

# What's Wrong?

## The Aggies dropped to 0-2 after a stunning 29-22 upset loss to USL

BY MATT MITCHELL  
THE BATTALION

LAFAYETTE, La. — The Texas A&M Football Team came looking for redemption, but all it found was more heartache. In what was perhaps one of their ugliest performances, the Aggies committed eight turnovers, including four interceptions, as the Southwestern Louisiana Ragin' Cajuns handed them their second straight defeat and one of the most stunning in A&M history, 29-22.

The Aggies' 0-2 start is their worst since 1988 when they began 0-3 in former coach Jackie Sherrill's last season at the Aggie helm. USL cornerback Britt Jackson's interception of a Brannon Stewart pass, and subsequent 30-yard stroll to a touchdown, put the Cajuns up for good with 6:30 remaining.

Despite rushing for 218 yards and rolling up 399 yards of total offense as compared to 248 for USL, the Aggies were able to muster just 22 points and largely beat themselves with untimely mistakes, penalties and turnovers.

A&M lost four fumbles, including three inside the USL 25-yard line that killed potential scoring drives. The Aggies' luck was no different through the air either, as junior quarterback Brannon Stewart threw four interceptions, two of which were returned for touchdowns.

"It seemed like every time we got a little momentum, we had a turnover," Stewart said. A&M Head Coach R.C. Slocum put the game into perspective.

"It's a very disappointing loss," Slocum said. "You can't win football games when you turn the ball over. With as many turnovers as we had tonight, I doubt there's any college team around we could beat."

Starting with the first play from scrimmage, it became apparent that turnovers would be a key theme of the contest. On first down from his own 27-yard line, USL quarterback Jake Delhomme sent a pass toward the right sideline which A&M senior cornerback Donovan Greer stepped in front of and returned 27 yards to the 12. From there, it took the Aggies just four plays to punch it in, scoring on a one-yard touchdown run by tailback D'Andre Hardeman with just under two

minutes gone in the game.

After forcing the Cajuns to punt on their next series, the Aggies looked ready to drive for another touchdown. But USL cornerback Damon Mason intercepted an errant pass from a heavily pressured Stewart in the flat and returned it 42 yards for a tying touchdown.

However, the Aggies came back on their ensuing possession by marching to the USL 27-yard line. But when sophomore tailback Eric Bernard fumbled at the five-yard line on what seemed to be a sure touchdown run, the Cajuns recovered in the end zone for a touchdown.

Proving more adept at scoring than its offense, the opportunistic USL defense forced A&M tailback Sirt Parker to fumble on the Aggies' next possession deep in their own territory and returned it for the score, giving the Cajuns a 14-7 lead.

The second quarter featured the longest sustained scoring drive for USL in the game. Combining accurate passes with well-executed running plays, the Cajuns stormed 92 yards down the field in 17 plays to take a 21-7 lead with 9:58 left in the half.

A&M was able to answer with time running out in the half, driving down field 58 yards and hitting paydirt as Hardeman scampered through a big hole toward the end zone. USL safety Damon Mason forced Hardeman to fumble at the two, but the sophomore recovered in the end zone for the score. A&M kicker Kyle Bryant missed the extra point, however, leaving the Aggies down 21-13.

With 2:40 left in the quarter, the stage was set for a bizarre finish to the half. USL moved downfield and gained a first down at the A&M 18-yard line when receiver Brandon Stokley caught a Delhomme pass for 14 yards with a few seconds remaining. Stokley appeared to run out of bounds, but the clock kept running and the Cajuns could not get another play off

before time ran out.

Coming out of the locker room at halftime, the Aggies looked fired up. After receiving the kickoff, A&M marched 65 yards in five plays for a touchdown to pull within two. The highlight of the drive was a 46-yard Stewart option keeper that put the Aggies in the end zone.

Displaying athleticism reminiscent of former Aggie quarterback Bucky Richardson, Stewart darted through the Cajun defense, avoiding would-be tacklers and all but carried one USL defender into the end zone with him for the score.

With the Wrecking Crew shutting down the USL offense, the Aggies took what was to be their only lead on a booming 48-yard Bryant field goal with 7:58 left in the third quarter.

The score would remain the same until Jackson's interception and return for the touchdown put the Cajuns up by seven.

A final desperation A&M drive ended at the Cajun 26 as Mason turned them away again by intercepting Stewart, the Aggie quarterback's fourth pick of the game. The Cajuns then ran out the final 31 seconds and the Aggies were left to shake their heads at another bewildering defeat.

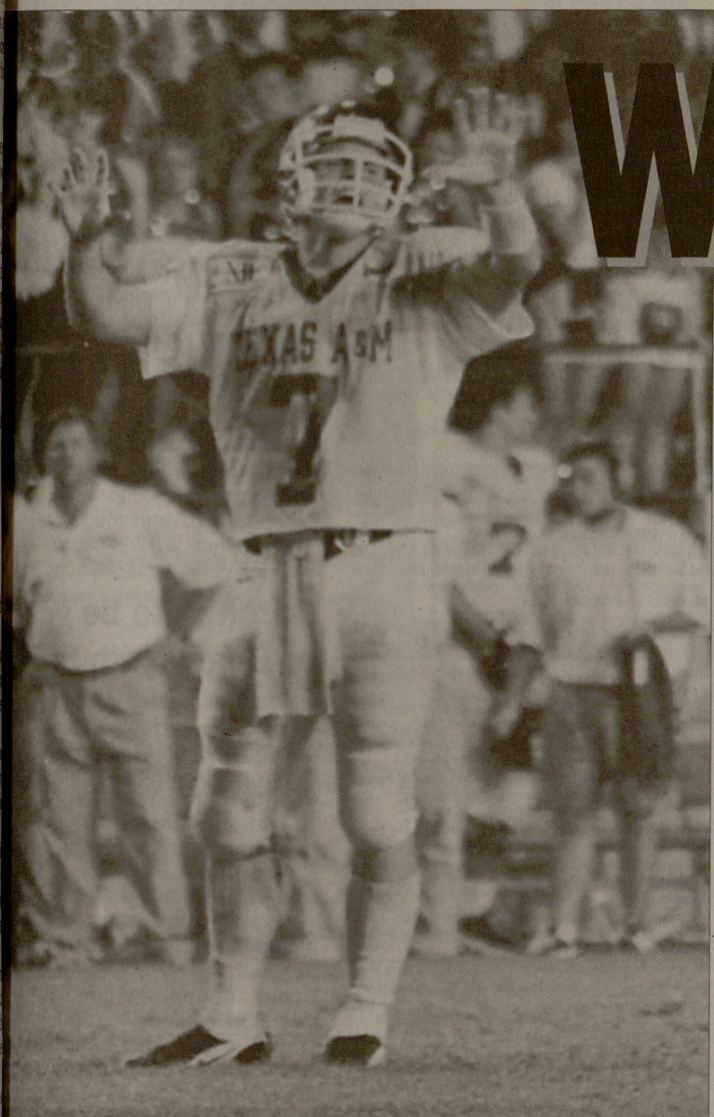
"We were in our one minute-offense and just trying to make things happen," Stewart said of his final pass. "I rolled out and saw a guy [open]. I'm not sure how it was intercepted, but I heard it may have been tipped."

One of the few bright spots of the evening for the Aggies was the resurgence of the Wrecking Crew. The defense limited the Cajuns offense to just 120 yards rushing on 38 carries, a 3.1 yard average. In addition, the Wrecking crew limited USL quarterback Jake Delhomme to 128 yards passing and one touchdown.

"I thought our defense played better today," Slocum said. "Our secondary was better. I was pleased overall (with the defense)."

**"With as many turnovers as we had tonight, I doubt there's any college team around we could beat."**

R.C. Slocum  
A&M Head Football Coach



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

### Eight turnovers contribute to complete Aggie meltdown

LAFAYETTE, La. — Turnovers! Turnovers! Turnovers! The Texas A&M Head Coach R.C. Slocum has never seen the movie *The Program*, chances are you might see a half dozen football players around campus with a skin in their hands today.

What seemed to be a clinic on how to give the ball away, the Texas A&M Football Team turned the ball over eight times during its 29-22 loss to Southwestern Louisiana Saturday.

Slocum may want to invoke a similar policy to the one used in *The Program*, requiring players to give the ball away at all times, or others attempt to strip it. With seven giveaways already under their belt and still having a chance to tie the game with less than a minute to play, the Aggies' clutch effort was halted when quarterback Brannon Stewart threw his fourth interception of the game.

Stewart said although the USL offense made some great breaks on some of his passes, he was to blame for several of A&M's charitable donations to the Ragin' Cajuns' cause.

"A couple of those were bad decisions," Stewart said. "Every time we got a little momentum, we had a turnover."

A&M's east-west passing game proved ineffective as the Cajun's defense intercepted two passes across the field and returned them for touchdowns.

With less than seven minutes remaining in the contest and the Aggies up 22-21, Stewart attempted a pattern pass to senior wide receiver Albert Connell that was broken and almost intercepted by USL cornerback Britt Jackson.

Two plays later, the Aggies attempted the same play and this time Jackson made them pay, picking off the pass and scampering 30 yards for the winning touchdown.

The Aggies were not any more lucky on the ground, fumbling the ball seven times and losing the ball on four of those occasions. With the score tied at seven in the first quarter, A&M drove 62 yards to the USL eight yard line before sophomore tailback Eric Bernard fumbled to give the ball back to the Cajuns.

"We just had some bad luck holding on to the ball," Bernard said. "We can correct it. We just have to work on the strip drills and tell the defense to try to take it from us."

Later in the quarter, USL safety Charles Johnson picked up a Sirt Parker fumble and dashed 17 yards for a score, giving the Cajuns a 14-7 lead.

On several occasions, the Aggies were lucky to recover several of their own miscues and often had to wait for piles to clear to see if they still had the ball.

"We just need to protect the football and [keep doing] what we're doing to have a chance to win the football game," Slocum said.

— BY BRENT MONTGOMERY  
Special to THE BATTALION

### USL Gifts

#### 1st Quarter

Stewart pass intercepted at A&M 42, returned for TD — 8:58

Bernard fumbles at USL 8 — 6:44

Parker fumbles at A&M 17, picked up and returned for TD — 4:43

Stewart pass intercepted at A&M 22 — 4:34

#### 2nd Quarter

Hawkins fumbles at USL 9 — 5:42

#### 4th Quarter

Hardeman fumbles at USL 25

Stewart pass intercepted at A&M 30, returned for TD — 6:30

Stewart pass intercepted at USL 14 — 0:31



Dave House, THE BATTALION

After the Ragin' Cajuns defeated the Aggies 29-22, USL fans rushed the field, tore down the goalpost and carried it out of the stadium.

## Aggies have many questions to answer in wake of USL debacle

There's not much to say. This was a game a lot of people originally thought had no business being on the Aggies' schedule.

Beating up on a hapless Southwestern Louisiana squad wasn't going to make A&M look any more glamorous to the national pollsters.

But following their season-opening loss at BYU, this game marked a chance for the Aggies to get back on track and erase the doubts surrounding them following their worst defensive performance ever three weeks earlier in Provo. Well, they won't have to worry about voters or

### Sports Editor



Tom Day  
Senior journalism major

In fact, when they open Big 12 play in a couple of weeks, Saturday's game might seem like a pleasant memory if A&M doesn't turn things around in a hurry.

The Aggies, 19-point favorites entering the USL contest, did everything in their power to give the game away. And the Cajuns wasted no time tearing the wrapping paper off of sev-

eral A&M gifts, using three of A&M's eight turnovers to score instant touchdowns — two on interception returns following a pair of errant Brannon Stewart passes, and one following a Sirt Parker fumble.

The Aggies' biggest concern coming into the game was its inexperienced secondary and reeling defense. Now, the entire team seems to be a mystery.

After an impressive debut at BYU, Stewart showed he is quite human Saturday, throwing four interceptions, fumbling two snaps and connecting on less than 50 percent of his passes.

But what was even more alarming was the offensive unit's four fumbles and inability to move the ball and get the job done when it had to against one of the least-regarded teams on A&M's schedule.

For three long weeks, the Aggies were licking their chops in anticipation of a coming out party at USL's expense.

But in its excitement, it seems the team has forgotten simple fundamentals of the game — like tucking the ball away to avoid fumbles, wrapping up on tackles, and making sound decisions under the gun.

The Aggies would have had trouble beating anyone Saturday, which leaves the burning question — what happens when Colorado comes calling at Kyle Field in two weeks fresh off their upset defeat at home to Michigan?

If there were any doubts in the Aggies' minds after the BYU game, they have to be wondering now when they're even going to win a game. The schedule doesn't get any easier.

But in the Aggies' defense, they probably just took USL a little too lightly and the Cajuns capitalized on that. That is not an excuse, but most likely the reason for A&M's defeat at the hands of a team that is far inferior

on paper.

Other questions will be flying this week. Did the Aggies have any business losing to a team like USL, or did they just play down to their level? Were the Aggies overranked?

But the more pressing questions fans might be asking could be a little more pointed.

Are the Aggies overhyped from a talent standpoint or does its recent shortcomings on the gridiron have something to do with coaching, or lack thereof?

No one, not even the Aggies, may be able to answer these questions.

But as they learned against USL, one thing does remain clear — their opponents aren't going to lie down while A&M tries to figure out how to solve its problems — no matter what their ranking is.

There's just not much to say.