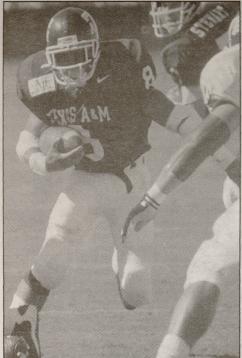
## Friday · September 5, 1997

2 OFFENSE

EFENSE



FILE PHOTO/THE BATTA Junior running back Sirr Parker cuts through a hole against the University of North Texas last year.

**Back to fundamentals** 

## A more experienced offensive unit looks to explode

By TRAVIS V. DABNEY Staff writer

urnovers, turnovers and more turnovers spelled doom for the 1996 version of the talented but young Texas A&M offense last year.

This year, however, the Aggies hope to considerably cut down the 28 turnovers from last season and give themselves a better chance to prove what a truly explosive offensive power they can be.

Heading the offense this year will be new offensive coordinator Steve Marshall, who came from UCLA where he was the offensive line coach.

Marshall plans to bring a powerful run-ning attack to the Aggie offense but said he will not hesitate to implement the passing game as well.

"It is hard to be an unbalanced team in college football today and win on a consistent basis," he said.

The Aggies lost three offensive starters from 1996 team including receiver Albert Connell now with the Washington has struggled with injury problems Redskins, Donte Hawkins and last years throughout his three years at A&M. starting center, Calvin Collins, who is with the Atlanta Falcons

Ready to step in and bring stability to the receiver corps is sophomore Leroy Hodge, who is 6-foot, 3-inch and 207 pounds.

Hodge saw limited action in the 1996 because of he backed up senior Connell, but had an impressive 14 yard average per catch.

'We want to have a much better season this vear, the offense wants to play well and we are all mentally tougher

after last season," Hodge said.

receivers that have all shown the ability to be good college players but need playing time to prove it.

Hodge

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With an injury-free year the duo of Hodge and Oliver could prove to be an excellent combination.

Backing up the starters will be Chris Taylor, Cole, Matt Bumgardner and Darren Brinkley.

All of the receivers have taken their share of criticism the past few years but the attitude with this group seems to be one of confidence, but not cockiness

"Things have happened in the past here with the receivers that have been hurt and Albert (Connell) was the only one who seemed to make plays in the past, but we will assert ourselves this year and prove that we are a talented group," Hodge said. The tight end position should also

mean strength for the Aggies this season as they return their top three tight ends of Derrick Spiller, Dan Campbell and Matt Mahone.

PLEASE SEE OFFENSE ON PAGE 11.



## **By CHRIS FERRELL** Sports editor

hey are a machine. A 1,466 pound, five man machine. Pulling, driving, firing out. All accomplishing individual assignments so the parts can function as a whole.

There are no magazine covers. There are no individual statistics, either. They are seldom noticed unless there is a mistake and under appreciated by the people in the stands.

But there is hard work and dedication. There are countless hours spent in the weight room. There is the constant barrage of ice packs and tape. And the many broken fingers and toes. The trenches where they battle are violent places.

They are offensive lineman. And they are among the nation's best.

"I think we're going to have a really good offen-sive line this year," said senior All-Conference guard candidate Steve McKinney. "We're good players. We're not just guys that fell into starting rolls last season.

Four members from last season's line return. Along with McKinney, tackles senior Chris Ruhman and junior Cameron Spikes and sophomore guard Semisi Heimuli return to the line up. They will be joined by senior center Koby Hackradt, who missed most of last season with injuries after starting as a sophomore.

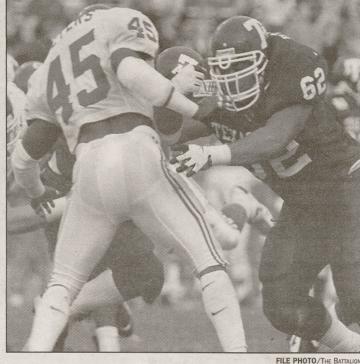
The five starting members of the Texas A&M Football Team's offensive line have combined to start 76 games over their careers.

They've been through the battles," offensive coordinator Steve Marshall said. "They know a little bit more about what's going on, they understand about protections and things. When things break down, they know how to fix them.

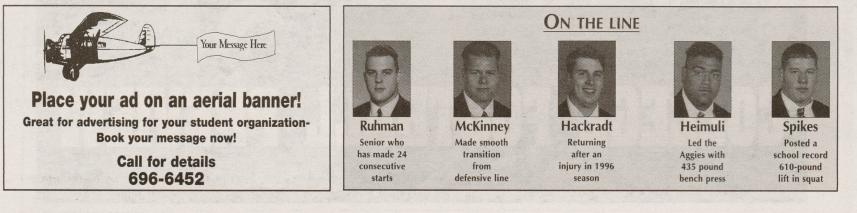
'We're still not old, but we have guys who have played in games and have learned to be successful

Spikes said the line gained valuable experience last season.

PLEASE SEE LINE ON PAGE 11.



Junior right guard Semisi Heimuli fends off University of Oklahoma linebacker Tyrell Peters last year at Kyle Field.



Along with Hodge will be a group of

Aaron Oliver leads this list because he