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Personal goals secondary for Allen

□ Deemed "too small" in high school, the senior safety is now a leader on the Aggie defense.

By Kristina Buffin
THE BATTALION

If there was a collegiate award for the football player who has steadily improved throughout his college career and exceeded expectations, A&M senior safety Dennis Allen could be preparing his acceptance speech.

"He is right on schedule," A&M Head Football Coach R.C. Slocum said. "He is a program guy, one who didn't dazzle us his first year, but has gotten better. We have been able to win with his leadership and stability that he provides the team."

When Allen was recruited out of Hurst's L.D. Bell High School, Slocum was worried about his small size and lack of speed. However, Allen has proven doubters wrong with his steady improvement over the last three years.

"I think trying to get bigger and strong has been one of my biggest improvements," Allen said. "I went from a 174-pound freshman to a 195-pound senior. I've put on weight for speed and quickness, and I've gotten used to the type of athletes that play at the college level."

Allen was redshirted his freshman year, but served as a backup to All-American safety Patrick Bates in his sophomore year. Allen attributes his improvement to the longstanding A&M tradition of being able to follow in the footsteps of players that go on to play in the NFL.

"It has helped a lot to come in with great people in front of you and to see what they have done," Allen said. "(Patrick) Bates and Chris Crooms were players that showed me what it took."

Although Allen had trouble adjusting to the increased athleticism among college teams, his fondest memory comes from a game during his sophomore year where he made a game deciding play against the University of Texas.

The Aggies were clinging to a 15-9 lead with less than five minutes to play in the ballgame. On a fourth-and-two play from the A&M three-yard line, Allen picked off a pass from Longhorn quarterback Shea Morenz to seal the Aggies' victory.

"The Texas interception in the fourth quarter was the turning point in my career," Allen said. "Making a play in that big of game brought it all out. I was only getting playing time late in games when the game was sealed, but this was a tight



Battalion File Photo

Texas A&M senior safety Dennis Allen attempts to break free from a Texas Tech player during last season's game at Kyle Field. Allen picked off a career-high four passes last season.

game and I was able to play it out."

In 1994, Allen took over the starting safety position following the Aggies' 36-14 victory over the University of Oklahoma, and used this opportunity to showcase his talent.

"Last season was just a continuation of his development," Slocum said. "Through his steady improvement and his personality, he only continues to get better."

As a result, Allen received second-team, All-Southwest Conference honors after making 65 tackles and four interceptions, including two interceptions in the Oklahoma game.

Allen's hard work and personality have earned him the respect that the coaching staff believes he deserves.

"The entire secondary looks up to Dennis and respects him," Slocum said. "He is a tough guy and a playmaker. He always ends up in the right spot, and has the respect of the team. He may not be as fast and talented as

some, but he is always in the right directions."

As a fifth-year senior, Allen feels that it is his time to give back to the A&M program by being a leader for the younger players.

"I've developed the reputation for being an intellectual leader," Allen said. "I like to lead by example and help coach the younger players along. It is something expected from the seniors as a way of giving back. I got a lot out of it, and I want to do what I can to help out and help younger players learn the system."

Allen said he has decided to put aside all personal goals and accomplishments in his last season and work towards the ultimate goal, helping the Aggies win a title.

"My main focus is winning the national championship; it is my only goal" Allen said. "Anything else is extra. Any personal awards will follow with the team award of winning the national championship."

Lack of line depth has a Houston solution

□ As a top national recruit, Brandon Houston is expected to see immediate playing time.

By Philip Leone
THE BATTALION

Not getting redshirted is a big honor for any freshman college football player. It is the coaching staff's way of saying, "Hey, this kid can play now." Although offensive lineman Brandon Houston is one of the few A&M freshmen to be so honored this season, the possibility exists that no one on the Aggie staff wanted to tell the 6-foot, 6-inch, 290-pounder anything different.

"I've been sort of a big guy all my life," Houston said. "My very first day of Pee-Wee football practice, they took one look at me and stuck me on the line with the rest of the kids who were going to have problems making the weight limit. That's where I've been ever since. It's not like I was built to play tailback."

A combination of size and quickness made

Houston one of the nation's bluest blue-chip prospects after his senior season at Katy Taylor High School.

College recruiters from around the nation drooled at the thought of grabbing Houston on signing day, but the Texas native decided to stay close to home.

"I went to Notre Dame, Colorado, Florida, and Michigan on recruiting visits," Houston said. "All those schools have great programs and facilities, but I found what I was looking for here at A&M. Coach Slocum and the rest of the coaching staff made me feel welcome and were just genuinely good people."

"Playing here also gives my parents and my brother a chance to come to our games at Kyle Field."

After spending his high school career terrorizing opposing defenders, Houston found the action to be strikingly different in his first few weeks as a college lineman.

"Two-a-days were a big learning experience for me," Houston said. "Everything — the intensity, the pace, the blocking schemes — is at such a higher level. I knew things would be dif-

ferent, but I was still surprised."

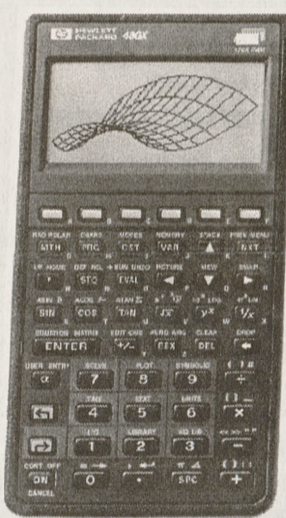
But Houston watched fellow linemen, including sophomore tackle Chris Ruhman and junior guard Calvin Collins, and credits them with helping him learn some of the finer points of playing at the college level.

Going into Saturday's contest with Louisiana State, Houston is penciled in as Ruhman's back-up at left tackle. A&M Head Football Coach R.C. Slocum said he expects Houston to have a solid impact this year for the offense.

"He's a big guy who has quick feet," Slocum said. "Last season we didn't have a whole lot of depth on the line, and he will be a part of this team."

Houston said although he is unsure how much he will play Saturday, he is feeling all of the typical pregame emotions.

"I'm excited and nervous about the LSU game," Houston said. "We're all ready to get the season going. I feel really fortunate to be playing for a team that has the ability to win the national championship, and it all starts with this game."



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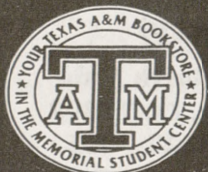


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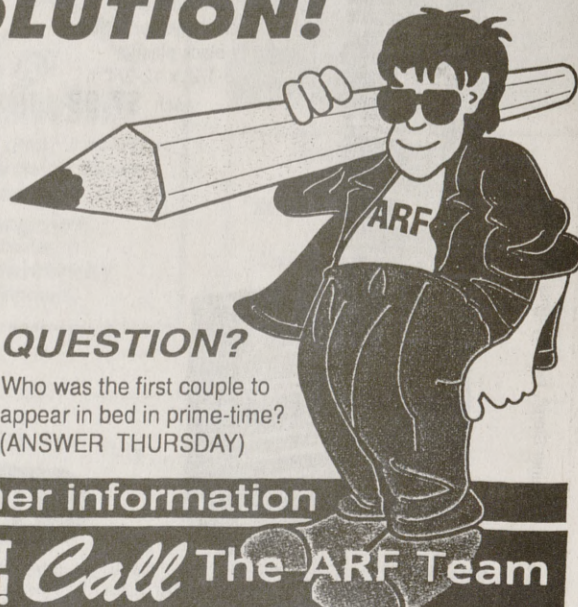
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