

Passing attack, defense add up to A&M win

□ The "Wrecking Crew" held UH to season lows in rushing and passing yardage.

By Nick Georgandis
THE BATTALION

26 + 4 = 30.
The equation on Saturday was simple: The Aggie Football Team used an opportunistic defense — led by big-play specialist Andre Williams (No.26) — plus a much-improved passing attack from Corey Pullig (No.4) to equal a victory — the 30th straight at Kyle Field for A&M.

Along the way, the Aggies reduced the Houston Cougars' record to 1-7 with a 31-7 victory in front of a crowd of 58,277.

But the afternoon had its problems for A&M, which overcame another slow start offensively, over 100 penalty yards and a major breakdown in the kicking department.

"We jockeyed around on offense quite a bit," A&M Head Football Coach R.C. Slocum said. "I'm disappointed in our field-goal kicking. We are missing out on opportunities to get some points."

The field-goal woes centered on sophomore Kyle Bryant, who has had an inconsistent season in 1995. Bryant missed a 45-yard attempt wide left on the Aggies' first possession and was replaced by Manoli Venetoulis as all scoring opportunities and by Lance Pilans on kickoffs.

"Kyle had a muscle problem, some sort of hip flexor, this week," Slocum said. "But, he just wasn't getting it done. We've got to get this worked out."

Fortunately for the Aggies, the rest of the special teams compensated for the shortcomings of the

kicking game.
Punter Sean Terry booted four kicks for an average of 40.3 yards, including a key punt in the third quarter. Rather than attempt a 56-yard field goal, A&M punted from the UH 39-yard line with Terry hitting the ball out of bounds at the Cougar 5-yard line.

On the next play, UH quarterback Chuck Clements scrambled frantically in the end zone while attempting to elude junior linebacker Keith Mitchell.

While Clements avoided the safety, he made a more costly error, lofting a soft pass that Williams intercepted for a touchdown — his first at A&M.

"I heard the quarterback say, 'Max' which means a pass," Mitchell said. "He rolled out, and I thought I would get blocked, but no one was there. Then, he threw the ball right to Andre."

The Aggies also received a big special-teams performance from punt returner Ray Mickens. With eight minutes still left in the game, Mickens put A&M in outstanding field position by returning a punt 61 yards to the Cougar 9-yard line.

Mickens said he could have scored on the return — the longest by an Aggie since 1993 — if he had not been so worn down already.

"There was the punt I dropped, and that made me mad," Mickens said. "Then I went to block for Typail (McMullen) on his interception, but then he fumbled so we were back on defense, and then they punted again. I was tired, man."

Four plays later, Venetoulis nailed a 24-yard field goal to end the day's scoring. Turnovers were a big key for the Aggies, as the defense captured five, while the offense did not surrender any for the second consecutive week.

Pullig completed 15-of-27 pass-

es for 172 yards and two touchdowns. His completions went to nine different receivers as the passing attack took up the slack for a lethargic running game.

Pullig credited his success to advice from Offensive Coordinator Steve Ensminger earlier in the season.

"At first, I didn't make a lot of good decisions this season," Pullig said. "But Ensminger told me I didn't have to make all the big plays. Last week we ran the ball pretty well; this week we just had a tough time."

Part of that tough time was due to the condition of junior tailback Leeland McElroy who was still recovering from an ankle injury. After collecting 51 yards in the first half, McElroy suffered a strained back in the second half and did not return to the game.

With an off week coming up, Slocum said McElroy should have plenty of time to heal for the Aggies' next game — against Rice on Nov. 9.

"This won't keep him from playing against Rice," Slocum said. "We had a tough time trying to run the ball today."

Stepping in to make some of the big plays for the A&M offense was seldom-used senior tight end Hayward Clay. Clay caught three passes for 38 yards including two nearly identical touchdowns in the first half.

Clay explained that a breakdown in the Cougars' secondary set up his two big plays on the day.

"They played a lot of man-to-man, and left me in one-one coverage," Clay said. "They gave my coverage to a linebacker, so I just gave him an inside fake and ran the post route."

Now ranked 17th in the nation, the Aggies' next home game is Nov. 18 against Middle Tennessee State.



Evan Zimmerman, THE BATTALION

Texas A&M senior Ray Mickens scans the field for defenders while returning a punt 61 yards to the University of Houston 9-yard line during the Aggies' 31-7 win Saturday at Kyle Field.

Marked man Williams turns tables 'Non-Special' teams making winning tough

□ In his first start, Andre Williams contributed two take-aways and a touchdown.

By Rob Clark
THE BATTALION

It was a big coming-out weekend for defensive backs in Texas.

A&M defensive back Andre Williams and his football idol, Dallas Cowboy Deion Sanders, both made big splashes in their first starts for their respective teams.

But Williams' performance outshone "Prime Time's," with two key plays to push the oft-sluggish Aggies past the Houston Cougars 31-7 Saturday at Kyle Field.

Starting in the place of the injured Donovan Greer, Williams not only played damage control by not getting burned by the speedy Cougar receivers, but he also took the game — and the ball — into his own hands.

With a fumble recovery and an interception return for a touchdown, Williams led an A&M defense that held UH to only 146 total yards.

In the third quarter, A&M Linebacker Keith Mitchell burst through the line and almost sacked UH quarterback Chuck Clements for a safety. In desperation, Clements threw in the direction of UH receiver Damion Johnson. Williams stepped in front to snag Clement's pass and took it five yards for a touchdown.

"I looked up, and I thought (Clements) was sacked," Williams said. "I kinda stopped and so did the receiver. I was like 'Oh my god,' when he threw the ball."

Williams said the A&M defense simply wore down the UH offense, and it was only a matter of time before Clements would have to depend solely on the passing game.

"We knew they were going have to start throwing the ball," Williams said. "I got them to that breaking point."

Even as a defensive back making his first start against a pass-oriented offense, Williams wanted Clements to test his skills.

"I kind of figured they'd come at me," he said. "I was hoping they would. I wanted the challenge ... I was baiting the quarterback. That whole time I was like hoping — please throw that ball."

Despite experiencing pregame nervousness, Williams said playing alongside All-American candidate Ray Mickens helped make his first start a game to remember.

"Ray helped out telling me a lot about their tendencies," he said. "He told me, 'I remember when I first started, I had butterflies. Just be ready, but play within yourself.'"

Mickens sounded like a proud papa after the game, after seeing Williams step

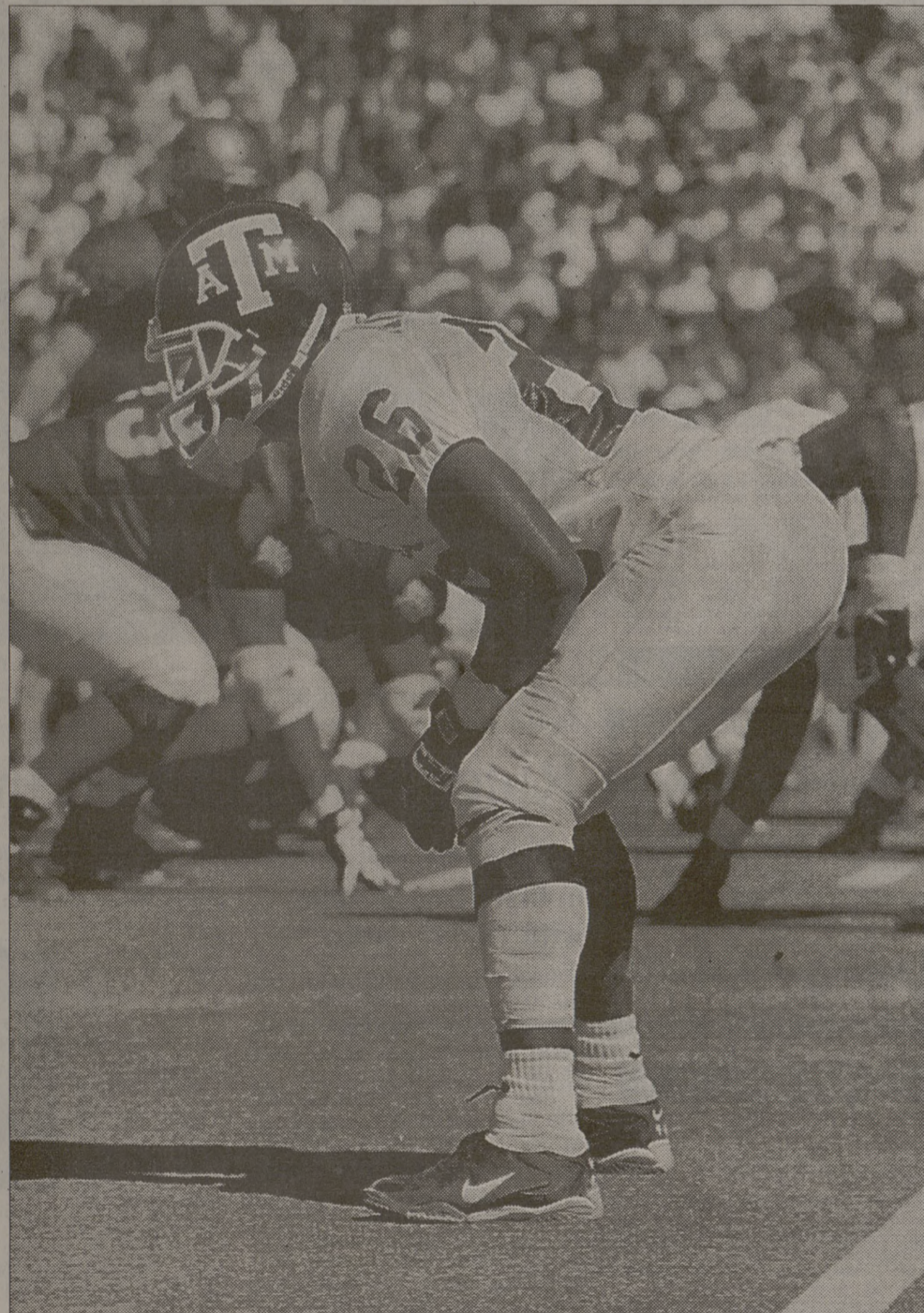
in and play well.
"I'm proud for him," Mickens said. "He knew they were going be throwing at him."
A&M Head Football Coach R.C. Slocum shared in Mickens' praise of Williams' first start.

"It's a real credit to him that we had not given up anything," Slocum said. "We lost Donovan and he stepped right

in. He made one of the biggest plays of the ball game."

Williams said playing well in a big-time game was what he craved by coming to A&M.

"It feels great," he said. "It's the kind of opportunity you come to A&M for. You don't go to play backup and special teams for four years."



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Junior comeback Andre Williams awaits the snap during last week's game against Baylor. Williams returned an interception for his first touchdown Saturday against the Houston Cougars.

KRISTINA BUFFIN
ASST. SPORTS EDITOR



The "Wrecking Crew" has not had any problems this season. The offense is just now getting on a roll. Everything seems to be falling into place, finally, for the Aggie football team.

Except for one part of the team that seems to have been overlooked this season: the special teams.

Last year, freshman sensation place kicker Kyle Bryant made his first seven field goals and set a freshman NCAA record with a 61-yard field goal. However this season, Bryant has been plagued by injuries and has made just 3-of-9 field goals and is 18-of-19 in point-after attempts.

In Saturday's game against the University of Houston, Bryant missed his first field goal attempt of 45 yards and was not to be seen again during the game.

Sophomore Manoli Venetoulis took over the place kicking duties and connected on 1 of 2 field goals. The one he made was a 24-yarder and he missed one from 38 yards out. Venetoulis also made 4-of-4 point after attempts.

"I'm disappointed in our field goal kickers," A&M Head Coach R.C. Slocum said. "We're missing opportunities to get some points."

However, all the blame should not be placed on Bryant. Other parts of the special teams have not been up to par so far this season. Junior Leeland McElroy has not been working his kickoff return magic, partially because of injury, and because other teams have learned how to cover him.

In his freshman season, McElroy had two returns for touchdowns against Rice and one against Texas. Last year, McElroy only had one return for a touchdown against Southern Mississippi.

This season McElroy is averaging 24 yards a return with no touchdowns, which is down from his average of 50.2 yards last season.

In terms of punt returns, Ray Mickens has been less than his normal outstanding self as well. Last season he averaged 14.3 yards per punt return but before Saturday's 61-yard jaunt, his average had dropped to 8.3 yards.

The only bright spot in the special-teams play has been senior punter Sean Terry. This season, Terry is averaging 43.4 yards per punt, has allowed only an average of 7.6 yards per punt return and his longest punt of 76 yards came against the University of Colorado.

In the Aggies' game against Houston this weekend, Terry's punt average was 40.3.

Special teams is a part of the football team that many people take for granted. Teams concentrate on putting points on the board with their offenses, creating stifling defenses but they seem to forget that special teams play is an intricate part of a football team. If the special teams play isn't exemplary, teams will not win close games.

After all, it is usually a last-minute field goal that decides close games, and if you can't rely on your place kicker to put the ball through the uprights, there is a problem.

The solution is not all that easy, and I don't have any particularly great ideas. Even R.C. Slocum is not quite sure where the answers may lie.

"We've got to get that worked out," Slocum said. "I don't know what the answers are. Either you make it or you don't."

At least the coaching staff realizes that there is a problem and it needs to be worked on. It is so disappointing to know that with the arsenal that the Aggies have on the special teams, they aren't living up to their full potential.

In the last four games of the season, the Aggies must turn it around because when the Aggies play Texas, in the last Southwest Conference game ever, every aspect of their game must be ready to go.