

# Reestablishing the dominance

## Defense wants to recapture the glory of past

BY STEPHEN BOUDREAU  
Staff writer

Still hearing the echoes of past greatness, the Texas Aggie defense is ready to pick up the pieces from last year's disappointing season and regain their place among the nation's best defenses.

"That 6-6 record wasn't good for our resume. It's been a long time around here since we haven't been in the rankings to start the season," said Brandon Jennings, a sophomore defensive back, "we have to go out there and play hard. We're going to try and win every game. But regardless, we're going to go hard."



Holdman

Under new defensive coordinator Mike Hankwitz, the A&M defense will take a more aggressive, attacking style of play.

"We're going to have enough pressure, or the illusion of pressure, that the offense has to take that into consideration and change its game plan. That way we aren't just always reacting to things they do," Hankwitz said. "You can be a pressure team and always create pressure, but when you do that you are also putting yourself at risk. So we're going to balance how much we do that."

"We are going to have a base defense that will line up and execute well."

The Aggies will continue to use a 3-4

alignment, but plan to pressure the quarterback more often than in previous years.

"Some of the new changes we've seen are that we have a couple of new blitzes," junior linebacker Warrick Holdman said. "We feel that last year sometimes we would have to take off some of our blitzes whenever our secondary needed help with coverage. Now we are going to try and make offenses change to us. Because if we blitz at them they're going to have to stop passing as much."

Last season A&M's defense was ranked No. 33 in the nation, the first time in 14 years that the Aggies did not finish among the nation's 20 best defenses.

Hankwitz is instilling confidence in the defense and focusing on training players to react properly in all types of game situations.

"Well, one of our primary objectives in the spring and the fall was to become a defense that executes and doesn't beat itself," Hankwitz said. "You've got to have the discipline to do what you are supposed to and the mental alertness to be able to do it quickly, on the move."

"In football things happen so fast you don't have time to analyze. You've got to be trained and train yourself to do what you are supposed to when things are happening quick or when something a little different happens."

Since two-a-day practices began Aug. 20, players have adjusted to the changes Hankwitz has brought to the team.

"One thing's for sure, it's a different atmosphere," Holdman said. "The attitude



FILE PHOTO/THE BATTALION

Members of the A&M Wrecking Crew try to stop the Colorado rush at Kyle Field last September.

in two-a-days has been to regain what made the Wrecking Crew what it was. That's the biggest thing. Everybody is hustling, getting to the ball, playing as a team; it's definitely a more aggressive style defense than before."

With six returning starters, the Aggies have gained experience that will help reduce mental errors that plagued game play last season.

"This year we are more experienced. So I think our mental mistakes will go down," Jennings said. "We're going back to the old A&M tradition of blitzing. With this type of style defense we will be pressuring the quarterback more. So that allows the secondary to play man to man more often."

Jennings, Rich Coady, Shun Horn and Toya Jones are all returning to lead the Aggie defensive backfield this season.

"There is no substitute for experience,

especially in the secondary," Hankwitz said. "I feel like we will be better back there for two reasons. Number one, because we are more experienced. Number two, we've got excellent completion going on at the corner and safety positions. Competition brings out the best in everybody."

Hankwitz identified the linebacking corp as being the strong point of the defense.

"The people returning and the experience that they are bringing make them the strongest part of the defense," Hankwitz said. "They have played a lot of football together."

"You take Warrick (Holdman), Dat (Nguyen), Philip Meyer and Trent Driver. You throw in some young guys, but it's still four guys that play a lot of football."

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## Out with the old, in with the new

# Wrecking Crew gets boost with new coordinator

BY STEPHEN BOUDREAU  
Staff writer

After nearly three decades of collegiate coaching, Defensive Coordinator Mike Hankwitz is bringing his experience and philosophy to the sideline of Kyle Field and into the minds of the Aggie Wrecking Crew.

"I am really excited about living in this community. It's a good community for a family," Hankwitz said. "More importantly, I am real excited about the opportunity to coach at a school like A&M. It's got a good reputation for football, especially for defense."

Hankwitz brings with him an aggressive style defense that focuses on pressuring the quarterback and causing opposing offenses to make unwanted adjustments in their game plans.

"My philosophy has been very similar to

what they have done here, so it wasn't necessary to make drastic changes," he said. "We are getting back to the basics and going to do things that have made the defense successful in the past, which were really consistent with things that I've done."

Players have responded well to Hankwitz's style of coaching and enjoy working with him on improving their game.

"Really the biggest change was the defensive coordinator," junior linebacker Warrick Holdman said. "Coach Hankwitz is nice. He helps everybody out, takes his time with the team. That's the biggest thing. Everybody likes...and feels comfortable with him."



Hankwitz

With the team in its best physical condition since becoming defensive coordinator, Hankwitz has high expectations going into this season.

"I felt like we are a better defense (now) than when we ended spring practice, because our guys worked hard in that interim time," Hankwitz said. "They did everything they could to make themselves better."

"I feel that we have continued to make ourselves better as we have practiced."

Sophomore Brandon Jennings said, "Coach Hank(witz) emphasizes effort...like the A&M tradition always has. He brings a lot of enthusiasm to the defense...and motivates us to keep going everyday."

Hankwitz, a native of Michigan, has a 98-37-6 record as a defensive coordinator and was part of a national championship team with Colorado in 1990.

"This is the sixth different head coach I have worked under. I think you learn some-

thing from every program," he said. "There are always different ways to do things, I hope I am bringing in some things that haven't been done before that will help us."

Coaching has many rewarding aspects, but Hankwitz feels that the relationship developed with the players is the most satisfying.

"As a coach you are trying to get each player to be as good as he is capable of being," he said. "Everybody has a little different potential based on his own God-given physical abilities."

"Some of them never move on and play pro ball, but they have great college careers. Having that is just as rewarding as having guys go on and play in the NFL."

Hankwitz's coaching style and techniques may assist in the progress of his players, but his firm belief in the team attitude may be the determinant factor in the success of the team as a whole.