

HINDSIGHT IS 20/20

Cameron Spikes returns to the A&M lineup after facing adversity, loss of vision on field

By JAMIE BURCH
Staff writer

When someone is born without the ability to see or hear, one or more of their other senses sometimes are heightened. If a person is blind, they may hear more clearly and from greater distances. If a person is deaf, they may have enhanced vision taste. And often times, it is easier to deal with because they never knew what it was like to see or hear properly.

But when someone loses sight because of an injury later in life, they are at an immediate disadvantage. Something they once took for granted now has them feeling lost and afraid. For several minutes, this harsh reality appeared to be the future of Texas A&M right tackle Cameron Spikes. Spikes started at right tackle his entire sophomore season and every game of the Aggie's 1997 re-game win streak. But against State, Spikes' world came to a screeching halt. Lying flat on his back and slowly regaining consciousness, Spikes tried to recall where he was and what had occurred. As the trainer rolled him over, Spikes felt an excruciating pain in his eye. "I couldn't see at all," Spikes said. "I honestly thought I was blind when it first happened. It scared me for a day or so." Fortunately, Spikes regained all use of his vision, but not before he had laser surgery to reattach his retina. In addition to the surgery, Spikes was withheld from contact drills for two weeks.



DAVE HOUSE/THE BATTALION

Junior offensive tackle **Cameron Spikes** will make his return to the starting lineup this weekend against Oklahoma State.

After reviewing the Iowa State game film, Spikes discovered the perpetrator, Cyclone defensive end Chin Achebe. Spikes said the eye poke was intentional.

"It was two minutes before the half," Spikes said. "I had been playing well and was beating the guy the whole game. He stuck his fingers straight out. There's only a small space in the face mask. It was as if he aimed for it."

"He came at me once, I tried to back up and he came at me again. The second time, he got me." More difficult than the pain

and the recovery for him, Spikes said, was sitting helplessly as his friends and teammates battled in a losing effort.

"It was really, really hard to watch [the Kansas State game on TV]," Spikes said. "I didn't stay in one place for very long. Playing ever since my freshman year, it was hard to just sit and watch."

Spikes was cleared for drills last Friday, but he had not practiced for two weeks. Therefore, the right guard was to be used only in emergency situations against Texas Tech.

"It was a lot harder [being on the sidelines] than watching,"

Spikes said. "I just helped encourage the offensive line and watched the plays they were running. That's all I really could do, be more or less a cheerleader."

Offensive coordinator Steve Marshall said he hopes Spikes will refrain from making a habit out of cheerleading.

"It doesn't look very pretty," Marshall said. "[Offensive lineman] Andy [Vincent] did a fine job Saturday, but Cam's the starter, has been, and you never want to take a guy out because of injury. I'm looking forward to him getting back into the lineup."

Injured left tackle and teammate Chris Ruhman agrees with Marshall's sentiments.

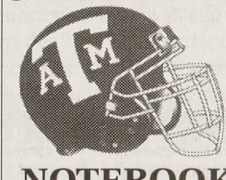
"Our cheerleading days are pretty much over," Ruhman said.

Spikes now is where he belongs: back on the playing field. After a two-week shelf life, the lineman is preparing to retake his position at right tackle face against Oklahoma State on Saturday.

Do not be shocked if you are unable to recognize the husky lineman. Spikes is adding a face-guard shield to his helmet. Much like Dante Hall, Spikes will don the visor to protect the healing retina and prevent further damage.

"I'll also recommend (a shield) for the rest of the offensive linemen," Spikes said. "Nothing like this has ever happened to me before. A lot of the guys don't like it because it's a big hassle. When it gets wet, foggy and dirty, it's high-maintenance, but as long as I'm playing football, I'll always have one."

OSU, A&M set to battle for wild, Wild South



NOTEBOOK

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CHRIS FERRELL
Sports editor

There's no place like home. The Aggies will be playing at home for the first time in three weeks. They return to Kyle Field this weekend reeling from two devastating losses on the road, one a 36-17 drubbing by Kansas State and the other a last-second loss to Texas Tech.

"It will be nice to be back home," junior safety Rich Coady said. "It's not a good road experience when you lose two on the road. It'll be nice playing a night game back at Kyle Field."

The game has been moved from its original 1 p.m. kickoff to 6 p.m. because the game was picked up by the FOX television network.

Stew the man.

Junior Brannndon Stewart has won back his starting quarterback job thanks to his performance against Texas Tech last week.

Sophomore Randy McCown, who learned shortly after the coin toss last week he was going to start, struggled in the first half and was replaced by Stewart at half time.

Coach R.C. Slucum said he was pleased to see the way Stewart responded in last week's game.

"I'm really proud of him," Slucum said. "I told him yesterday this could at least make him a better person, and it also could help him become really a good football player because he's had his share of rough roads."

All systems go.

The Aggies should be close to full strength for the first time in weeks. Starting offensive tackles Cameron Spikes, who missed the last two games with a torn retina, and Chris Ruhman, who is expected to play a few weeks earlier than first expected after injuring his knee, both are scheduled to return to the lineup.

"This sucks, quote sucks," Ruhman said. "Being injured sucks. It's a bum thing. You're seeing your friends and teammates out there and you can't do a damn thing to help them. You're just sitting there on the couch. It bums me out, it really bothers me."

PLEASE SEE FERRELL ON PAGE 8.

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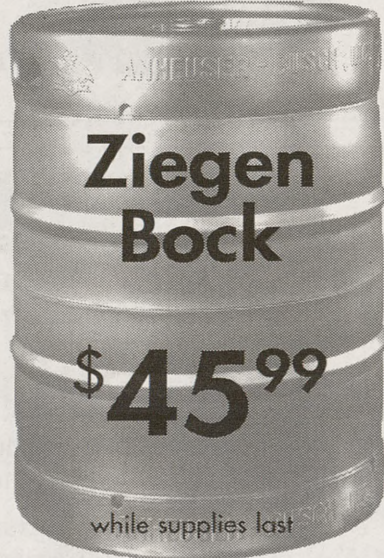
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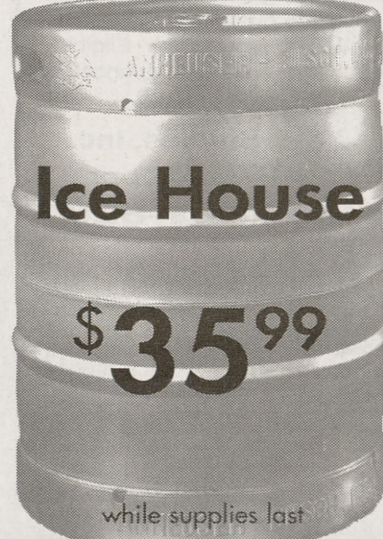
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