

Winless Aggies not in worst of shape

It is not lost. Sure, I know most Aggies are all throwing away Kleenexes while their bare spots left over three-and-a-half hours of hair-pulling Saturday night — but Aggies aren't as bad as you seem.

Don't laugh now, I'm serious. As hard as it is to even look at the box score from A&M's 29-22 bellyflop in the big bowl game, it's a gumball known as Cajun Stadium, that's where the silver lining from this particular dark cloud can be found.

After scanning past the final statistics of penalties and turnovers, one finds the defensive statistics, which are considerably more tolerable, an encouraging.

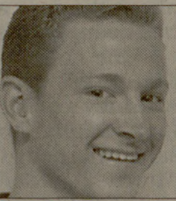
The Wrecking Crew returned to its usual domicile against the University of Southwestern Louisiana after reflecting three weeks on the field-class carving it major league against Brigham Young University.

Apparently, the back-to-the-back approach during the second round of Aggie two-a-mattes woke both the Aggies' lumbering pass rush and overnight dormant secondary. The Aggie defense limited the Cajuns' offense to 248 total yards, including only 128 passing yards by highly touted quarterback Jake Delhomme.

The Cajun signal caller spent more time scrambling than he did in the pocket. The defensive line applied constant pressure, forcing an interception on the first play from scrimmage which Donovan Turner returned to the Cajun 12-yard line to set up A&M's first score. Delhomme was also sacked three times for minus 17 yards.

The Wrecking Crew surrendered just 120

Sportswriter



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rushing yards to USL for an average of 3.1 yards per carry, including only 60 yards by starting running back Kenyon Cotton. In addition to stuffing the run, the defensive line repeatedly penetrated the Cajuns' backfield to stop plays while they were still in their infancy.

The Aggies' speed and quickness off the line had a great deal to do with their 16 tackles for losses or no gain, for a total of minus 37 yards. Controlling the line of scrimmage allowed the Aggies to force the Cajuns to change their offensive scheme a bit with more running plays being strung out to the sideline. This is where the quick Aggie defenders, led by Dat Nguyen, Warrick

nerback Shun Horn proved themselves by breaking up several passes. Andre Williams also saw significant playing time and made some good plays, which says a great deal about the man's character after the BYU debacle.

A&M Defensive Backs Coach Larry Slade should be commended for reinforcing the fundamentals and improving the communication among his defensive backs.

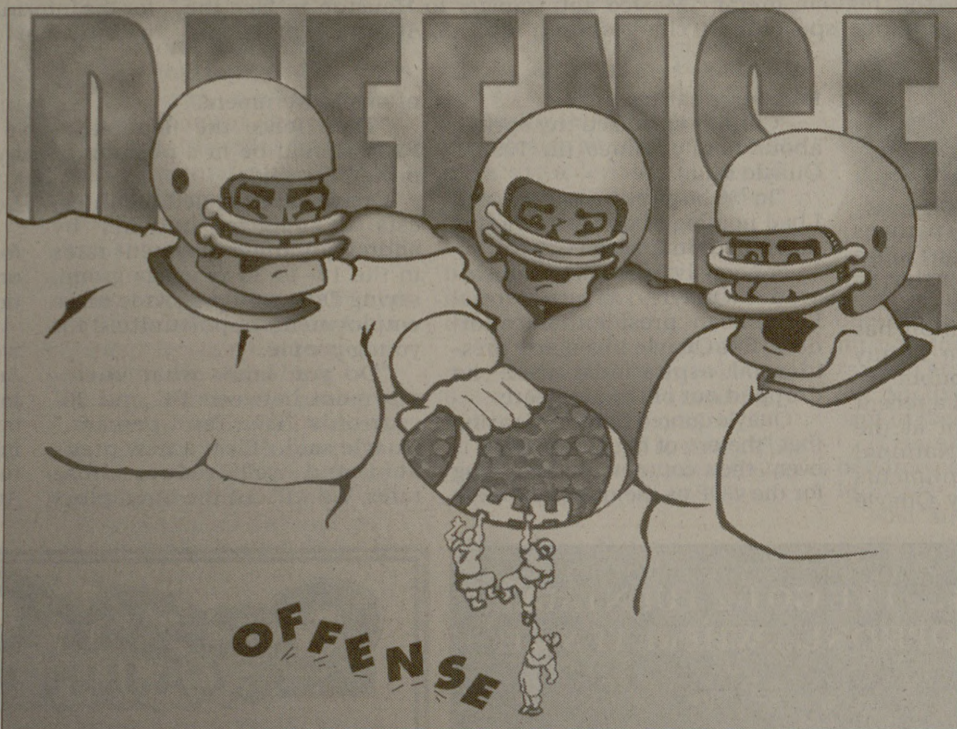
If that wasn't enough good news, the special teams showed more promise than any other time this season. Coverage teams were impressive, if not spectacular. By preventing long returns on kickoffs and swarming to the ball, the Aggies often left the Cajuns a long way from the A&M end zone.

The Aggie kickoff and punt return teams provided several exciting moments, and it is only a matter of time before Donte Hawkins picks up right where Lectric Leeland left off.

Finally, Kip Amedeo, the Aggies' 12th Man kickoff player Saturday night, made a tackle in the second half. If that doesn't bode well, then I don't know what does.

Now I know what you're thinking — the Aggies should have won; it's USL for crying out loud. But consider that while USL's talent level was certainly down a notch or two from BYU's, the two team's offensive systems were quite similar, and the Wrecking Crew responded with a solid effort, signaling a return to excellence.

The offense plays well one week, the defense the next. If and when we ever get the two to play well in the same game, we've got a Top 20 team again. So keep your head up, things are going to get better. Besides, if the Aggies play any more games like the last one, many fans will see the A.P. Beutel Health Center in a new light.



Holdman and Larry Walker II, snuffed them like a bad cigar.

While more takeaways would certainly have been welcome, other positives abound. The secondary improved, providing tight coverage and good closure on the ball — something that was sorely missing against BYU.

Safety Toya Jones and first-time starting cor-

nerback Shun Horn proved themselves by breaking up several passes. Andre Williams also saw significant playing time and made some good plays, which says a great deal about the man's character after the BYU debacle.

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