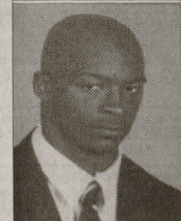


Monday • September 8, 1997

# Aggies rout Bearkats in season-opener

By CHRIS FERRELL  
Sports editor

The huge sigh of relief you heard late Saturday afternoon came courtesy of Dante Hall. Just as the Aggie natives began to rumble 'here we go again,' the sophomore tail back scored from five yards out to break open a 7-6 game and the Texas A&M Football Team never looked back, cruising to a 59-6 victory over Sam Houston State University Saturday at Kyle Field.



Hall

It was A&M's eighth opening day victory in the past nine years.

Hall finished the day with 221 yards of total offense including 169 rushing on 11 carries and two touchdowns.

"Dante always has a good day," junior quarterback Brandon Stewart said. "It seems like he can always turn something bad into something good. That's what we count on Dante to do, make big plays for us. That's what he did today."

The Aggies started off slow and for the first quarter at least, it appeared that so many of the ghosts of 1996 which the team had worked hard to chase away had returned to haunt them again.

Sam Houston took the opening kick off and proceeded to march 67 yards on 17 play chewing 7:09 off the clock before settling for a James Dummer field goal to take a 3-0 lead.

"That first drive really killed a lot of us," senior defensive end Brad Crowley said. "It didn't give us a chance to really catch our wind. They had a couple of drives in the first half that were long and after that some of the guys picked it up and we started playing with the Wrecking Crew style."

On A&M's first play of scrimmage, Hall raced through a huge hole for a 52-yard gain before being drug down at the Bearkat 28.

Four plays later the bad luck returned when junior Sirr Parker's 28-yard touchdown run was called back on a penalty. On the next play, Hall fumbled and the Bearkats regained possession.

Then the luck shifted. Sam Houston quarterback Chad Shramek hit receiver Matt Dominguez who fumbled. The ball was recovered by A&M sophomore



RYAN ROGERS/THE BATTALION

Freshman safety **Ronald Patton** tackles Sam Houston State running back **Elmore Armstrong** Saturday during the Aggies 59-6 win at Kyle Field.

cornerback Sedrick Curry. Curry also had an interception on the day.

Four plays later, Parker scored the Aggies first touchdown of the season to give A&M a 7-3 lead.

A&M was forced to punt on their next drive and then proceeded to score on their next eight possessions. They finished with 567 yards of total offense.

A&M running backs rushed for seven touchdowns on the day including three by Parker. Hall had two touchdowns and juniors D'Andre Hardeman and Michael Williams and freshman Burnest Rhodes each scored.

As was the plan going into the game, A&M rotated Stewart and sophomore Randy McCown throughout the game. Stewart finished the day with 110 yards on 8 of 12 passing and McCown was 7-14 for 148 yards. Neither threw an interception.

The defense settled down and held the Bearkats to three points the rest of the way.

The Wrecking Crew limited the Bearkats to 238 yards of total offense.

Freshman linebacker Roylin Bradley had two sacks and a fumble recovery in his debut.

PLEASE SEE **AGGIES** ON PAGE 10

## New Stewart takes stage in A&M victory

Okay what did they do with the old Brandon Stewart? Because the new and improved Stewart emerged Saturday against Sam Houston State University and showed the promise that everyone was looking for last season.

Stewart did not fumble a snap, fumble while being sacked, throw a bad pass to one of the other guys, throw it away under pressure or even step out of bounds before getting a first down. It seemed as if Stewart shrugged off the pressure of being the Aggie savior and has gone back to the basics, playing football. It is about time.

Stewart was 8-for-12 for 110 yards and most importantly, he had no interceptions. He looked comfortable and made good reads of the defense. Although he split time with sophomore quarterback Randy McCown, there is no quarterback controversy, Stewart came in and did his job.

Stewart did not throw for a touchdown but he was instrumental in setting up the drives which led to eight A&M rushing touchdowns. In the Aggies second drive, Stewart threw a 41-yard pass to Leroy Hodge which moved the Aggies down to the Sam Houston eight-yard line. Two plays later Sirr Parker scored a touchdown.

"We drove the ball well," Stewart said. "We played a good football game and we did what we had to do."

Stewart was repeatedly put through the ringer and raked over the coals last

season. Critics constantly pointed out that he was not the 'Peyton' of Texas A&M like he was made out to be. It was also a media blitz from the beginning in 1996. Stewart was inundated by requests and constantly under the critical microscope of sportswriters around the nation.

A&M Head Coach R.C. Slocum has admitted that the blitz got out of control thus, this summer, he kept Stewart out of the glaring media spotlight. At the Big 12 media day in July, Slocum opted to take Dat Nguyen and Steve McKinney as his player representatives rather than Stewart.

But it was not only the media pressure, Stewart had to overcome in '96, he was also subjected to fan pressure. In 1995 when Stewart had to sit out following his transfer from Tennessee, Aggie fans constantly chanted 'Brandon' when former quarterback Corey Pullig was performing below par. Fans were ready for a fresh quarterback but were highly critical when Stewart was not perfect.

Like in all sports, practice has its merits but it is game experience which makes a player improve. Stewart practiced and was on the squad team, but he had to sit on the bench during the 1995 season. No amount of watching games, tapes and reading playbooks was going to give him the experience to compete in the highly-competitive Big 12 Conference.

Although he was a junior last year, Stewart's experience amounted to that of a freshman's. This is not an excuse that Stewart uses for his performance however. He instead accepts his mistakes and is looking forward to learning from them and improving.

Saturday's game illustrated that. Stewart looked cool, comfortable and calm.

PLEASE SEE **BUFFIN** ON PAGE 10



KRISTINA  
BUFFIN  
Staff writer

### Game Notes

- Junior linebacker Dat Nguyen left the game in the first half with cramps and did not return. He was still able to finish with nine tackles, second most on the team.
- Freshman linebacker Roylin Braley was as good as advertised Saturday totaling four unassisted tackles, two sacks and a fumble recovery.
- Sophomore cornerback Sedrick Curry, playing for the injured Shun Horn, provided a spark for the defense, intercepting a pass and recovering a fumble.
- The coaching staff said it will continue to rotate quarterbacks Brandon Stewart and Randy McCown. The two looked comfortable in the new system, combining for 258 yards.

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