

SPORTS

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A&M Football '96 Back in Training

After enduring a stressful 1995 season, the Aggies are taking '96 one day at a time. Keith and Brandon Mitchell share All-American aspirations and a desire to win



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Freshman wide receiver **Shannon Crenshaw** pulls in a pass on Friday morning.

Following four busy days of full-squad workouts, several players and coaches on the Texas A&M Football Team have reached a consensus — the pressure is off, but the excitement is back.

Unlike last season, the Aggies do not have lofty predictions and expectations to live up to. But, they do have a lot to look forward to.

"Everyone is excited because we're coming into a new conference," senior cornerback Donovan Greer said. "This year has a relaxed atmosphere. For the most part, [practice] has been great."

A&M defensive coordinator Phil Bennett said he has been pleased

with his players' performance during summer two-a-days.

"I've been very pleased with the effort and intensity, and with the retention (of plays and formations) we've had," Bennett said. "We've

been able to get into our defensive package early. The players are excited about the season and the expectations are to be the best we can be."

For several returning Aggie players, two-a-day experience has had its advantages.

Aggie sophomore running back Surr Parker and sophomore inside linebacker Dat Nguyen said they are more confident this year as opposed to last season, when they were both newcomers.

"I've got a year under my belt now," Parker said. "I'm more confident now in my ability."

Defensive backs coach Larry Slade said the team is high-spirited because most of the players have had a year of experience.

The returners have not only gained confidence in themselves through that experience, but they have also gained confidence in their teammates.

"We (running backs) look real good compared to last year," Parker said. "Everyone is hungry and ready to play. No matter who you put in the game, the job is going to get done."

Greer said the defensive backs are striving to be one of the top secondaries in the nation.

"We will be one of the best secondaries whether we have young players or older players," Greer said.

Greer also said he is confident about his health after coming off major knee surgery in the spring and is excited to be playing football this season.

"Overall, it's been feeling great," Greer said. "It's a lot better than I anticipated. All I

have to do is continue strengthening it and wait for the soreness to leave."

"Who doesn't want to win a national championship? That is still our ultimate goal, but (this year) we're just taking it one game at a time."

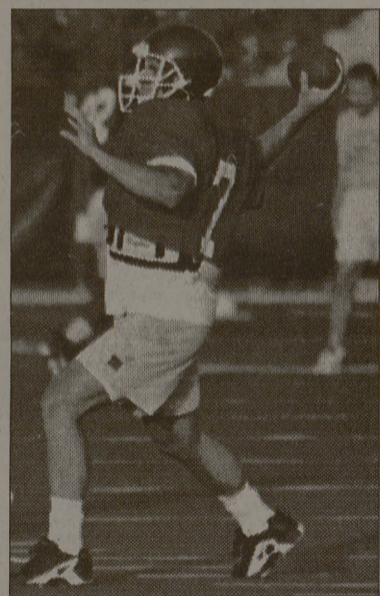
— DONOVAN GREER
A&M senior cornerback



The pressure is off this season for the Aggies. There are no distracting infatuations with Sun Devil Stadium or the media's constant questions about a national championship.

"Last year (during the pre-season) we were ranked third, and a lot of pressure was on us," Greer said. "Now we're just focusing on BYU. Who doesn't want to win a national championship? That is still our ultimate goal, but now we're just taking it one game at a time."

By Ross Hecox



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Junior quarterback **Brandon Stewart** inherits the job as the top signal caller for the 1996 Aggies.

By Colby Gaines
THE BATTALION

They come from vastly different backgrounds, but they share a few things in common — a winning desire, the will to be the best and the same last name.

But this season, Brandon and Keith Mitchell could share something even bigger — All-American status.

Brandon, a two-year starting defensive end for A&M and winner of the 1995 Walter Camp All-American Award, is projected to earn All-American honors again this season.

Defensive line coach Bill Johnson said Brandon is an experienced and spectacular player.

"He is one of the best at A&M," Johnson said. "He gained a starting position early on because he made big plays. Since then, he's been working very hard to get better."

Keith, a two-year starting outside linebacker and the Defensive Most Valuable Player of the 1995 Alamo Bowl, is expected to be the next A&M All-American at that position.

A&M outside linebacker coach Shawn Slocum said Keith is already one of the greatest linebackers ever to play for the Aggies.

"He'll rank with the best linebackers we've ever had, including Aaron Wallace, John Roper and (Marcus) Buckley," Slocum said. "He's a productive guy, a playmaker and a force for offenses to deal with."

Last season, the Aggies were ranked No. 3 in the pre-season AP Poll and there was talk of a national championship. However, it is a much different story this fall, as A&M begins the year with modest rankings and a new conference.

Brandon said team unity is the key to avoiding the early-season letdowns that spoiled A&M's championship hopes last year.

"We have to play together — as a team," Brandon said. "Last year, there was a lot of pressure of trying to live up to expectations. Every week, we would be wondering what everyone was thinking. But this



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Freshman running back **Dante Hall** works on blocking drills with running backs coach **Ken Rucker** on Saturday morning.

year, we just have to come out and prove ourselves."

Brandon said the Aggies' lack of challenging competition in the past allowed for lackluster performance;

however, he said there will be no room for error playing in the new conference.

"Last year, we played down to opponents like TCU and SMU," Brandon said. "This year, we'll be playing top-ranked teams. So we'll have to play well every game."

With the return of fellow linemen Edward Jasper, Brad Crowley and Pat Williams, Mitchell said the Aggie defensive front should be tough.

"We should be really good,"

Brandon said. "Last year, we didn't take care of the little things like not jumping offsides. But in practice, the coaches have been stressing working on those."

"Last year, there was a lot of pressure of trying to live up to expectations. But this year, we just have to come out and prove ourselves."

— BRANDON MITCHELL
senior defensive end



Johnson said if his players stay healthy and play smart football, success is imminent.

"They can be as good as they want to be," Johnson said. "When you have a group of NFL contenders who've played together for a couple of years, the results

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