

Kickoff Classic

Texas A&M vs. Florida State

Aggies tested early against 'Noles

A&M rushing attack will face Florida State's national No. 1 rushing defense from 1997.

BY AARON COHAN
The Battalion

It was once said, "To be the best, you must eat the best." Call it a royal rumble, a battle of the titans, or a test like no other. This is the year when Texas A&M University football coach R.C. Slocum will step up to the plate along with his multi-talented student athletes to face the annual football powerhouse, Florida State University.

As the maroon-and-white clad Aggies take the field against FSU, all eyes will be keenly focused on the game that, with a victory by the home Star visitors to the Big Apple, could break the A&M program wide open.

"In order to become a well-known football program," Slocum said, "you must prove to everyone in the country that you can run with the big boys."

Everything seems to be in order. The fifth-oldest active Division I coach, the seventh-oldest program in the '90s, and seven bowl appearances in nine years highlight the Aggie resumé for the Kickoff Classic.

"It is a chance to get national recognition for a program that has always been knocking on the door," Slocum said.

Players say the chance to see the Big Apple and play in front of a nationally-televised audience provide motivation for facing the Seminoles, but a 13-inch TV/VCR combo from Kickoff Classic officials is a nice bonus in the trouble.

"New York has always been a place I had wanted to see," junior running back Dante Hall said, "and now I've got that chance."

However, the Aggies are not just there to catch a glimpse of the Statue of Liberty or Radio City Music Hall. They said they traveled to the neutral grounds of the Meadowlands to win a football game.

"It's a measuring stick," offensive lineman Cameron Spikes said, "to show us how good we really are."

defense from last season, minus those players, when they take the field against Florida State. However, rankings and reputation do not faze senior running back D'Andre Hardeman.

"They have yet to face my boys [Hall, Parker, and Bernard] and I," he said.

The offense said they want to make a statement to the nation, but the defense speaks loudly about their own prowess.

The vaunted "Wrecking Crew" defense built its reputation on stopping players like Florida State running back Travis Minor, a product of the same Baton Rouge high school as former teammate Warrick Dunn.

"I don't care who it is," senior linebacker and Butkus Award candidate Dat Nguyen said. "We are going to play the best football we are capable of."

With the Aggies giving up a school record-low three touchdown passes a year ago, players say a highly regarded quarterback like FSU's Chris Weinke does not make them shudder in their boots. Defensive coordinator Mike Hankwitz told his players to not fear the Seminoles, but prepare to nail them.

"Coach Hankwitz has molded us into a crew ready to hit with the hardest," senior linebacker Warrick Holdman said.

With the mighty Seminoles a 14.5 point favorite, the ABC announcers figure to have their work cut out for them keeping viewers in the second half of a blowout.

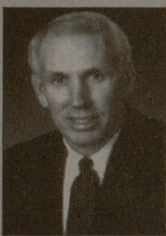
However, the small whisper of a few A&M players could turn into a booming voice if the team performs the way they say they can.

"Life is about changes and turnover," offensive coordinator Steve Kragthorpe said. "But you have to make sure the changes you make are to your advantage."

At 7 p.m. tonight, the A&M football team will put forth their best effort to change one thing in the young campaign.

They will try to add a win to the 1998 season.

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— R.C. SLOCUM

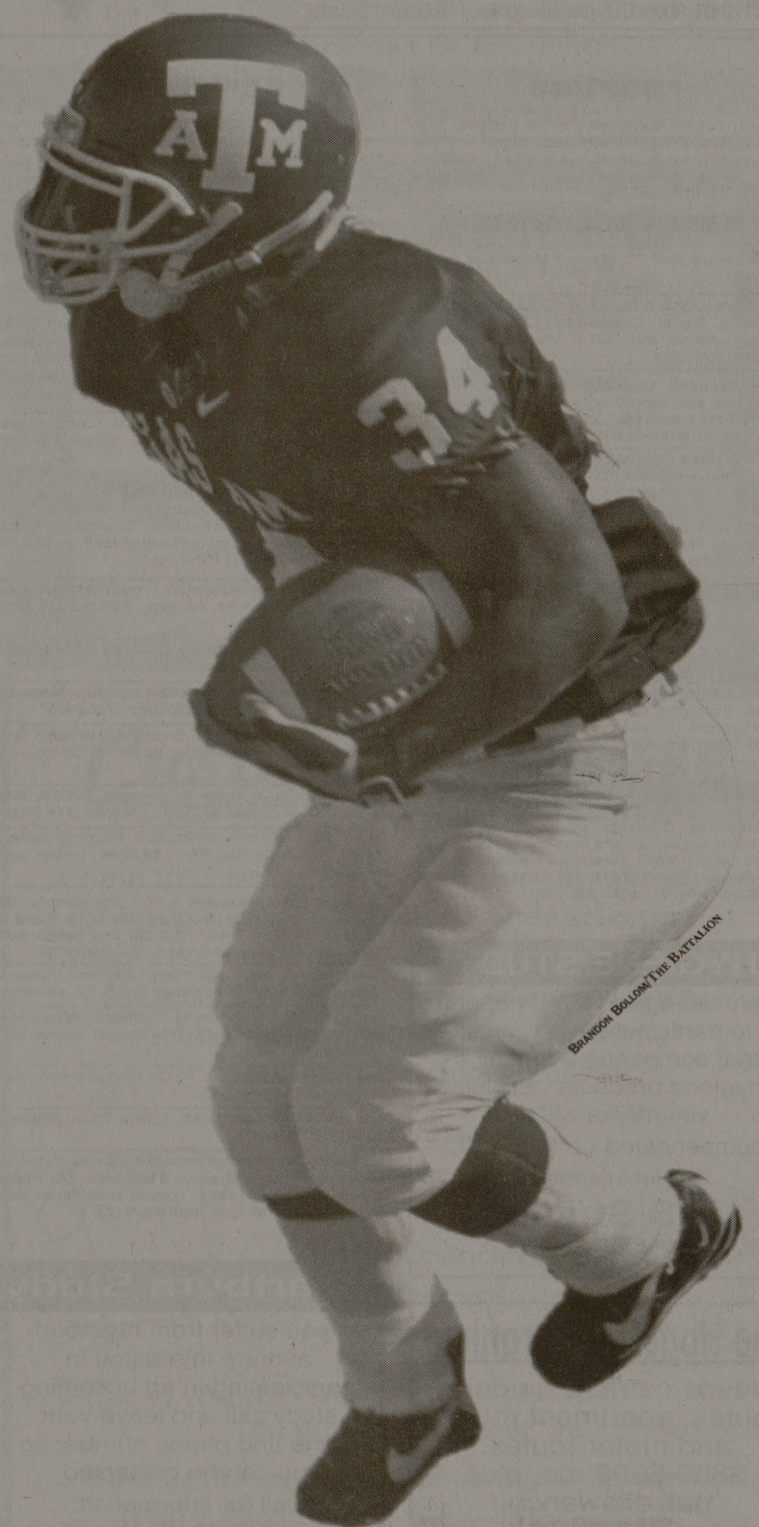
AGGIE FOOTBALL COACH

Spikes, along with many other players, said he feels that just because A&M is not mentioned in the same sentence with FSU, Michigan, Ohio State and Nebraska, does not mean that the Aggies do not have the same potential as other teams.

Although the NFL raids the FSU talent pool every year for top round draft choices, no school replenishes its talent better than the Seminoles.

The FSU defense lost defensive back Samari Rolle and defensive lineman Andre Wadsworth, who was widely considered the top athlete in the 1998 NFL draft.

A&M will face the nation's top rushing de-



Balasson/Balasson/The Battalion

Welcome Back



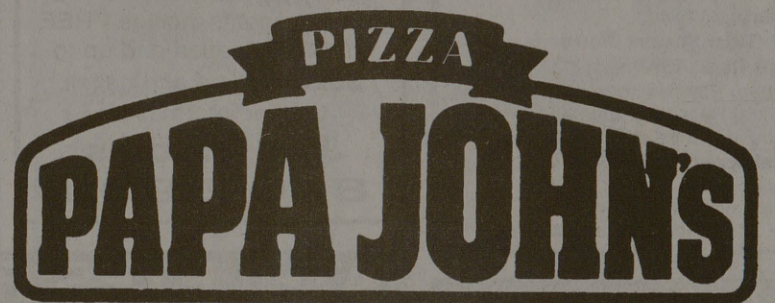
1 Large 1 Topping Pizza
&
Breadstix
\$9.99

*Customer pays applicable sales tax. Additional toppings extra.
Not valid with any other offers.
Available at any Huntsville and Bryan/College Station area location.

Aggies

Thrifty Eleven Fifty
1 Ex-Large 2 Topping Pizza
\$11.50

*Customer pays applicable sales tax. Additional toppings extra.
Not valid with any other offers.
Available at any Huntsville and Bryan/College Station area location.



Late Night Special
1 Large 1 Topping Pizza
\$6.99
10 p.m.-Close

*Customer pays applicable sales tax. Additional toppings extra.
Not valid with any other offers.
Available at any Huntsville and Bryan/College Station area location.

College Station

Aggie Bucks Accepted Here

1100 D Harvey Rd.
764-7272

601 University
Northgate & TAMU
846-3600

Bryan

3414 E. 29th Street
268-7272

