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THE BATTALION SPORTS

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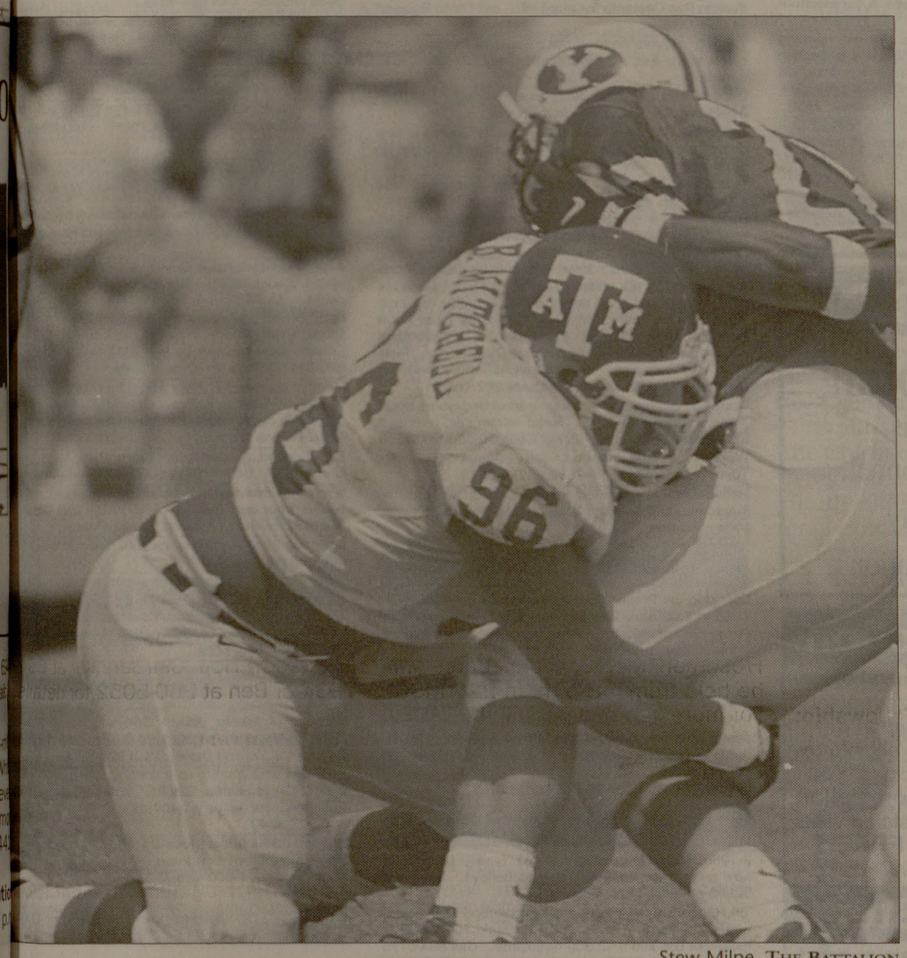
Mitchell provides leadership to Wrecking Crew

By ROSS HECOX
THE BATTALION

Three years ago, a quiet young farm boy with loads of potential packed his bags, left his small hometown of Belleville, La., and came to Aggieland on a scholarship to play football. At the time, the defensive line squad of Coach Teichelman, Eric England and All-American Sam Adams was in its final year and recruited to fill the large shoes they had soon leave. Although the Aggie coaches brought Mitchell in to play on the defensive line, he had never played the position. "In high school I played running back and linebacker," Mitchell said. "The first year at A&M was the first time I ever put a

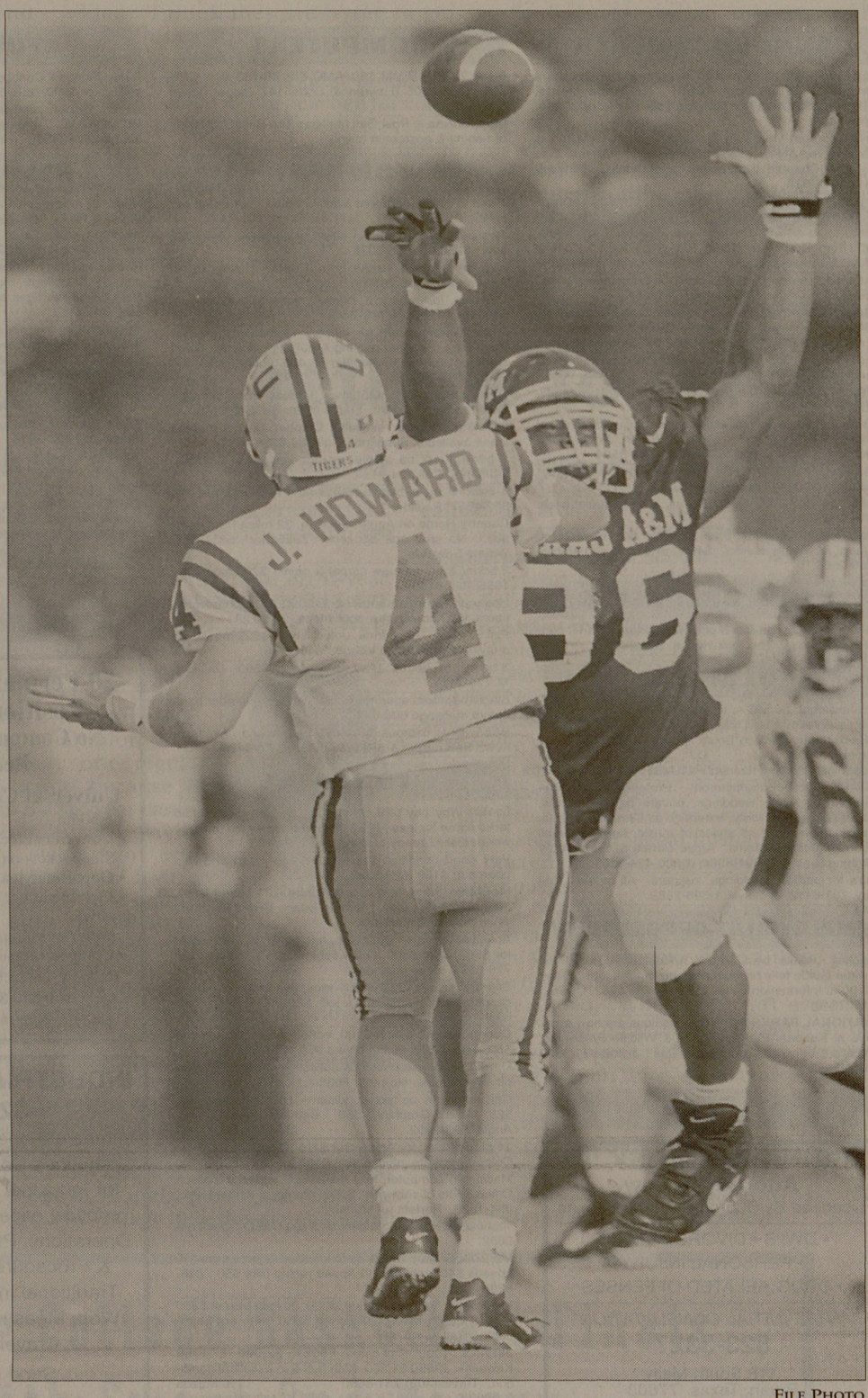
hand down on the line." Now in 1996, Mitchell has returned for his final season as a member of the Wrecking Crew, and it seems that he has quite substantially filled those shoes. After being named to the 1995 All-American first team, he is a preseason All-American, Lombardi Award Candidate and Outland Trophy Award Candidate. "He is a guy that had a lot of ability, and he's done a great job of developing into one of the premier players in the country," Defensive Line Coach Bill Johnson said. "I'm proud of him. He tries to be a complete player mentally and physically." But for all of his success, Mitchell does not credit talent or his hard work ethic. He credits the close-knit friendship he has with the other defensive linemen. "(As a freshman) sometimes I would

get depressed because I thought I wouldn't play," Mitchell said. "But they would come over and help me smile. They also keep on pushing me (to play better)." Throughout Mitchell's career, the defensive linemen have become very close friends, leaving practice together and constantly motivating each other to work hard. None of them have ever missed a practice at A&M. Mitchell could easily have made himself eligible for the NFL draft after last season, but he said his dedication to his friends made him stay. "I didn't want to leave them," Mitchell said. "Me and my friends came here together, and we're going to leave here together. The pros are all big business. I'm going to enjoy college life."



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Senior defensive end Brandon Mitchell stops BYU running back Mark [Name] in his tracks.



FILE PHOTO

Defensive end Brandon Mitchell pressure LSU quarterback Jamie Howard in last season's game at Kyle Field.

See MITCHELL, Page 11

Parker is ready to assume the throne left vacant by McElroy

By COLBY GAINES
THE BATTALION



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Sophomore running back Sirm Parker heads away from the line-up during the A&M-BYU game.

Imagine being a sophomore starting tailback at the third largest university in the nation and being regularly exposed to more than 70,000 pigskin fiends. For 18-year-old Sirm Parker, this situation is a bright reality. Parker began his football career many years ago playing Pop Warner football in Los Angeles, Ca. But he said he had to sneak out to attend practice. "When I was younger, my grandma didn't want me to play because she thought I would get hurt," Parker said. "But my cousins got me interested in it, and eventually, they took me downtown and signed me up. So, every day after that, I was sneaking off to go to practice." At Locke High School in Los Angeles, Parker played three offensive and three defensive positions. But he was most impressive at the running back position. During his senior season, Parker rushed for more than 1,000 yards while racking up nearly 20 touchdowns en route to becoming the fifth-ranked back in the nation. When signing day came around in 1995, Parker said A&M, with its lengthy tradition of great running backs, seemed a natural choice. "The running back situation here interested me," Parker said. "There's a lot of good running backs that have come through here. I knew that if I came, I would be able to play." In his freshman season, Parker was subjected to national championship hype, tremendous pressure and the transition from high school to college football. In most cases, he said he handled it in stride. "Being a high school All-American, many people expect so much of you," Parker said. "Coming here, I was recruited to play running back. So, I knew there would be pressure. But it isn't too much pressure. I just know that I have to prove myself. "I've always been an independent person. When I got here, I just looked around and saw how others did things. I just patterned myself to adjust to the new surroundings." A&M Running Back Coach Ken Rucker said Parker's positive attitude has helped shape his potential. "(Sirm) is one of the best running backs I've seen and coached," Rucker said. "He's still very young and still learning. The transition from high school to college football has to do with the physical aspect and speed. It's another level, and he's taken it very well. With his positive mindset, his potential won't go to waste." Parker said his freshman highlight came in December's Alamo Bowl victory when his parents got to see him on television. He said the 140 yards he and the other two running backs, D'Andre Hardeman and Eric Bernard, combined signaled a premonition of things to come. "Before the Alamo Bowl, we worked harder than any other part of the year, and it paid off," Parker said. "We also played differently. Last year, we ran an I-back formation. The fullback rarely got the ball, so the defenses keyed on Leeland (McElroy). "This year, we have two tailbacks, and that will keep defenses on their toes. They won't know what we're going to do because we can run out of the split-back or I-back formations. It's going to be hard to stop us." Although the 1995 season ended on a high note, Parker said this year's team has a lot to prove. "This year, we plan to put a lot of points up with the new offense and the



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

A&M running back Sirm Parker makes his way through Cougar traffic in the Pigskin Classic.

caliber of players on this team," Parker said. At any rate, Parker said he's excited about the tough competition the Big 12 has to offer. "It's an honor to be part of the number one conference in the nation right now," Parker said. "We just have to play up to the part, show that we deserve to be there and show that we're one of the better teams in that conference." Parker added that if he had it his way, A&M's Big 12 beginning would be one for the record books. "We would win the Big 12 Conference Championship in St. Louis," Parker said. "Finally, we'd top that off by winning the national championship, and I would get my first ring."