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Speed, strength keys to Brown's success

By Philip Leone
THE BATTALION

Standing at 6 feet, 2 inches in height and weighing in at 232 pounds, Texas A&M senior outside linebacker Reggie Brown can get respect from just about anybody he wants.

But that is just not the style of the All-American candidate and Butkus Award nominee.

"I'm really not too concerned with getting an All-American selection or winning the Butkus Award," said Brown. "Being recognized as one of the top linebackers in the nation is a big honor for me, but I try to keep focused on my responsibilities to the team."

"The team goals of going undefeated and getting a shot at playing in the Fiesta Bowl are also my primary personal goals."

Brown's decision to come to A&M was heavily influenced by the school's long-standing linebacking tradition of excellence.

Brown's teammates say he is on the verge of taking his place among the illustrious group of A&M All-American linebackers including Marcus Buckley and John Roper.

"Reggie has as much natural ability as anyone on this football team and as much talent as any linebacker A&M has ever had," said senior free safety Dennis Allen. "He has everyone's respect around here because he works extremely hard and plays with tremendous intensity."

In 1994, Brown racked up 67 tackles, recorded nine tackles behind the line of scrimmage, forced

two fumbles, and recovered two more on his way to being named to the second team, All-Southwest Conference defense.

Brown was not satisfied with his junior campaign, however, and got down to business in the weight room during the offseason.

He increased his bench press to 380 pounds, his squat to 430 pounds, and his power clean to 300 pounds. Brown's dedication did not stop there.

He and his roommate and fellow linebacker, Larry Walker II, stayed in College Station over the summer to work out and run together to prepare for the upcoming season.

"Larry and I really busted our tails this summer to get in shape before the start of two-a-days," Brown said. "I think both of us are in the best condition of our lives. Larry will take care of everything on the inside, and I'll handle all the action on the outside on my side of the field."

Brown will definitely see a great deal of action on the outside this fall. As the "drop" linebacker in the Aggies' defensive scheme, his quickness will be utilized in covering backs out of the backfield on pass routes and the occasional receiver in the flat between the line of scrimmage and the secondary.

"I think I can keep up with anybody in the country," Brown said with a grin.

When asked about covering his Heisman Trophy candidate teammate Leeland McElroy, Brown kept smiling but declined to comment on the matchup.

Besides his outside linebacking chores, Brown will also call the defensive signals this fall. However, he does not consider himself one of the leaders of the "Wrecking Crew."

"I guess maybe I'm one of the leaders on the defensive side of the ball mainly because I've been around a while," Brown said. "If I'm a leader, it would be by setting an example, not by words. One of the great things about this defense, about this whole team really, is that every player is a leader in their own way."

"Everybody works hard to take care of his business. That's one of the main reasons why this program has been so successful."

When prospects of playing in the NFL and earning big paychecks are raised, Brown thinks of his mother instead of the idea of playing in the professional ranks.

"(Signing an NFL contract) would give me a chance to go back and take care of my mom," Brown said. "She's been there for me my whole life and has given me encouragement the whole time I've been playing football, and I would like to make sure she's happy."

Brown's athletic ability and work habits make many observers believe that pro scouts will be hounding him after he completes his senior season.

Despite the praise, Brown downplays his potential to play in the National Football League. "If it happens, it happens. Coach Slocum has told me and



Reggie Brown pressures Texas quarterback Zebbie Lethridge.

keeps telling me that if I take care of my business on the field then everything will work out for me," Brown said. "I want to play in the NFL because that's something I've dreamed about since I was a kid. Every football player has that ambition."

Offense

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Last year's biggest question mark — the offensive line — is still a question mark this year — with several experienced contributors and a host of recruits who could have immediate impacts for A&M.

A&M returns All-Southwest Conference lineman Calvin Collins at right guard. Collins is in his third season as a starter and has entrenched himself as one of the best run blockers in the conference. "Everything starts up front with our offensive line," Pulliam said. "They're the biggest key for our success as an offense. If we have breakdowns with our offensive line, we won't be able to do the things we want to accomplish."

This year's receiving corps for the Aggies is the only real question mark for the offense. Senior wide receiver Chris Sanders, last year's big-play breakthrough, returns as a starter, but last year's two most experienced receivers, Brian Mitchell and Ryan Matthews, have graduated.

"I wish we were set at the receiver position but we're simply not," Slocum said. "We don't have a true proven receiver with a great deal of experience, but we have a number of guys with ability who we put on the field and they'll perform well."

To help ease the workload on the primary receivers, A&M received five top players last spring. Chief among them is Albert Conn, a junior college transfer from Trinity Valley Community College. Connell grabbed 41 catches last season as his team won the junior college national title.

Unfortunately for the Aggies, injuries have sidelined nearly all their receivers at times during summer practice. It may not be until late September that all of A&M's receivers are healthy.

At tight end, senior Hayward Clay finally steps out of the shadow of James McKeehan, who graduated in May. Clay missed two games last season due to a knee injury, but caught four passes for 57 yards in the season. In his career, Clay has averaged 13.3 yards per reception.

"Hayward Clay is going to be a big-time tight end," Ensminger said. "He runs great routes and he has good strength. We have depth at tight end, too. We have Matt Mahone and Daniel Campbell and Derrick Spiller. All three are doing real well, and you'll see all three get some action this season."

Defense

Continued from Page 4

describes Bennet as an energetic teacher.

"Coach Bennet is fiery and motivating," Allen said. "He likes to compete and is very intense on the field."

"I am a competitor," Bennet said. "I want to cover all the bases and I want to put our kids in a position to be successful. To do that, you have to have a sense of urgency about myself to get it done."

Bennet will have a lot of talent to work with in 1995, starting with the defensive line. Junior left end Brandon Mitchell will be an anchor up front. The Outland Trophy and Lombardi Award candidate earned consensus All-SWC honors last season with his 62 tackles and nine sacks.

With opposing offensive lines expected to focus on him this season, Mitchell hopes to create openings for his teammates.

"It could be tougher on me this year because some teams are double-teaming me more," Mitchell said. "But that may open things up for other players."

On the other side of the ball, sophomore Brad Crowley is projected as the right end. Crowley, a converted defensive end from junior college, will share time with junior college transfer Pat Williams.

"Williams is a good addition to our team," Slocum said. "He has played in a year-and-a-half, so from a conditioning standpoint, he's not in good shape. If he can stay healthy and keep working, he'll play a lot for us."

A&M's prospects at linebacker are just as impressive. Slocum said this year's group has the potential of being the best to come through A&M.

Larry Walker II, the top tackler from last season, will start at outside linebacker. His 69 tackles were second on the team. Sophomore Trent Driver will replace Graham at the other inside linebacker position.

At outside linebacker, senior Reggie Brown steps to the forefront after making 67 tackles in 1994. Junior Keith Mitchell has the potential of filling All-American Antonio Armstrong's shoes. Mitchell collected 22 tackles in a reserve role last season.

Opposing teams won't have an easy time penetrating the A&M secondary. Allen returns at free safety with big-game experience and a knack for sensing where the ball is going to be thrown.

"I am more a student of the game than a lot of people," Allen said. "When I'm out on the field and I get my reads, I'm able to react a little bit quicker because I've seen it so many times in the film room."

Junior Donovan Greer and All-American and Thorpe Award candidate Ray Mickens will start at the cornerback positions.

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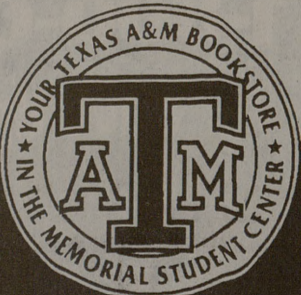
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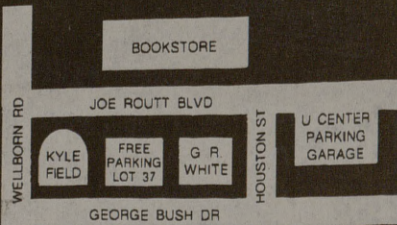
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