lucky teenagers get to make the bone-crushing tackle, the long run or the graceful catch on the field of the Astrodome, Texas Stadium, or Kyle Field.

As shown during last week's Class 5A, Division II quarterfinal game between John Tyler and Plano East at Texas Stadium, playoff games can be nothing short of heartstopping.

Leading 41-17 with just over three minutes remaining in the contest, John Tyler appeared to have the game in the bag. But refusing to say die, Plano East kicked three onside kickoffs and miraculously scored four times to grab the lead.

But what would have been the greatest comeback in the history of Texas high school football wasn't meant to be, as John Tyler returned the game-ending kickoff for a touchdown and the victory. The game's thrilling finish was so exciting, the highlights were played on ESPN.

I was fortunate enough to be a part of a playoff run during my junior year of high school. As a player on the junior varsity football team, our unit ran scout team in practice for the varsity through December.

It was a thankless job until our coach let us suit out for a game in the Astrodome. Running out on the Dome floor that day four years ago was an unforgettable experience and one I wouldn't trade for anything in the world.

Armstrong selected as AP All-American

McElroy named to third team

Stewart Doreen
THE BATTALION

Senior linebacker Antonio Armstrong has entered into a select group of Aggies Wednesday when he was named to the 1994 Associated Press All-American team.

"It feels great," Armstrong said. "It makes you feel good to see all the hard work you do during the season has paid off."

Armstrong joined the elite group of former Aggie greats including Sam Adams, Marcus Buckley, Aaron Glenn, Patrick Bates, and John Roper, all recent graduates who also made their presence felt in the A&M "Wrecking Crew."

Armstrong, a Butkus Award semi-finalist, led the Southwest Conference's number one defense by recording nine and a half sacks to go along with 62 tackles for the season.

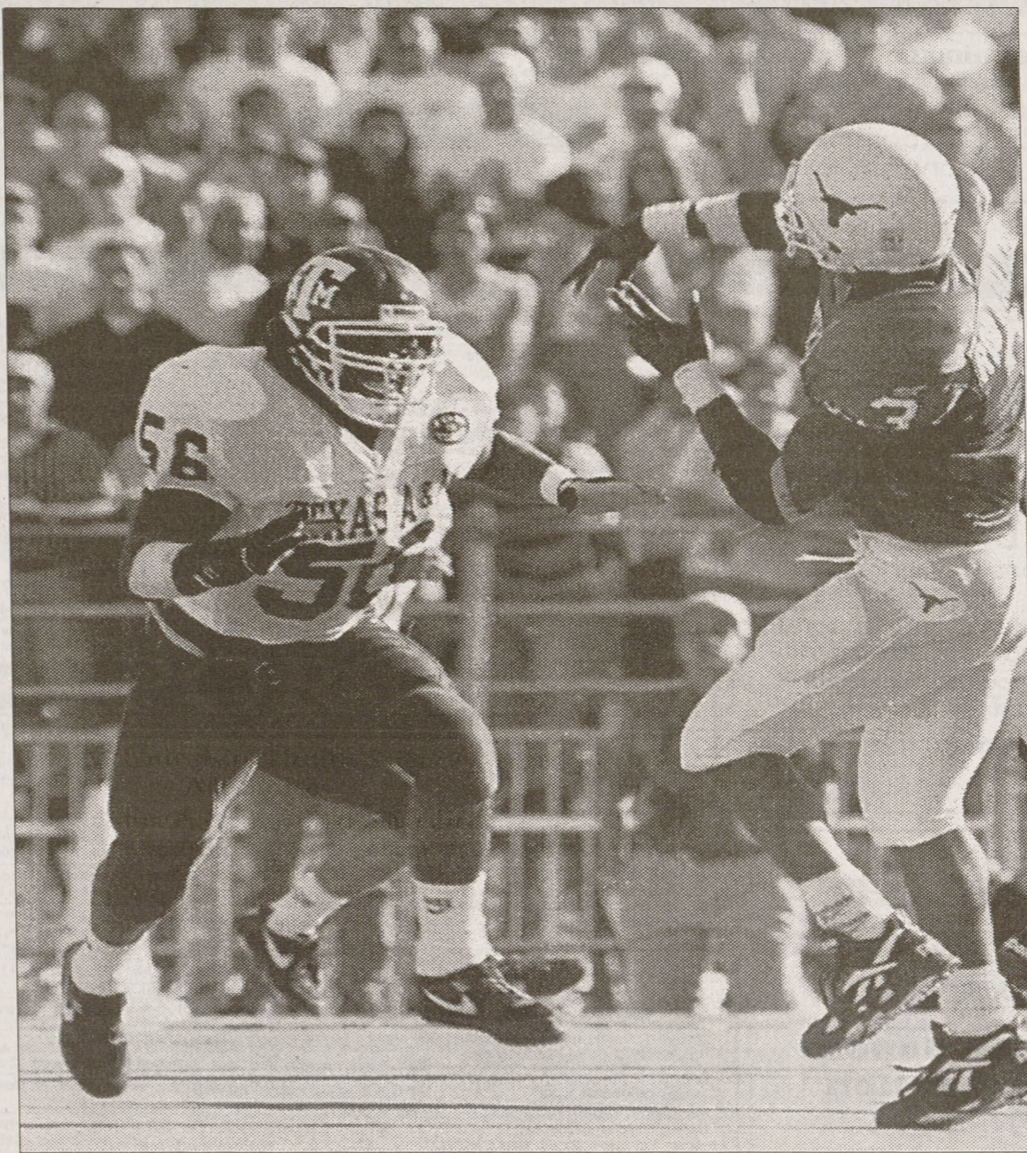
Armstrong's All-American season followed his break-through performance in his first season as a starter with eight and a half sacks and 73 tackles and All-SWC honors.

He highlighted his junior year at the Mobil Cotton Bowl where he manhandled Notre Dame's All-American Aaron Taylor, racking up three quarterback sacks, eight tackles and Defensive Player of the Game honors at the Mobil Cotton Bowl.

Other notable players on the team include Colorado's Rashaan Salaam, the nation's leading rusher, Penn State quarterback Kerry Collins, the nation's leading passer and Miami's Warren Sapp, who won the Lombardi Award for the nation's top lineman.

Sophomore running back/kick returner Leeland McElroy was named to the third team as the all-purpose back. McElroy rushed for 707 yards and nine touchdowns and return six kicks for 301 yards and one touchdown.

McElroy is A&M's all-time leading leader in kickoff returns for touchdowns with four and kickoff return average with 42.4 yards per return.



Senior linebacker Antonio Armstrong rushes toward the Longhorn quarterback during the Texas game. Armstrong was selected to the '94 All-American team.

Stew Milne/THE BATTALION

Other Southwest Conference players on the All-American team include: The University of Texas' Blake Brockermeier, a second team offensive line, Texas Tech University's Zach Thomas, a second team linebacker and Texas Christian University's Andre Davis, a third team running back.

A&M seniors to play in postseason

By Stewart Doreen
THE BATTALION

Even though the eighth-ranked Texas A&M football team will not make the journey to Dallas on New Year's Day, the holiday football season will have a touch of Aggie flair.

It was announced Wednesday that All-American linebacker Antonio Armstrong, defensive end Larry Jackson, tight end James McKeenan and offensive tackle Jeff Jones, four seniors from the 10-0-1 1994 A&M team, will participate in the Blue-Gray Football Classic Christmas day in Montgomery, Alabama.



McKeenan

Jackson, McKeenan and Jones will be among those who will play for the South team coached by Auburn's Terry Bowden.

Armstrong decided to forgo the trip, saying that playing in the game would not be in his best interest.

Auburn, another team that is feeling the effects of NCAA regulations will send six players to the game including All-American wide receiver Frank Sanders, second team All-American defensive tackle Mike Pelton and All Southeast Conference selections—defensive back Chris Shelling, and punter Terry Daniel.

Armstrong and Jackson will travel to Hawaii to play in the Hula Bowl in January. It is an opportunity that, Armstrong said, "I want to show I can drop back into coverage and do more than just blitz."

Senior running back Rodney Thomas will make his only postseason appearance at the Senior Bowl.

Browns hope to uplift season with win against Dallas

IRVING (AP) — Vinny Testaverde languished for years at Tampa Bay without any hope of getting into a playoff game.

That can change with a Cleveland Browns victory Saturday over the Dallas Cowboys at Texas Stadium.

If the Browns win, they would need only a Denver loss or tie to the Los Angeles Rams, a Buffalo loss or tie to Minnesota, or a Kansas City loss or tie with Miami to earn a wild card.

"It would be the first time in my career I would be out there on the field in the playoffs instead of sitting home watching," Testaverde said. "That would mean a lot to me."

The Cowboys (11-2), who have clinched the NFC East and a playoff spot, can assure themselves a first-round bye in the Dec. 31-Jan. 1 games with a victory over the Browns.

Dallas quarterback Troy Aikman, who has been nursing a sprained left

knee ligament the past two weeks while Jason Garrett and Rodney Peete won games, will start. Vinny Testaverde will start for the Browns.

Cleveland, 9-4, trails Pittsburgh by a game in the AFC Central. The Browns have to travel to Pittsburgh next week before finishing the season at home against Seattle.

The Browns are coming off a tough loss to the New York Giants. "We were disappointed and surprised that we allowed them to take the game away from us. Now we have even a bigger challenge," he said.

"We're playing them at their place in a short week," Cleveland coach Bill Belichick said. "It will be tough. But I think this team has really responded to adverse conditions. After we've lost games, we've bounced back."

Cleveland hasn't been in the playoffs since 1989.

"I would like to see what it's like in

Cleveland during the month of January," wide receiver Michael Jackson said.

The Browns hold a 16-10 advantage over the Cowboys.

The last time the teams met was in 1991, when the Cowboys spoiled Belichick's first NFL game as a head coach with a 26-14 victory. Cleveland last defeated Dallas in 1988, when the Browns won, 24-21.

Dallas running back Emmitt Smith took note of the Browns' tough defense, which leads the NFL in least points allowed.

"They really have a solid defense," Smith said. "It seems like we face one of them every week. That's the way it goes. We just need to do what we have to do to improve our situation in the playoffs."

The Cowboys are tied with the 49ers in overall record but San Francisco owns the tie-breaker for homefield advantage by virtue of a 21-14 win over

Dallas earlier in the season.

Cleveland linebacker Frank Stams said the game will test the Browns to the limit.

"When you want to be the best, you have to prove yourself against the best," Stams said.

"They're two-time defending Super Bowl champions," linebacker Michael Dean Perry noted, "and until some other team replaces them, they still have to be considered the best. They have a great offense, a great defense, and a great special teams unit. That all adds up to a great team."

Dallas wide receiver Michael Irvin predicted Cleveland will give a strong effort on Saturday.

"They feel they should have beaten the New York Giants at home last week, so we'll get their best shot," Irvin said.

The Cowboys are 10-point favorites for the 3 p.m. CST kickoff in Texas Stadium.

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