

Aggies visit Stillwater with pride on the line

By MATT MITCHELL
THE BATTALION

With dreams of post-season glory fading fast and a Big 12 South Division championship all but out of reach, the Texas A&M Football Team finds itself in unfamiliar territory. Pride, respect and hopes of finishing over .500 this season are on the line for the Aggies this Saturday as they travel to Stillwater, Okla., to battle the Oklahoma State Cowboys.

The Aggies have been forced to accept the prospect of a disappointing season after a heart-breaking 13-10 loss to Texas Tech last Saturday at Kyle Field.

The Cowboys are coming off a 35-28 overtime loss to the University of Missouri, in which OSU quarterback Tone Jones had a career day, passing for 235 yards and four touchdowns.

For the third time in four weeks, the Aggies will face one of the nation's top running backs in OSU's David Thompson. Thomp-

son ranks third in the Big 12 and fourth nationally in rushing with 138 yards per game and averages over five yards per carry.

"I think they're a frightening team," A&M Head Coach R.C. Slocum said. "They have good enough players and they don't have a lot to lose right now. They have been a team that has looked pretty good at times this year. Where we are right now we can't take anyone lightly or for granted. Everyone looks pretty good right now."

Despite their disappointing performance recently, the Aggies had spirited workouts this week and are looking forward to venting their frustrations on the Cowboys.

"I look at it this way — I think if we prepare well and everything we can go up to Stillwater and play a good game," junior quarterback Brannndon Stewart said. "I'm not looking at this as a turning point, but I definitely think it would help us to win this game and pick up a little momentum to

finish out the season."

Aside from momentum, the Aggies will be looking to wake a slumbering passing attack. After a quick start this season, there has been a noticeable drop-off in passing offense.

"As I've said all along, we have

"Where we are right now we can't take anyone lightly or for granted."

R.C. Slocum
A&M head coach

to make more plays in the passing game," Slocum said. "We cannot play against teams with large collections of guys around the line of scrimmage. We have to make them pay for doing that.

And if you don't, then it's hard moving the football."

Questions abound as to who will get playing time on offense this week. The Aggies have reached a point in their season where they will be evaluating some of their younger talent and giving them the opportunity to contribute. Backup quarterbacks Shane Lechler and Randy McCown may be included in that group.

"Based on the way the season has gone, I don't think it's unreasonable at all to let McCown play some," Slocum said. "It wouldn't be anything negative about Brannndon, but we're at that stage of the season that it would make sense to let him have a series and see how he does. That very likely could happen."

The coaching staff also faces the tough decision of who to start at running back with the recent emergence of freshman Dante Hall.

"I don't know (who we'll start)," Slocum said. "I was im-

pressed with Dante. I thought he had a great ball game (against Tech). I also thought Tiki Hardeman had a great ball game and he would be a starter, so the only place there would be a question would be at the A-back position."

Whoever gets the start, Saturday's game will be a matchup of two — for now — run-oriented teams. While the unfulfilled expectations may haunt the Aggies, they are now focused on the matter at hand.

"I think we've got a lot of pride in ourselves and I think we're playing for pride right now to get this season over and have a positive end," senior outside linebacker Keith Mitchell said. "I know my teammates feel the same way, and I think they're going to come out and do whatever it takes. We need some wins."

The Aggies have a few players nursing injuries. Cornerback Shun Horn was restricted in practice this



Freshman **Dante Hall** gets wrapped up by two Tech defenders.

week because of a concussion sustained last week against Tech. Horn also strained a groin muscle in Wednesday's practice, and is questionable for tomorrow's game. Offensive tackle Cameron Spikes is doubtful for Saturday's game with a sprained foot.

On the receiving end

Spiller has his own individual motive — an education

By JEREMY FURTICK
THE BATTALION

With the whirlwind of negative publicity surrounding collegiate athletics today, it's refreshing to cross paths with an individual who contradicts that image. While many college football players have tarnished the image of their sport with off-field misdemeanors, dealings with agents and the like, there are others who keep their heads on straight.

Derrick Spiller, the Texas A&M Football Team's 6-foot-3-inch, 236-pound tight end, has the tools to become one of the country's top players. But more important to him, he also has the tools to graduate and start a career.

Spiller, who plans on working in the field of health care administration after college, said getting an education was his top priority coming to A&M.

"On my signing day, my grandfather was on the phone with R.C. (Slocum) talking about me getting my degree," Spiller said. "That's my main goal —

to graduate."

Spiller has his act together on the gridiron, as well. The sophomore has fit nicely into an Aggie offense that has thrown the ball more this year than in years past. Spiller's physical skills and athletic ability make him a dangerous pass catcher from the tight end position.

Spiller finished second overall, behind Larry Walker II, in the Aggies' off-season conditioning program as a freshman. He posted marks of 4.65 seconds in the 40-yard dash and 34.5 inches in the vertical jump, both of which ranked seventh on the team. He also finished third in the squat with a lift of 525 pounds, and sixth in bench press with a 380-pound lift.

Texas A&M Tight Ends Coach Tam Hollingshead said Spiller's athleticism has been an asset to the Aggies' passing offense.

"Derrick's ability to get down the field vertically from the tight end position helps our passing game tremendously," Hollingshead said. "It opens up the whole field." Sophomore wide receiver Donte Hawkins said the same ability that makes Spiller a receiving threat creates holes for the running game.

"Derrick helps our rush offense because the linebackers have to cover him on every play," Hawkins said. "He's quick, fast and has good hands — they have to watch him."

Spiller, who ranks third on the team with 11 receptions, said his role has changed from last season, when he caught one pass.

"I've had the opportunity to catch a lot of balls this season," Spiller said. "Last year, I was primarily a blocker."

Hollingshead said Spiller's commitment to school shows he has his priorities set.

"Derrick's doing an excellent job in his academics," Hollingshead said. "He's here to get an education first, and then do as well as he can in football."

Spiller said he resents the stereotype of college athletes as mediocre students. He said there are many players that focus on their education.

"There are really a lot of guys on the team that carry a heavy school load like me," Spiller said. "It just means a lot of late nights, early mornings and studying between classes. But if that's what it takes, then that's what I do."

Spiller said he has kept his focus on academics by putting everything into perspective.

"When I started getting recruited in high school, I was already planning to attend college regardless of whether or not I played football," he said. "So when I signed, it was like a bonus."

Spiller comes across as a man confident in his abilities, but also aware they might not be there forever. He said he has dreams of playing in the NFL, but not at the expense of his education.

"Playing pro football would be great," he said. "If it happens, it happens. If not, oh well, life goes on. I'll still have my degree."

Hawkins steps out of shadows to bolster receiving corps

By MATT MITCHELL
THE BATTALION

Question: Who besides Albert Connell starts at wide receiver for the Texas A&M Football Team? It is not an easy question to answer. However, sophomore wideout Donte Hawkins is usually that unnoticed player lining up on the opposite side of Connell.

"I understand the situation," Hawkins said of Connell's 'go-to' status. "He's a senior. Things are probably going to start happening for him. I think all that (attention) will come when it's ready to come, like next year or my senior year. It's fine for him to get his little spotlight because I know that's something I'm going to want my senior year, too."

But playing alongside an All-American candidate at the same position has not deterred the quiet sophomore from Round Rock from working toward his own goals.

"[Improving] is the period I'm looking at right now," Hawkins said. "With each game, I take it and try to get better, whether it's my blocking or my running or whatever."

Hawkins is only now reaching the stage in his collegiate career where he has the consistency of practice and game situations to improve.

Hampered by injuries as a freshman, Hawkins still made an impact with 16 catches for 151 yards. His role would have been greater had he not missed two games early in the season because of a stress fracture in his shin.

"It seemed like everything was rolling along pretty well after my injury at the beginning of the year, then I had the stress fracture in my leg; and the week of the Texas game, I actually broke my leg," Hawkins said.

Hawkins missed both the Aggies' regular season finale against Texas and the celebrated Alamo Bowl victory over Michigan. While spring drills gave him the opportunity to review the mental aspects of his position, the lack of physical activity hampered his efforts to establish himself as a starter.

A&M Receivers Coach Les Koenning said Hawkins had a lot to overcome.

"He wasn't able to participate in spring training, so that set him behind knowledge-wise and as far as the physical part of playing receiver," Koenning said. "He overcame that, and he's worked hard to get back into shape. What he needs to do is see a lot of reps."

Despite his injury woes, Hawkins has battled fellow sophomore Aaron Oliver for the starting job this season. Hawkins has played in all eight contests this year, hauling in 27 passes for 318 yards, an average of 11.8 yards per catch, which ranks second on the team.

"He's improving for us each game," Koenning said. "Donte has competed. He's been in and out of the starting lineup throughout the year. He and Aaron push each other, and that's what you want to have at each position."

The jostling for position among the Aggies' tal-



Sophomore **Donte Hawkins** exchanges words with senior **Albert Connell** at the A&M-Tech game.

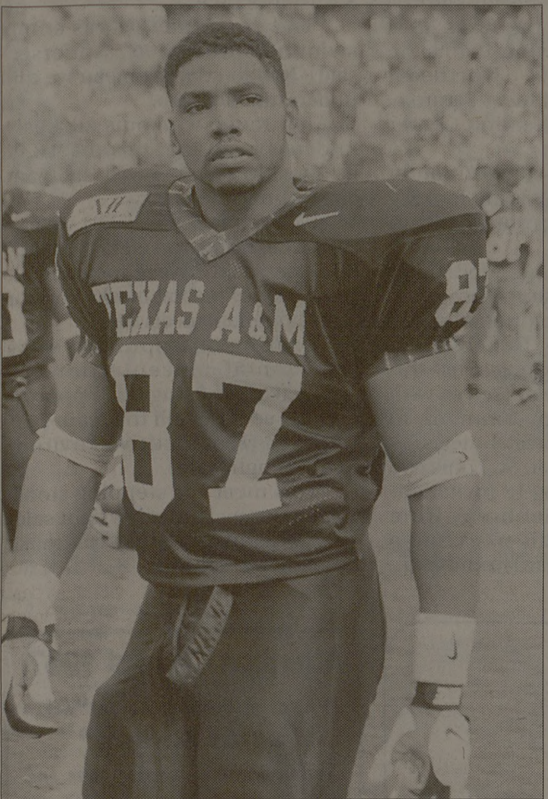
ented receiving corps could pay large dividends down the road. Each receiver has concentrated on giving the Aggie offense another weapon to complement Connell, as well as taking some of the defensive pressure off him.

"In the past games, [the ball] has gone to the backs to take some pressure off of A.C.," Hawkins said. "I think that'll change, though, because in practice they've been throwing to all of us. They know that with three people guarding A.C., somebody's got to be open."

Hawkins said he and the other receivers enjoy trying to dispel the myth that A&M is incapable of having a balanced offensive attack.

"Me and Aaron and all the receivers are going to try to put that role back on ourselves, because he (Connell) led us in the thinking that we can do this," Hawkins said. "I think we'll definitely fill those shoes next year."

And just maybe that spotlight, too.



Dave House, THE BATTALION

Sophomore tight end **Derrick Spiller** ranks third on the team with 11 receptions.

This Weekend in Sports

Friday

A&M Volleyball at Iowa State, Ames, IA, 7:30 p.m.

A&M Soccer vs. UNC-Greenboro at Post Oak Mall Classic, Aggie Soccer Complex, 1:30 p.m.

Saturday

A&M Swimming and Diving vs. N.E. Louisiana, Student Rec. Center Natatorium, 1:30 p.m.

A&M Football at OSU, Stillwater, Okla., 2:30 p.m.

The Battalion's 1996 Staff Picks

The Match-Ups	Tom Day	Kristina Buffin	Jamie Burch	Sara Duesing	Jeremy Furtick	Colby Gaines	Ross Hecox	Matt Mitchell	Dennis Ramirez	Nicki Smith	Consensus
Texas A&M at Oklahoma St.	A&M	A&M	A&M	A&M	A&M	A&M	A&M	A&M	A&M	A&M	A&M: Aggies ride Cowboys into sunset
Baylor at Texas	Texas	Texas	Texas	Texas	Texas	Texas	Texas	Texas	Texas	Texas	Texas: With or without the agent
#7 Colorado at Missouri	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado: Buffs show 'em
Kansas at Iowa State	Kansas	Kansas	Kansas	Kansas	Kansas	Kansas	Kansas	Kansas	Kansas	Kansas	Kansas: Jayhawks raid cornfields
#5 Nebraska at Oklahoma	Nebraska	Nebraska	Nebraska	Nebraska	Nebraska	Nebraska	Nebraska	Nebraska	Nebraska	Nebraska	Nebraska: Huskers invade Norman(dy)
#11 Northwestern at #15 Penn St.	Penn State	Northwestern	Penn State	Penn State	Penn State	Penn State	Penn State	Penn State	Penn State	Penn State	Penn St.: No miracles in Happy Valley
Syracuse at #18 West Virginia	W. Virginia	W. Virginia	Syracuse	W. Virginia	W. Virginia	W. Virginia	Syracuse	W. Virginia	Syracuse	W. Virginia	W. Virginia: Juice anyone?
#21 Washington at USC	USC	USC	USC	Washington	Washington	USC	Washington	USC	USC	Washington	USC: Huskies can't take the heat
Michigan St. at #9 Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan: Spartans kicked back a century
Philadelphia at Cowboys	Cowboys	Philadelphia	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys: Dallas clips Eagles' wings
Oilers at Seattle	Oilers	Oilers	Oilers	Oilers	Oilers	Oilers	Oilers	Oilers	Oilers	Oilers	Oilers: McNair keeps Seahawks sleepless
Washington at Buffalo	Buffalo	Washington	Washington	Buffalo	Washington	Washington	Washington	Buffalo	Buffalo	Buffalo	Washington: Redskins scalp Buffalo
Last Week	7-5	8-4	8-4	9-3	10-2	11-1	7-5	8-4	10-2	8-4	86-34: Day stumbles, desk rumbles
Cumulative	68-28	59-37	56-40	66-30	62-34	63-33	61-35	60-36	65-31	63-33	623-337: Colby has net Gaines