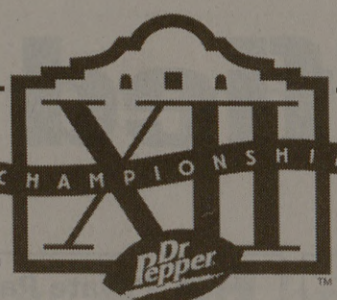


TEXAS A&M — CHAMPIONSHIP — NEBRASKA



# GUT-CHECK

## Given little chance to upset Huskers, Aggies set to battle for Big 12

By TRAVIS V. DABNEY  
Staff writer

arren Davis, Mike Lawrence, Williams (Texas Tech), Jabobbs and Ricky Williams (Texas Tech). These are some of the offensive backs the Texas A&M football team has faced on the ball field to date. While the Aggies may not have completely downed every one of the backs, in most cases they did it took to win the game. Saturday's game against the Nebraska Cornhuskers poses a new dilemma for the Aggies: not only will the Aggies be

posed with the challenge of stopping the Cornhuskers and their rushing attack which leads the nation, averaging 397 yards per game. The Aggies will likely face the best running back quarterback tandem in the country. Scott Frost and Ahman Green form what has become a very potent one-two punch as both have gone for over 1,000 yards rushing this season. The Aggies will also have to contend with what most feel is one of the best offensive line units in college football as the Huskers average an incredible 297 pounds up front. "Their offensive line is just in-

credible and they execute their scheme very well," senior defensive lineman Brad Crowley said.

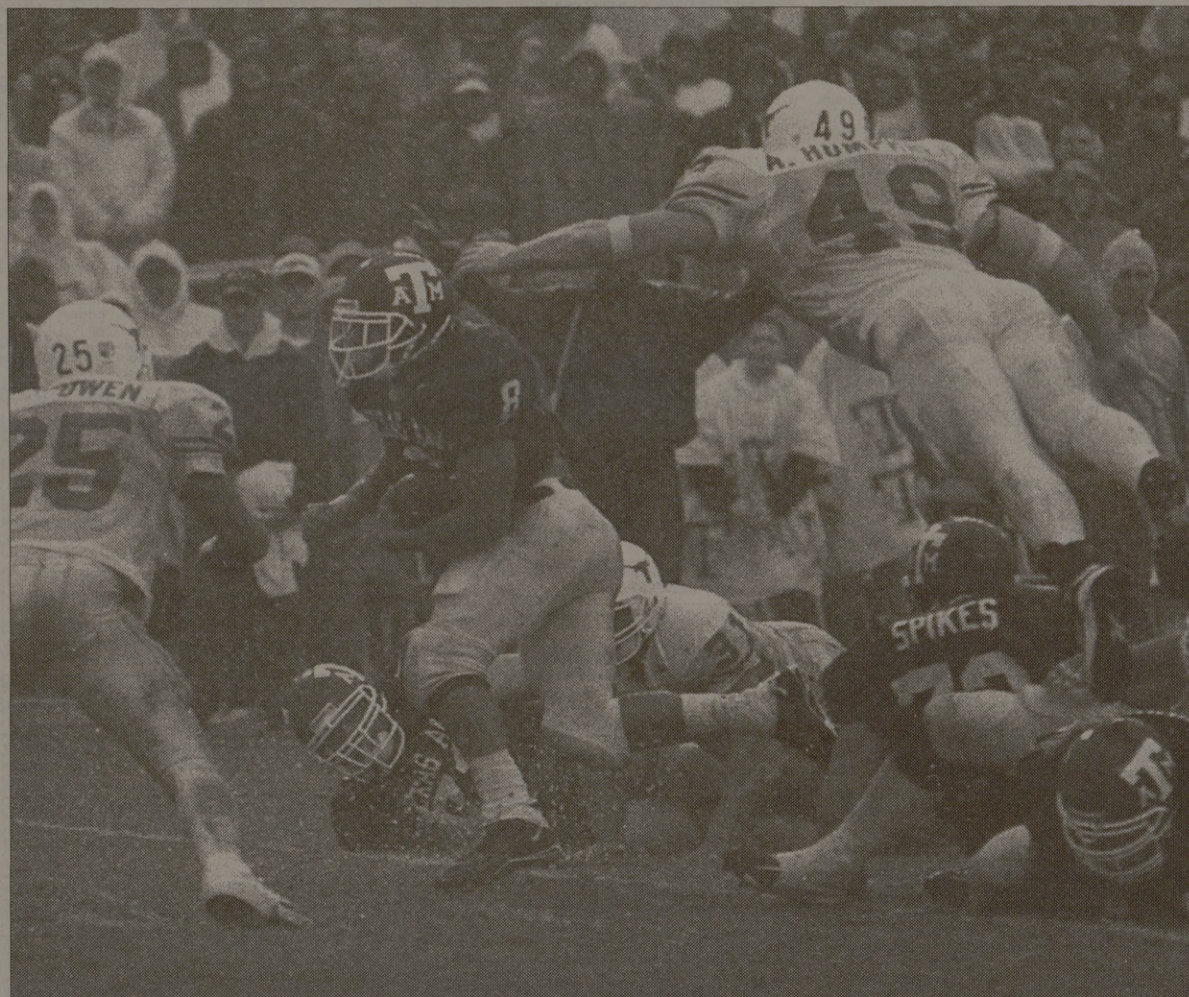
While the Aggies will have their hands full with the Nebraska option attack, the Aggies seemed convinced that they will have plenty to offer the Huskers when Brannndon Stewart is under center.

"We are more comfortable with the offense right now than we have ever been," junior tight end Dan Campbell said. "We know that if we have to pass the ball it will be there. If there is a weakness on their team it is the secondary, still they are an above average unit."

The Huskers defense has not been totally impenetrable this season as several teams have moved the ball on them. Central Florida, Missouri and Colorado all had success with the combinations of their running game and passing. That being said, the Huskers still have the nation's fourth-best defense while giving up a total of only 255 yards per game.

"They are a very difficult team to go four yards and a cloud of dust on," offensive coordinator Steve Marshall said. "We are going to have to be very balanced on game day."

The balance Marshall is referring to has really come to the forefront in the second half of the season with the emergence of junior quarterback Brannndon Stewart. Stewart took over the quarterback position in the second half of the Aggies' game with Texas Tech and has yet to look back. The Aggies, led by Stewart, have not lost a game since that heartbreaker to Tech and much of the team's success can be traced to Stewart. Stewart has accumulated some impressive numbers since that cold day in Lubbock as he has passed for five touchdowns, zero interceptions and a total of 800



DAVE HOUSE/THE BATTALION

Junior SIRR PARKER and the Aggie offense will face a tough task against the nation's fourth-ranked defense.

yards passing. There will be several keys for the Aggies in this game, one of which will be to maintain the excellent turnover ratio that the team has acquired up to this point of the season. The Aggies were very generous in the '96 season with turnovers, giving away the ball 28 times in all while only taking it away 25. This season has been a reversal of fortune for the Aggies as they have handed the ball away a paltry 13 times compared to taking the ball

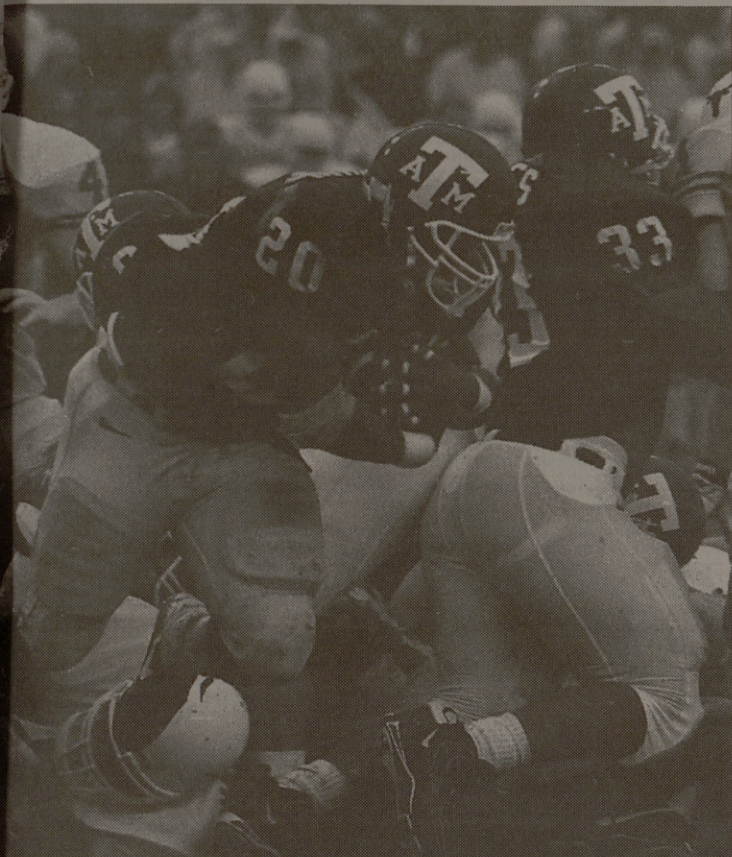
away from the opponent 29 times. The Aggies also will have to continue their trend of not allowing the big play. The Aggies have allowed only one play of over forty yards this season, and with the Nebraska offense and their tendency to jump on a team with quick strikes this will be a necessity for the Aggies.

Maybe the most important factor of all is the confidence the A&M team will have when they walk onto that turf in the Alamo-

dom in San Antonio. Nebraska, with their bright red and white uniforms strikes fear in many opponents before the first snap is ever taken, but the Aggies don't seem to be in awe of the Huskers.

"When we go into the offseason and get up 6 a.m. to lift weights and run, we don't do all that to keep games close," junior running back SIRR PARKER said.

"We do that to win games, and that's our main focus this week. We are not scared of Nebraska."



RYAN ROGERS/THE BATTALION

Junior D'Andre Hardeman and the A&M backs will look to pound Nebraska.

## Nebraska takes lesson from last year into title game

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The Nebraska Cornhuskers have changed the way they feel about the Big 12 championship.

Entering last year's game in St. Louis, Nebraska had proclaimed the contest a nuisance — another potential pitfall as the Huskers strived for three straight national titles.

Tom Osborne's concerns were realized when Texas won 37-27.

The Huskers insist things are different now. The trip to San Antonio for Saturday's game between No. 2 Nebraska (11-0) and No. 14 Texas A&M (9-2) is no longer a necessary evil. It's part of the schedule.

"This year, it's something everybody expects," quarterback Scott Frost said. "We're going to go down there and play, and we're looking to get some redemption from last year."

Like last year, Nebraska is favored. Yet the Huskers maintained

this week that a victory is no foregone conclusion. Osborne and his players said last year erased any chance of that feeling.

In 1996, a pressure-packed season bottomed out against Texas. All year long, the Cornhuskers had been shadowed — even haunted — by their two titles and the hunger for a third.

A 19-0 loss at Arizona State in the second game made for a rocky start. Nebraska played the rest of the way knowing that another loss would mean no national title.

"It seemed like it took all the focus we possibly had to just climb ourselves out a hole we dug and get back in contention for the national championship," Osborne said.

Nebraska cruised through its Big 12 schedule with little resistance. Then, in the regular season finale, the Huskers outlasted Colorado in a

17-12 slugfest on a rainy and cold day in Lincoln.

"That was a very big win for us," said defensive end Grant Wistrom. "Then it was like, 'Wow, we've got to get back up for another game.'"



Wistrom

Unfortunately for the Huskers, Osborne said they were drained emotionally and physically. About 35 players missed at least one day of practice before the Texas game with the flu.

"There was some flu bug, some emotional things," Frost said. "The Colorado game was very emotional. Some of the problems we had through the year, with people

changing positions, distracted us from the game.

"Then there was all the talk around here about whether we should even be playing in this game," Frost said.

It ended with John Mackovic's fourth-and-inches gamble from the Texas 28 with 2:38 left, as the Longhorns nursed a 3-point lead. James Brown's 61-yard pass to Derek Lewis set up the final touchdown on the next play.

"We still talk about it," said Nebraska defensive tackle Jason Peter. "It was embarrassing what happened to us... We haven't forgotten it, and we don't want to go through that again."

It was a low point for all the Huskers.

"I don't think we were overconfident," Osborne said. "I think maybe we were a little fatigued going into the game last year. Our players knew

they had to perform. Sometimes the well is dry."

This year, Nebraska's players got their flu shots early. Although Colorado rallied for two late TDs last Friday, the Huskers said it wasn't as draining a game as the year before. And practice this week has been crisp.

"The guys who played in that (Texas) game last year have taken it upon ourselves to make sure there isn't that emotional letdown that usually follows the last game of the season," Wistrom said.

For the fifth straight year, Nebraska carries national title hopes into December. Osborne said the difference over last year is that this time his team is ready.

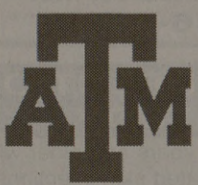
"Just being around them, I don't feel we've run out at this point, that we can't go out and play a great game... I feel we're in a better place now than we were a year ago," he said.

### Game tickets still available

(AP) — The Big 12 championship may officially be a sellout, but around 3,000 tickets for Saturday's game between

No. 2 Nebraska and No. 14 Texas A&M are for sale through the Aggies' ticket office.

A&M announced Thursday afternoon that the league had given it a batch of \$60 tickets. The seats are located in the lower level of the Alamodome behind the A&M bench area.



## The Battalion's 1997 Staff Picks

### The Match-Ups

#14 Texas A&M vs. #2 Nebraska (16)a  
#11 Auburn vs. #3 Tennessee (-6.5)b  
#20 Colorado St. (9.5) vs. New Mexico c  
Toledo @ Marshall (-11.5) d  
Army vs. Navy (-12.5) e  
Panthers @ Cowboys (NL)  
Vikings @ 49ers (-6.5)  
Packers (-3) @ Buccaneers  
Patriots @ Jaguars (-3.5)  
Giants @ Eagles (-5)  
Broncos @ Steelers (-1.5)  
Lions @ Dolphins (-3)  
Last Week  
Cumulative

Chris Ferrell	Paul Mitchell	Jeremy Furtick	Kristina Buffin	Jamie Burch	Matt Mitchell	Stephen Boudreau	Travis Dabney	Margaux Harris	Len Callaway	Jeff Schmidt	Jeff Webb	Jason Whitcomb	Consensus
Nebraska	Nebraska	Texas A&M	Texas A&M	Nebraska	Nebraska	Nebraska	Nebraska	Texas A&M	Texas A&M	Nebraska	Texas A&M	Texas A&M	Nebraska: Ags need big fan turnout in SA
Tennessee	Tennessee	Tennessee	Auburn	Tennessee	Tennessee	Tennessee	Auburn	Tennessee	Tennessee	Auburn	Auburn	Tennessee	Tennessee: Manning finally wins big game
Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.	Colorado St.: They have to play this one
Marshall	Marshall	Toledo	Marshall	Marshall	Marshall	Marshall	Toledo	Marshall	Marshall	Marshall	Marshall	Toledo	Marshall: The Randy Moss showcase
Army	Navy	Navy	Navy	Navy	Navy	Navy	Army	Army	Army	Army	Navy	Army	Navy: Classic battle moves from Philly
Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys	Panthers	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys	Panthers	Cowboys	Panthers	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys: There is no tomorrow
49ers	49ers	49ers	49ers	49ers	49ers	49ers	Vikings	49ers	49ers	49ers	49ers	Vikings	49ers: Clinch home-field advantage
Buccaneers	Packers	Packers	Packers	Packers	Packers	Packers	Packers	Packers	Packers	Packers	Packers	Buccaneers	Packers: Battle of the Bays finally competitive
Patriots	Jaguars	Jaguars	Patriots	Jaguars	Jaguars	Jaguars	Patriots	Patriots	Jaguars	Jaguars	Patriots	Patriots	Jaguars: AFC Championship rematch
Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles: Win crucial for Cowboys' hopes
Broncos	Steelers	Broncos	Broncos	Broncos	Steelers	Steelers	Steelers	Broncos	Broncos	Broncos	Broncos	Steelers	Broncos: Kordell learns from the master
Dolphins	Dolphins	Dolphins	Lions	Lions	Dolphins	Dolphins	Dolphins	Dolphins	Dolphins	Dolphins	Lions	Lions	Dolphins: Jimmy has Miami on a roll
5-7	1-11	3-9	4-8	3-9	1-11	1-11	1-11	1-11	3-9	1-11	6-6	1-11	Last Week: 31-125: Bad, bad week
83-70-3	72-81-3	83-70-3	78-75-3	73-80-3	75-78-3	75-78-3	69-84-3	73-80-3	49-45-2	52-66-2	75-78-3	75-78-3	Cumulative: 973-982-38: Bump in the road

a. Big 12 Championship @ San Antonio; b. SEC Championship @ Atlanta; c. WAC Championship @ Las Vegas; d. MAC Championship; e. @ East Rutherford, N.J.