

1998 Texas A&M Football Preview



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JAKE SCHRICKLING/THE BATTALION

Behind Nguyen's Numbers

- 383 career tackles rank Nguyen fourth in school history. Nguyen is on pace to shatter the school record of 455 tackles, set by former Green Bay Packer Johnny Holland.
- Nguyen's career tackle-per-game average is 10.6, tied with Holland for school record.
- Has 22 double-digit tackle games to his credit.
- First player since Ed Simonini to lead A&M in tackles for three straight seasons.
- Cotton Bowl Defensive MVP against UCLA.
- First-team All-Big 12 selection in 1997.



NGUYEN
5'11", 221 lbs.
Rockport, TX
Fulton H. S.
Senior-3L
Linebacker

NGUYEN

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"That really helped everybody understand you can be different," Nguyen said. "Everybody grew together, and I think it helped the community see that you don't need to be a certain color and judge people from different races and colors."

Nguyen was so good he started getting scholarship offers from colleges and was named Defensive Player of the Year in his district.

Even though Texas A&M signed four other linebackers in 1994, Nguyen decided to be an Aggie.

Coming in to A&M, Nguyen weighed nearly 240 pounds, sat out his true freshman year and redshirted. He thought his weight was keeping him from playing and decided to lose 20 pounds.

"When I came in, it was tough. It wasn't a cakewalk," Nguyen said. "I didn't have the tools to play right away, and that opened my mind that I needed to improve."

Improve he did. Nguyen became the first freshman in A&M history to lead the team in tackles and earned Southwest Conference Defensive Newcomer of the Year honors.

Nguyen followed up that season with his best season to date, earning All-Big 12

honors after racking up 146 tackles and three interceptions.

Last year, Nguyen was named All-Big 12 for the second year in a row and ended the season with a spectacular game against UCLA in which he was named Cotton Bowl Defensive Most Valuable Player.

He made 20 tackles in the game, including a Cotton Bowl record 15 solo tackles. He even intercepted a Cade McNown pass, ran 19 yards and lateralled to junior safety Brandon Jennings, who ran the final 45 yards for a touchdown.

Nguyen currently has 383 career tackles and is on pace to break the A&M record of 455 set by two-time All-American Johnny Holland.

A&M Football coach R. C. Slocum said Nguyen may not be the most talented player at A&M, but he has the heart of a lion.

"He's one heck of a football player, plain and simple," Slocum said.

"I think it goes beyond physical tools. He's smart, has great instincts and takes great pride in what he does. He plays with such intensity. Dat is one of those guys that plays every play like it will be his last."

Senior linebacker Warrick Holdman agrees with Slocum's assessment.

"He's not the biggest, but he has a great heart," Hold-

man said. "Heart is more important than talent."

Even Nguyen's opponents have great respect for him.

"He's as fine a linebacker as I've seen in college football," Iowa State coach Dan McCarney said. "He's relentless, has tremendous speed and quickness. Every coach in America would love to have him on his football team."

"Dat Nguyen was all over the field. He's a great football player and a hard guy to block," UCLA coach Bob Toledo said.

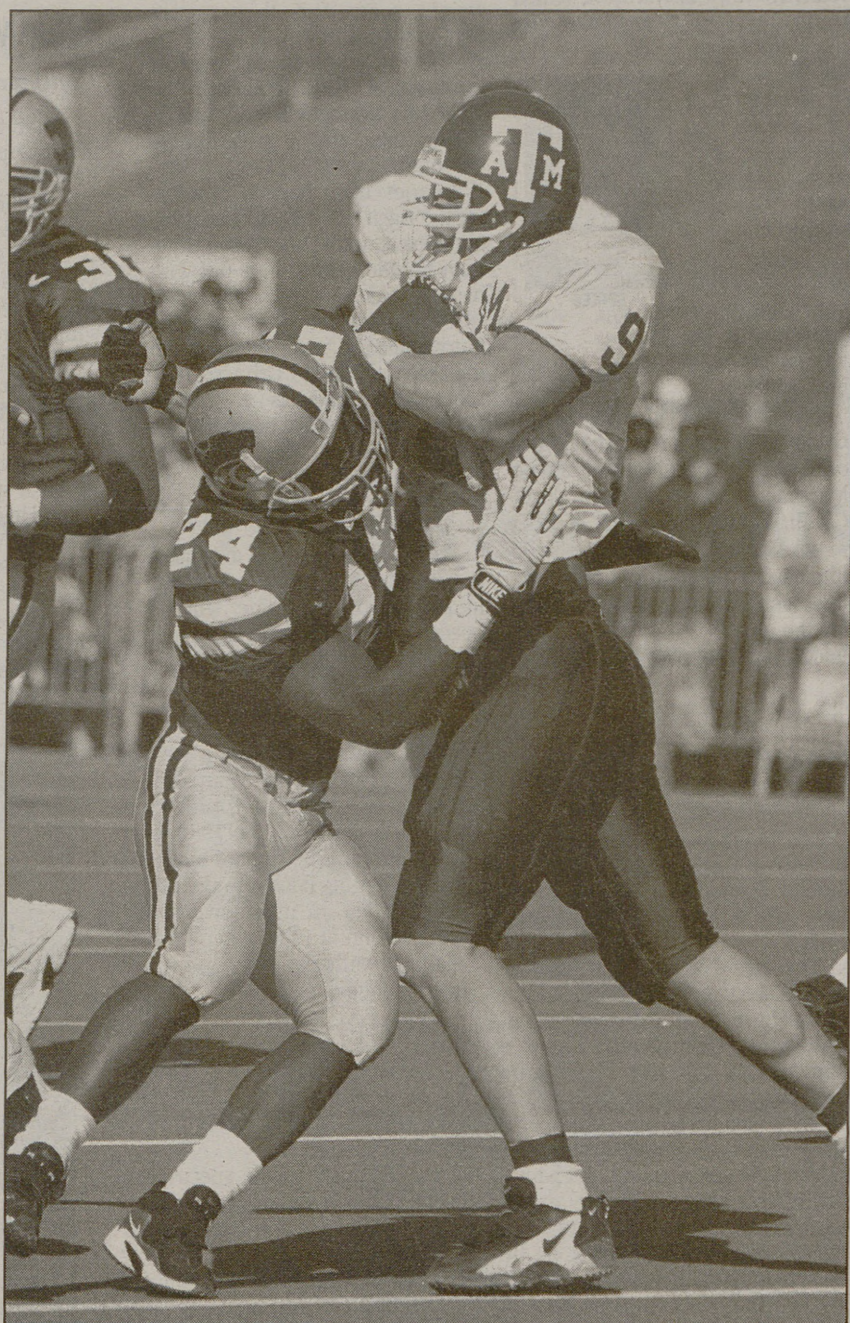
With these accolades and praises, Nguyen has become a candidate for the Butkus Award, which is given to the nation's best linebacker.

After the season? Who knows. Maybe he will be the first player of Vietnamese descent to play in the NFL.

"Just, give me a shot," Nguyen said. "But if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out. You've got to hang it up some time."

Even if Nguyen does not make it to the next level, he said he tries to be a role model for others.

"I would like to think that not just Asian kids look at me or Vietnamese kids look at me, but all different cultures come up to me and say 'You're a role model,'" Nguyen said. "Let them [kids] know there is another way and to stay out of trouble. I think any kid in the world would trade [for] where I'm at."



FILE PHOTO/THE BATTALION

TEXAS A&M FOOTBALL PREVIEW

The
Battalion

Cover art: Brad Graeber & Brandon Bollom

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