

# Back on Track

## The Aggie Football Team clicked on all cylinders in a 55-0 win over North Texas

By TOM DAY  
THE BATTALION

The fun is back — for at least a week, anyway. With the University of Colorado coming to Aggie Field this week, the struggling Texas A&M Football Team felt it had to find a winning formula before the 12th-ranked Buffaloes came calling. Mission accomplished.

The Aggies out-hustled, out-classed and thoroughly dominated an overmatched University of North Texas squad on Saturday at Kyle Field, whipping the Eagles, 55-0. Rolling up 624 yards of total offense (312 passing yards, 312 running yards) while limiting UNT to 70, A&M dominated every facet of the game to put the Eagles away early.

Even more important for the Aggies, they eliminated the mistakes that plagued them in losses to Brigham Young University and Southwestern Louisiana — turnovers, costly penalties and defensive breakdowns.

But A&M Head Coach R.C. Slocum said the team got the most important thing it was looking for — a win.

"We have a young group of players, and they hadn't tasted victory and what it feels like to make plays and have fun in a ballgame," Slocum said. "Sometimes the harder you try to accomplish it, you almost start working against yourself and start pressing, and it makes it more difficult."

A&M strong safety Rich Coady, who intercepted two passes Saturday, said the players blocked out the pressure and approached the game with the sole intention of enjoying themselves.

"Coach Slocum took the attitude this week of us going out there and having fun," Coady said. "This is college football and you're supposed to have fun, and we lost sight of that the last couple of weeks."

"After losing two games, it was rough with people asking what's wrong all the time. We definitely got the monkey off our back."

It took a little while for the Aggies to warm up offensively. After settling for a 24-yard field goal by Kyle Bryant in the first quarter and another 47-yarder to put them up 6-0 with 1:35 gone by in the second, the A&M offense caught fire.

After holding UNT again and getting the ball

back a minute and a half later at their own 45, A&M went for the jugular. Aggie quarterback Brannndon Stewart called an audible at the line and connected with senior wide receiver Albert Connell in the left flat on the first play of the series for a 55-yard touchdown pass.

Going for the two-point conversion on the next play, Stewart scrambled out of the pocket and toward the sideline before throwing a strike to sophomore tight end Matt Mahone in the back of the end zone to put the Aggies up 14-0.

Connell's touchdown reception came on a quick-hitch pattern, an east-west style of passing play that has come under criticism from fans in the past.

Slocum said the Aggies use the play when opponents show blitz and rely on single-man coverage. "It's one of those plays where you can complete it and a guy comes up and makes a great tackle and you get three or four yards and people ask why would you throw that pass," Slocum said. "The reason why you do it is because they don't always make that tackle, and if they don't, it's a big play."

Coady's first interception of the day came on the Eagles' next series and his 18-yard return set the Aggies up on the UNT 21-yard line. Two plays later, Stewart found Connell again on the right sideline as the wideout slipped three or four tackles before bulling his way into the end zone to break the Eagles' spirits.

"We started off slowly today," Connell said. "We were just getting a feel for the defense and getting momentum, and after my first touchdown run, everyone got hyped and we were just having fun."

That spelled doom for the Eagles as the Aggies went run rampant the rest of the afternoon.

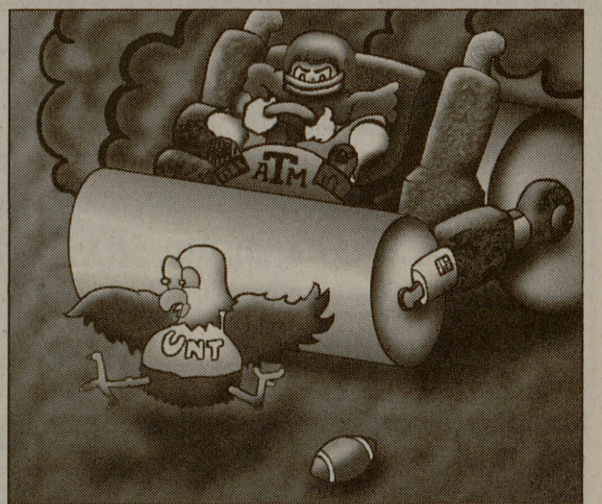
Freshman punt returner and tailback Dante Hall had a career day, returning eight punts for 119 yards while carrying the ball from scrimmage 14 times for 93 yards.

His 37-yard punt return and an Eagle face mask penalty set up another A&M touchdown with 8:06 left in the first half. A 15-yard run by sophomore tailback Sirr Parker would move the Aggies down to the UNT three-yard line, before sophomore D'Andre Hardeman pounded the ball in for a score to put A&M up 28-0.

In the second half, Slocum was able to unload his bench.

"I thought it was important to come back this week and have a game where we could play a lot of people," Slocum said. "I've found that really helps your squad morale when you have a lot of guys get into the ballgame. That's good for our team and it comes at a great time for us in getting ready for a great challenge next week to play a team like Colorado."

Touchdown runs by Hardeman, Parker, Hall and sophomore Eric Bernard in the second half put icing on the cake for A&M. Pacing the Aggies was Parker



Texas A&M 55, North Texas 0

UNT	0	0	0	0	—	0
A&M	3	25	20	7	—	55

	UNT	A&M
First Downs	4	29
Rushes-yards	24(-10)	60-312
Passing yards	80	312
Comp-att-int	8-23-1	20-35-1
Return yards	6	36
Punts-avg.	11-46	2-25
Fumbles-lost	1-0	5-1
Penalties-yards	6-54	8-60
Time of possession	24:06	35:54

with a career-high 117 yards on 18 carries, while Bernard carried 13 times for 98 yards.

After suffering four fumbles last week at USL, the A&M backfield held on to the ball against UNT.

"We didn't all of a sudden change everything we did this week for those backs," Slocum said. "Sometimes bad things happen to you. We had a lot of second-effort runs today — a lot of yardage after the contact."

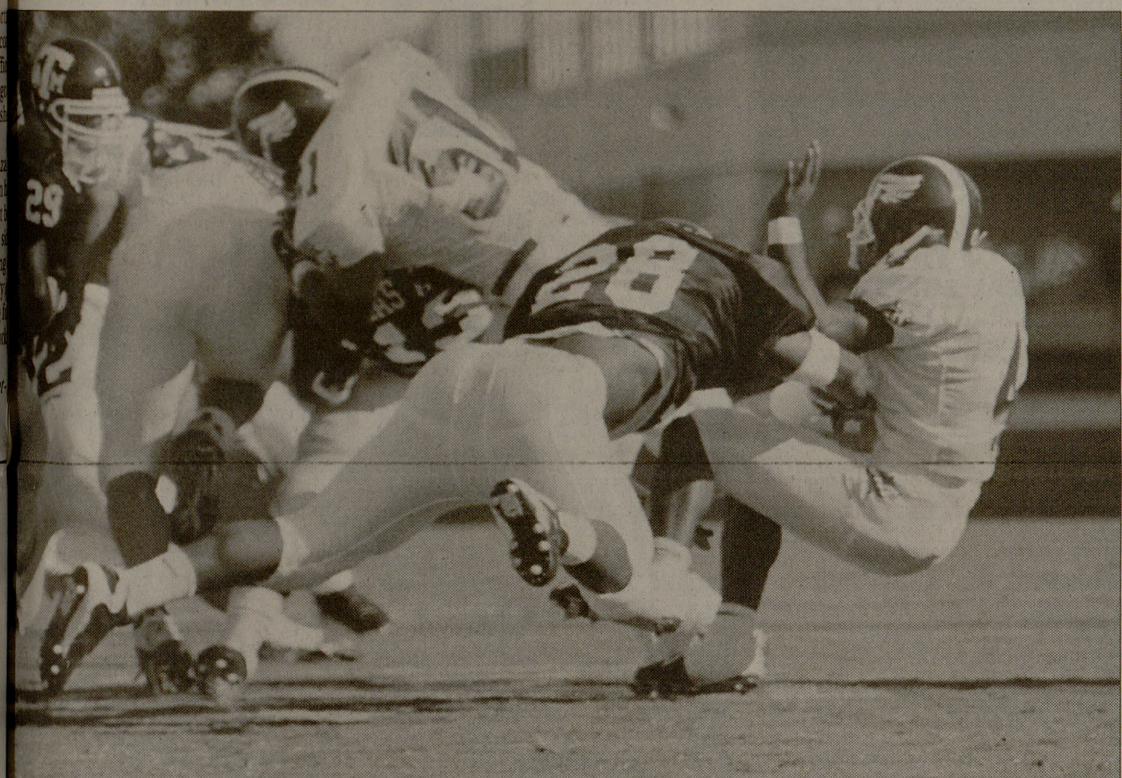
Stewart's 275 yards through the air on 17-of-30 passing was the most by an A&M quarterback since Bucky Richardson threw for 321 yards against Texas Christian University in 1991.

The A&M defense was just as impressive, limiting the Eagles to minus-10 yards rushing, the Aggies' lowest total since limiting BYU to minus-12 yards in the 1990 Holiday Bowl.

In posting their first shutout since a 7-0 blanking of Rice in 1994, the Aggies turned the ball over just once and limited their penalties to inexperienced mistakes by second team contributors.

Slocum said playing at home was the answer for the struggling Aggies.

"I thought getting home with our fans, the band and the families would be a positive thing for us," Slocum said. "Colorado presents a great challenge to us. You need everything going for you in that game and you need a positive mental attitude. Coming off a game like today, we had a chance to regain some of that."



Dave House, THE BATTALION

A&M junior special teams player Trent Driver pile drives UNT sophomore kick returner Bobby Coleman in the second quarter of A&M's 55-0 win Saturday at Kyle Field.

## Aggies eliminate mistakes on both sides of the ball

By KRISTINA BUFFIN  
THE BATTALION

Senior outside linebacker Kei Mitchell epitomized the attitude of the Texas A&M Football Team when he screamed, "I feel good, yeah!" when he walked into the press conference following Saturday's 55-0 shellacking of the University of North Texas.

Against Brigham Young University, the defense had its problems. Against the University of Southwestern Louisiana, the offense had too many turnovers. But with their first win of the season, the Aggies pulled together all aspects of their game and showed

that they do have the talent and ability to turn the season around.

"I was pleased both sides of the ball produced," A&M Head Coach R.C. Slocum said. "Players on both sides made a significant contribution and they can feel good about themselves going into this next week."

Junior quarterback Brannndon Stewart looked his most comfortable in a game situation thus far. Except for two fumbled snaps, Stewart had a career day, connecting on 17-of-30 attempts for 275 yards, two touchdowns and no interceptions.

"I was very comfortable out there," Stewart said. "Since the

first two-a-days and in spring drills, I was comfortable with the guys and at ease.

"You have to remember that I didn't play much in my first year of college ball, and each game and each week I am gaining more experience."

Stewart's 275-yard performance was the most by an Aggie quarterback since Bucky Richardson threw for 321 yards against Texas Christian University in 1991.

Stewart's primary target, senior wide receiver Albert Connell, also had a career performance. Connell had nine receptions for 166 yards and two touchdowns. His previous best was a seven-catches, 112-yard performance against SMU in 1995.

"I didn't know the ball was going to come to me as much as it did," Connell said. "I started off (the season) a little slow, but this is a big confidence booster for me to have a game like this when big things happen."

Slocum had nothing but praise for his star receiver.

"Albert Connell is a really good player and he is dangerous when he gets the football," Slocum said. "I'm really proud of him; I think he's one of, if not the best receiver we've had in a long time."

The Aggie offense illustrated its commitment to a balance of rushing and passing by accumulating 312 yards in both aspects.

"Going into North Texas, we wanted to keep it balanced, and it worked for us," Stewart said. "We proved we have a good team and that we should win. I said this week, regardless of who we beat, we just need a win."

Perhaps the biggest surprise of the game was the emergence of freshman tailback/punt returner Dante Hall. Hall, who ironically wears the same number of former tailback Leeland McElroy (#34), returned eight punts for

119 yards, which puts him at No. 3 in the A&M record books.

In the fourth quarter, Hall was called upon to take up rushing duties. He had 14 rushes for 93 yards and a touchdown score with five minutes left to play.

The Wrecking Crew showed the power they exuded in the BYU game by shutting out North Texas and holding the Eagle offense to 70 total yards and only four first downs.

Mitchell said the defense's play was only a matter of coming together and making the game more fun.

"You see what happens when we have fun," Mitchell said. "We came together and bonded together. Sometimes things happen for a reason, and I'm really happy about our play together."

Sophomore inside linebacker Dat Nguyen led the team with seven tackles, six unassisted, and senior noseguard Eddie Jasper recorded two of the defense's five quarterback sacks.

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R.C. Slocum  
A&M Head Coach



Dave House, THE BATTALION

After bulling his way through three defenders, senior wide receiver Albert Connell dives for a touchdown in the second quarter.

Slocum said this game was encouraging because it is always a challenge when things are not working out.

"Part of you wants to push them, but you have to remember that these are young people," Slocum said.

For the second consecutive game, the secondary showed improvement. Former walk-on strong safety Rich Coady had two interceptions in the second quarter.

Coady said although one of his pick-offs set up a Connell touchdown, his teammates riled him about not returning the interceptions for touchdowns.

"The front seven did a good job of pressuring and I was able to read the quarterback's eyes to see where he was going," Coady said.

"But I'm starting to get it from the guys about not scoring."

A&M has not yet begun to worry about the University of Colorado stampeding into town this weekend. Instead they are just happy to have a game in the win column and are intent on keeping up their positive attitude.

"There's an old axiom I learned back in my coaching days that when players get down coaches get up," Slocum said. "You have to coach them to be enthusiastic and positive and I thought the staff did a good job with that."

"[Colorado] is the first conference game for us and I expect a big crowd. It is significant in terms of the conference and Colorado is respected nationally and it will be a great challenge for us."



Dave House, THE BATTALION

Sophomore safety Rich Coady (#48) points to freshman defensive back Brandon Jennings for a block after his interception in the second quarter.