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ROCKET MAN

Lechler's booming punts becoming common

By **CHRIS FERRELL**
Sports editor

Somewhere out in space among the discarded rocket boosters and old satellites, footballs orbit the earth. They were not left behind by astronauts. Buzz Aldrin and his Apollo buddies preferred to hit golf balls.

These footballs were launched from a field in College Station, Texas, rockets sent rearing from the earth off of the foot of Shane Lechler.

Lechler, Texas A&M's sophomore punter has become a standout for the Aggies at a position which normally does not merit much attention. Midway through his second season as the Aggie's punter, he has already established a reputation as one of the nation's top clutch punters.

Never was this more evident than in A&M's 30-10 victory at Colorado two weeks ago when Lechler got off two crucial punts, each causing significant damage.

The first pinning of the Buffaloes inside their own 10, setting up an A&M fumble recovery, and the other, a yarder which knocked

outman down deep in his own territory with the game on the line.

"I feel like that's one of my plus-ones that I've had," Lechler said. "In critical situations I haven't let the team down yet. But I'm not going to punt my chickens before they hatch because you never know."

Special teams coach, Shawn Slocum, said that a player with Lechler's capabilities can be invaluable to a football team.

"In big ballgames, your not just go-

ing to run up and down the field on offense," Slocum said. "If you are, you've got no problems anyway. A lot of times, your kicking game becomes a factor of the defense. If we boot them in the hole, you've got a great advantage. Then turnovers come into play and the all-around big picture of field position is such a big factor."

Not only does Lechler turn in big punts, but he does it consistently. Lechler leads the Big 12 and is second in the nation in punting, averaging 48.83 yards per kick. If he keeps up his current pace, Lechler will shatter A&M's single season punting record by five yards per punt.

Lechler's success is even more impressive considering that he came to A&M listed under the category of athlete rather than punter. During a stellar prep career at East Bernard High School, Lechler never left the football field.

"In high school punting was just another position," Lechler said. "I played every down. I started at quarterback and middle linebacker on defense. I did all the kicking and returned all the kicks. Punting really was a break for me in high school. I'd punt it and I'd never run down and make a tackle. I just stood there and caught my breath."

His senior year he led his team to the state quarterfinals.

An exceptional all-around athlete, he also led East Bernard to two state baseball championships, the state golf tournament and regional basketball and track appearances.

When Lechler arrived at A&M he was listed as a punter/quarterback, however it soon became apparent that punting was his future. After suffering a strained quadriceps during two-a-days in August, he and coach R.C. Slocum decided that Lechler would focus the majority of his time on punting.

"It was a decision he and coach Slocum made," Shawn Slocum said.

"Shane is looking at it right now that his role on this football team is as a punter in games and he's continuing to prepare as a quarterback during the week. If needed, he could step in and do it. He's really focusing on his role right now and that's to be the best punter he can be."

The focus has paid off as Lechler and senior kicker Kyle Bryant have formed one of the nation's top special teams tandems. Bryant, an All-American candidate himself, said that while Lechler's accomplishments are still amazing, they no longer shock him.

"He's got a great leg," Bryant said. "Two things about kicking; you've got to have good leg speed and you've got to have great technique. Shane's got good leg speed, great leg strength and his technique is getting a lot better."

"You're first reaction when you see that (one Lechler's booming punts) is, 'My God, where did he pull that from.' The more you know Shane, the more you look at him, you just know that's his talent, that's what he can do."

Lechler's talent could lead him even beyond the college ranks. Ironically his punting, once his chance to gain a breather in high school, could be his ticket to the NFL.

Defensive coordinator Mike Hankwitz said that Lechler is just as good as current NFL punter Tom Rouen, who was at Colorado during Hankwitz's tenure there and R.C. Slocum said he's the best punter to come through A&M during his 25 years at the school. But Lechler would rather not look too far ahead into the future.

"I always keep the NFL in the back of my mind," he said. "It's not something I think about much because I don't want a dream like that to be shattered with an injury. It's something that if it happens it happens, if it doesn't, it doesn't."

But for now, the future is bright and everything is all systems go for the Aggie's human rocket launcher.



Cream beginning to rise to the Big 12's top

has canceled all interview requests for this week. Snyder said football is a team sport. He said this is Bishop's first year on the team and there are four-year starters that deserve some attention.

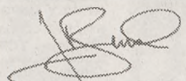
He Could Go All The Way
Oklahoma running back De'Mond Parker led all Division I-A rushers on Saturday with 31 carries for 291 yards and three touchdowns. Parker's near 300-yard performance did not include a 65-yard touchdown carry that was nullified by a holding call. It was the second best performance in OU history and raised Parker's Big 12 leading season totals to 149 carries and 955 yards, a 159.2 yards per game — second nationally to Iowa's Tavian Banks.

Run Forrest, Run
For the Nebraska Cornhuskers on Saturday, on the rain-soaked turf of Floyd Casey Stadium, the game plan against the Baylor Bears was simple: give the ball to Ahman Green and block for him. Nebraska's top ranked offense victimized the Bear's 94th-rated defense, running for 410 of its 548 total yards. Green rushed for 158 yards and four touchdowns leading Nebraska to a 49-21 win.

Florida Or Bust
The No. 2 Cornhuskers have laid the foundation and now have just one obstacle en route to an Orange Bowl appearance, Colorado. Nebraska (5-0, 2-0) has played its two hardest games of the season, Washington and Kansas State. Its next five opponents — Texas Tech (2-0 in conference for first time since 1993), Kansas (109th total offense), Oklahoma, Missouri (19 straight losses against ranked opponents) and Iowa State (13 straight losses) — pose no threat to the No. 1 ranked offense. Nebraska is averaging 528.8 yards of total offense and 399.8 on the ground.

PLEASE SEE BURCH ON PAGE 8.

NOTEBOOK



JAMIE BURCH
Staff writer

It's week three of conference play and we're starting to separate the men from the boys. Nebraska, Texas A&M, Oklahoma State, and Kansas State being the men and the rest of the eight, boys. Looking ahead in the schedule, as only the Swami can, the games that should determine the season for the men are Oklahoma State at A&M Nov. 1 and Nebraska at Colorado Nov. 28.

Buffaloes Cannot Walk On Stillwater

Oklahoma State Coach Bob Simmons, a former assistant at the University of Colorado, exacted a bit of revenge Saturday beating the Buffaloes 33-29 in Stillwater.

Simmons was overlooked by Colorado in 1994 when Rick Neuheisel was hired to replace former coach Bill McCartney.

Questions have surfaced the last several weeks around the Boulder area, asking if the Buff's chose the wrong coach. This victory was Simmons' way of saying 'I Told You So.'

No Press For You

Kansas State Coach Bill Snyder has decreed no media shall talk to Wildcat quarterback Michael Bishop. After Bishop rushed for 196 yards and two touchdowns and threw a 44-yard touchdown pass against Missouri on Saturday, Snyder snatched Bishop before FOX Sports could interview him. And Bishop was not allowed to talk to media in the post-game press conference. Furthermore, Snyder

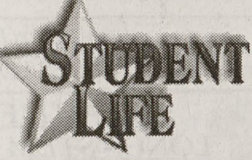
HAD ENOUGH ??

- DIFFICULTIES WITH YOUR PROPERTY MANAGERS?
- ROOMMATES JUMPING ON YOUR LAST NERVE?
- NEED TO FIND A NEW PLACE TO LIVE?
- NEED TO FIND A NEW PERSON TO LIVE WITH?

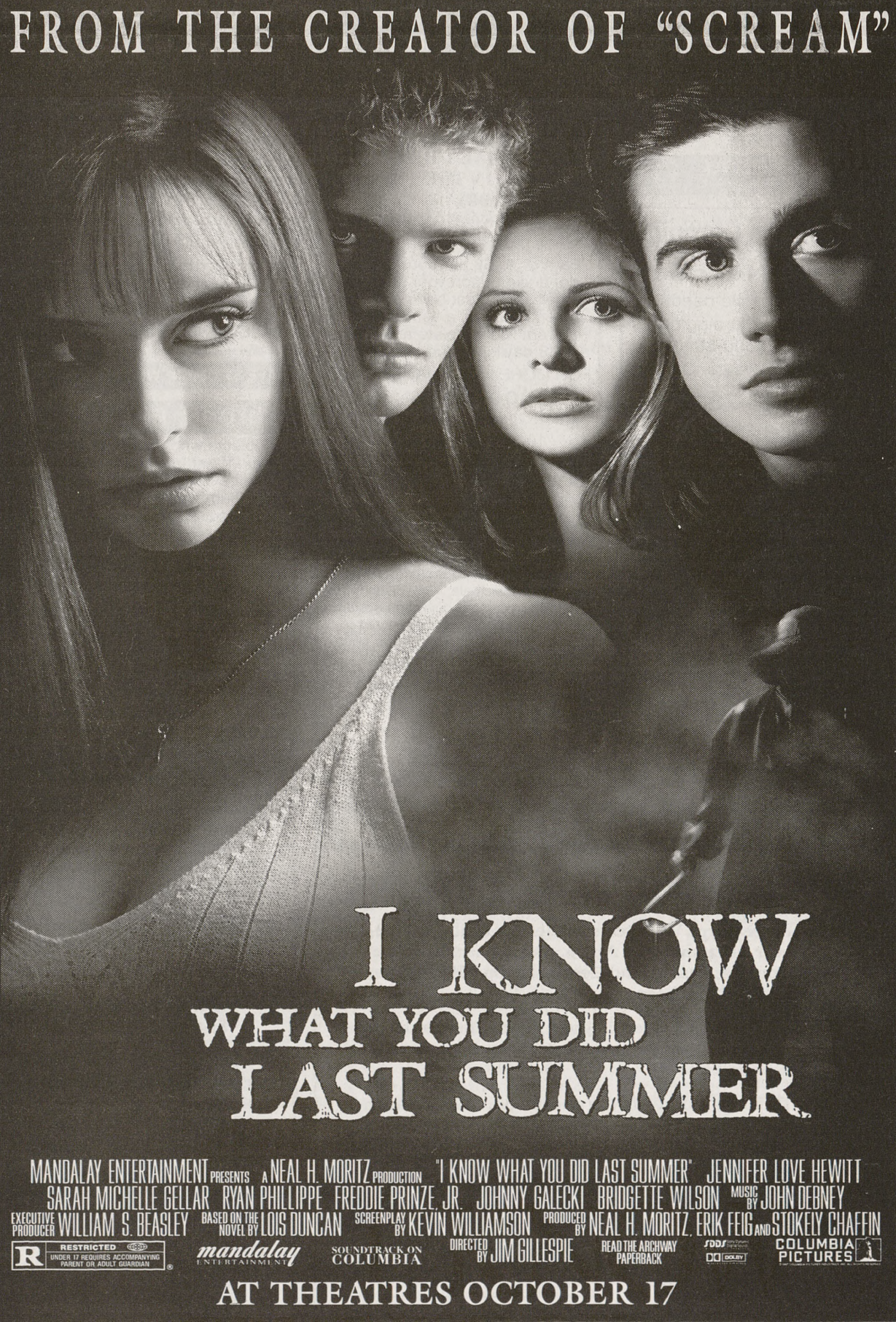
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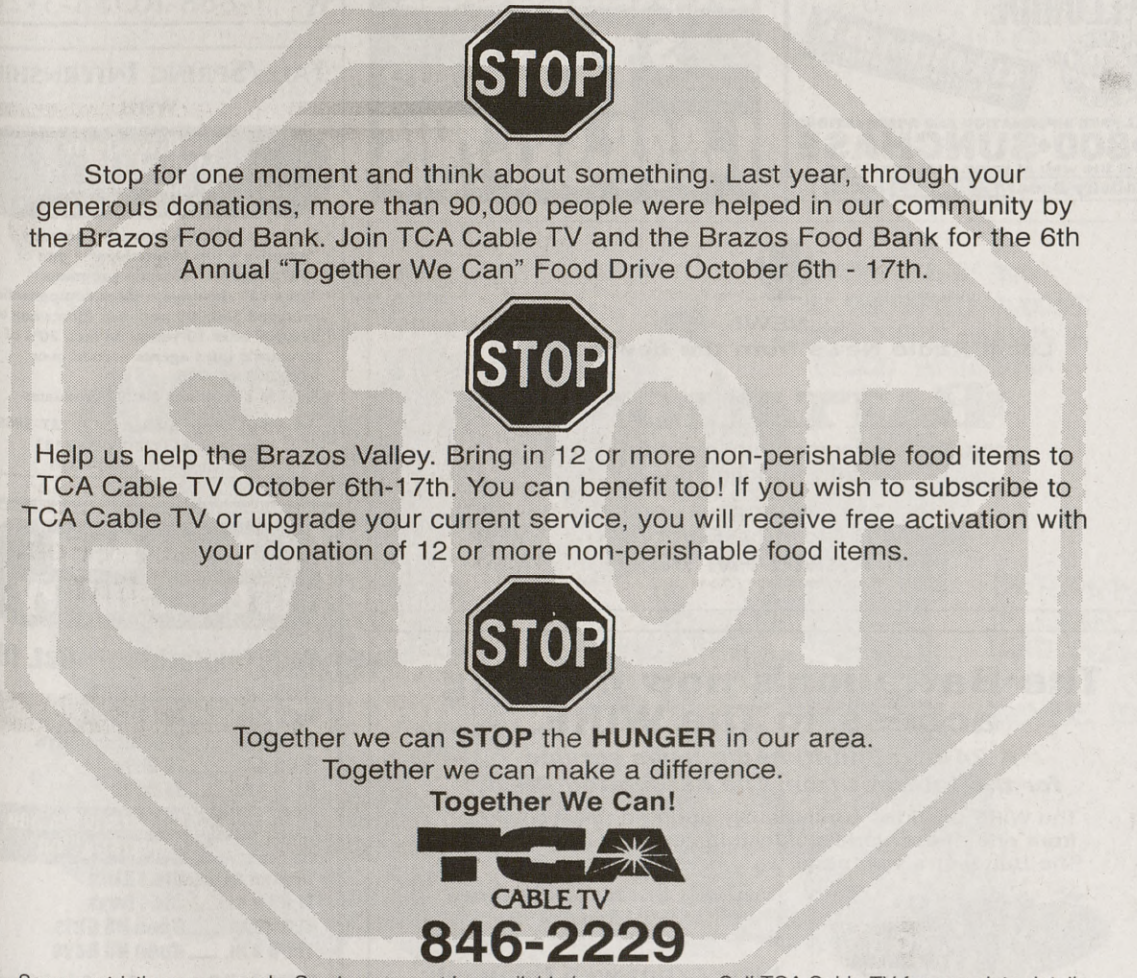
FROM THE CREATOR OF "SCREAM"



I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER

MANDALAY ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS A NEAL H. MORITZ PRODUCTION "I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER" JENNIFER LOVE HEWITT SARAH MICHELLE GELLAR RYAN PHILLIPPE FREDDIE PRINZE JR. JOHNNY GALECKI BRIDGETTE WILSON MUSIC BY JOHN DEBNEY EXECUTIVE PRODUCER WILLIAM S. BEASLEY BASED ON THE NOVEL BY LOIS DUNCAN SCREENPLAY BY KEVIN WILLIAMSON PRODUCED BY NEAL H. MORITZ, ERIK FEIG AND STOKELY CHAFFIN DIRECTED BY JIM GILLESPIE

AT THEATRES OCTOBER 17



Stop for one moment and think about something. Last year, through your generous donations, more than 90,000 people were helped in our community by the Brazos Food Bank. Join TCA Cable TV and the Brazos Food Bank for the 6th Annual "Together We Can" Food Drive October 6th - 17th.

Help us help the Brazos Valley. Bring in 12 or more non-perishable food items to TCA Cable TV October 6th-17th. You can benefit too! If you wish to subscribe to TCA Cable TV or upgrade your current service, you will receive free activation with your donation of 12 or more non-perishable food items.

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Together We Can!

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