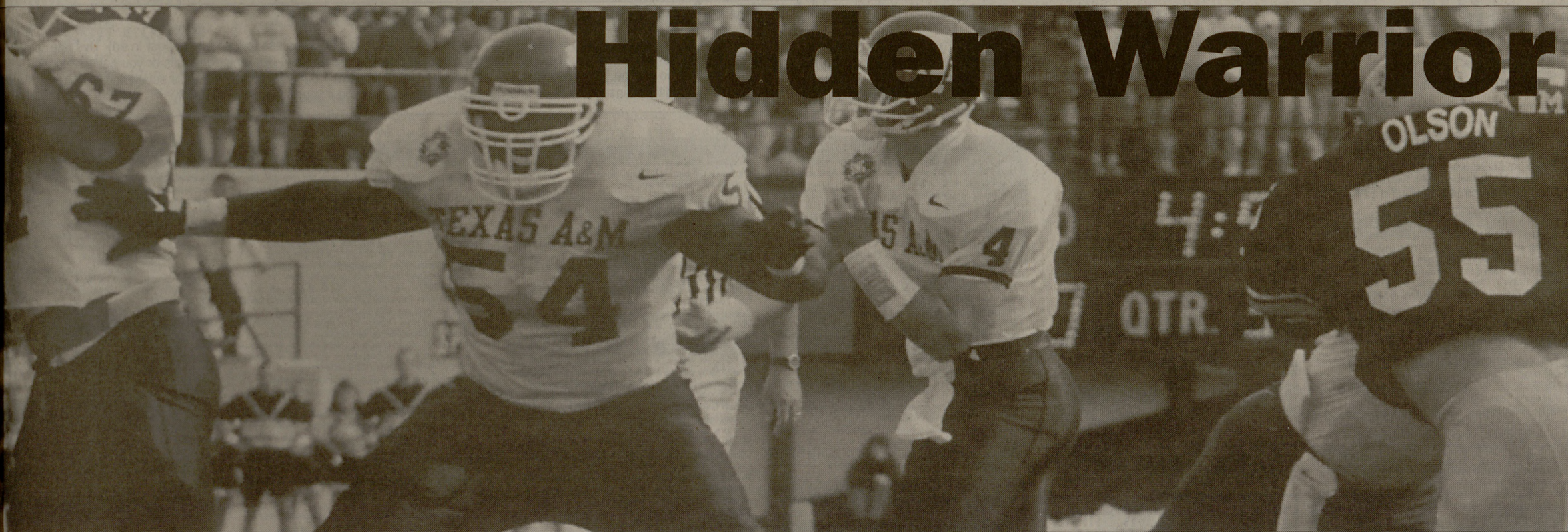


Hidden Warrior



FILE PHOTO

Calvin Collins anchors talented Aggie line

BY TOM DAY
THE BATTALION

There is nothing glamorous about his job. Aggie football center Calvin Collins labors in obscurity at the heart of the trenches around 60 days a game, punishing opposing defensive linemen, while at the same time absorbing their best hits.

And what does he get for clearing a path for an Aggie tailback or providing pass protection for quarterback Brannon Stewart? Nothing but blood, sweat and a lack of recognition.

Not exactly the most rewarding way to spend a Saturday afternoon. But 6-foot-3-inch, 298-pound Collins still finds a way to enjoy himself on the gridiron. All he has to do is look up into the stands and feel the roar of the crowd to get a charge.

"It's real fun and exciting with the fans behind you and TV viewers, and that type of thing really pumps me up," Collins said. If that fails, he can just hold a casual discussion with his opponents.

"I stay loose out there," Collins said. "Sometimes, I carry on conversations with defensive linemen, depending on who they are. We'll be out there talking, saying, 'What's up, and what you going to do this year?' I think that loosens you up and eases some of the tension and helps you play hard."

So when does the free-wheeling Collins have a chance to enter the limelight, or at least get his picture in the paper?

"I like pulling on screens and stuff like that," Collins said. "Because for that one moment, you might think someone is looking at you. That one moment, someone might be paying attention to you, if you make a key block to spring the tailback, that's the one time you may have a second of fame."

Sophomore tailback Surr Parker is taking Collins' words to the bank this year. Parker said he has complete faith in Collins' ability to create openings for him on the front line.

"I was joking with Calvin the other day," Parker said. "When he pulls, I won't have much to worry about. I'll just jump in his hip pocket."

All kidding aside, Collins has all the tools necessary to lead the Aggie offensive line in 1996, and to

rake in more accolades in the process. The three-time All-Southwest Conference pick is expected to contend for All-American honors again this year.

The senior earned All-American honorable mention honors his sophomore year and was considered the top blocker on a line that allowed just nine quarterback sacks in 11 games last season.

A&M Offensive Line Coach Mike Sherman said Collins has all the attributes of an All-American.

"He has tremendous God-given strength, but he has also developed it here in our strength program under Coach [Mike] Clark," Sherman said. "He is extremely intelligent in the classroom and on the playing field, and that helps. He's at a point in his life right now where he really likes to play and his enthusiasm is really appreciated."

One of Collins' most useful traits is his versatility. The senior has played musical chairs on the line throughout his four years at A&M, rotating between the center and guard positions when necessary.

Projected to play guard in 1996, Collins was asked to move back to his more natural position at center, when starter Koby Hackradt suffered a knee injury during two-day workouts.

A&M Head Coach R.C. Slocum said the team was well prepared to handle the situation.

"We had actually been working him [at center] some before Koby got injured," Slocum said. "We moved him over and was looking at that combination of Semisi (Heimuli) playing guard and Calvin at center and he looks good there. He's done it before, including some last year."

Collins has taken the move in stride. The senior opened huge holes for the Aggie tailbacks during the team's season opener against Brigham Young University Aug. 24. The A&M offense racked up 489 total yards, including 257 on the ground.

Even though Collins played center in high school and has more experience at that position than at guard, Sherman said the lineman is always willing to make a sacrifice.

"It's more of a natural position for him," Sherman

said. "Hopefully, if he has the type of season that we anticipate, he'll continue to flourish. Calvin is a very unselfish player, and I think he knows that position is best for him. But I know he'd play guard, center or tackle if he had to."

Collins' biggest desire during the 1996 season is to assume more of a leadership role on the line. The senior said there are more ways than one to approaching his goal.

"Hopefully, I'll be viewed as a leader," Collins said. "I want to be able to go out there and set the tone and attitude for the offense."

"Sometimes you have to (be vocal), other times it's just by going out there and playing hard. That's the best example and best leadership you can give."

Sherman said Collins' leadership will help Stewart and the inexperienced right side of the offensive line.

"Our expectations of him are very high as a leader on our offense," Sherman said. "We have a first-year quarterback and we have some first-year players beside him on the right side. [Calvin] is going to hopefully bring the experience of the left side and his own experience and tie it in to the right side."

Collins said it could be easier to anchor the line at the center position.

"Everyone is relying on you to make the calls," Collins said. "Your call dictates what calls everyone else is going to make. They're waiting on that call, and I think that helps the leadership role."

Collins said he is only concentrating on this season, but Sherman said the center could make it to the NFL if he improves in one area — consistency.

"In his present position, he has to have a good year," Sherman said. "I think consistency is the number one thing. Calvin went out with a passion and played the game of his life against Notre Dame (in the 1994 Cotton Bowl) as a red-shirt freshman. He played against first-round draft picks and really dominated. But there are other games when he hasn't had that consistency, and that is what he needs to have to be able to make it to the next level."

"When he pulls, I won't have much to worry about. I'll just jump in his hip pocket."

Surr Parker
A&M sophomore tailback



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