

CATCHING ON QUICK

Aggies expect big things from youthful receivers

By Robert Hollier
The Battalion

In the Aggies' season opener against Florida State, Texas A&M fans caught a glimpse of the changes in Aggie offensive play calling. To put it simply, the Aggies are going to throw the ball more.

In 1997, the Aggies averaged 169 passing yards a game to 205 rushing yards a game. This season, A&M will look to make their offensive attack more balanced and less predictable.

"We're going to call more passing plays," Texas A&M Football coach R.C. Slocum said, "but throwing the ball is not going to be a big change."

"All of our receivers had a good year last year. It was the most improved position and I expect them to all be better this year. They all showed significant improvement last year and in spring practices."

Another adjustment to

the offense which will be a welcomed sight for the Aggies is the presence of Sirtt Parker at receiver on more plays.

Playing Parker at receiver will allow the Aggies to take advantage of his 4.24-second speed in the 40-yard dash, and to get more of their multitalented running backs on the field at the same time. Parker's time in the 40-yard dash is a new Aggie record, breaking Leeland McElroy's record of 4.27.

"[Texas A&M offensive coordinator Steve] Kragthorpe has made our offensive scheme a whole lot easier," Parker said. "The transition was very smooth. He's more of a player's coach and he's easy to talk to."

Tight ends (seniors Daniel Campbell and Derrick Spiller) are also an asset for the offense. They are considered two of the best in the Big 12. Campbell and Spiller excelled at

blocking and catching the ball last season and figure to improve in 1998.

The Aggies' receiving corps also returns senior Aaron Oliver and juniors Chris Cole and Leroy Hodge, all of whom started for A&M at different times last year.

Cole led the receivers last year with 25 catches for 333 yards and three touchdowns. Hodge made 23 receptions for 336 yards and one touchdown, and Oliver made 16 grabs for 180 yards in a limited time because of injury.

Kragthorpe said the Aggies will look for contributions from junior Matt Bumgardener and sophomore Chris Taylor. The two combined for 13 receptions for 156 yards in 1997.

"Cole made significant improvement in the spring and he wants to be the go-to receiver," Kragthorpe said. "Hodge has been consistent and Oliver made big third down catches last

year. He hurt his knee in the spring, but is making good progress.

"Taylor moved from quarterback to receiver last year. He was a quarterback in high school, and for the first time, he was able to concentrate on being a receiver."

Cole, the Aggies' most consistent and productive receiver in 1997, is expected to make a bigger impact and produce even more this year. He is looking forward to a season that will see the Aggies put the ball in the air more.

"Anytime we throw the ball, it makes the receivers happy," Cole said. "We showed the coaches we could catch the ball in practice and hopefully we can go out and do it in the game and be successful."

"Our passing game will be a great complement to our already strong running game, and with Sirtt at receiver, it should really open the offense. He puts a lot of speed on the field."



BRANDON BOLLUM/THE BATTALION

Senior tight end Derrick Spiller dives for a touchdown against Baylor in last season's 38-10 win.

Weisinger comes back to his Texas roots

By Michael Taglienti
The Battalion

Every year hundreds of Texas high school football players decide that the grass is greener on the other side and decide to play college football for an out-of-state school. Some of these players succeed, some fail, and some decide that they really belong back in Texas.



WEISINGER

In the spring of 1995, Jeremy Weisinger was a senior at Uvalde High School and was one of the nation's top-rated quarterbacks. Recruited by college football powers from all over America, Weisinger narrowed down his college choices to Texas A&M and the University of Colorado. He decided Colorado and its

hotshot new coach Rick Neuheisel would be the best situation for him.

Weisinger redshirted his first year at CU, was third string as a freshman and was to be the backup to John Hessler in 1997 before he broke his leg in a weight room accident.

After recovering from the broken leg, 1998 was going to be the year that Weisinger finally became the starting quarterback at CU.

Unfortunately, Neuheisel had a different opinion and Weisinger decided he should look into going back to Texas.

So Weisinger decided to transfer to A&M. In compliance with NCAA rules he will have to sit out a year before being eligible to play for the Aggies.

Weisinger said he knew where he wanted to go when he decided to leave CU.

"I have always liked A&M," Weisinger said. "I have been coming to games since I was a kid and I have a bunch of family that went to school here. Coach

Slocum recruited me pretty heavily out of high school and I always liked the school."

Weisinger has switched positions from quarterback to strong safety and said he is working on learning his new position.

"I like playing strong safety a lot," Weisinger said. "I have not played it since my sophomore year of high school. I definitely need some coaching and [I] need to work on my fundamentals because I do not have my backpedaling down."

Defensive backs coach Larry Slade said Weisinger's previous experience as a quarterback should help him as a safety.

"I think when it will really help him is when we start studying opponents and we get into different formations," Slade said. "Because he has played quarterback he knows where the quarterback wants to go with the ball in certain formations."

Senior safety Rich Coady said he has been surprised by Weisinger's athletic ability.

"The guy came in as a quarterback, yet he is extremely fast and strong," Coady said. "I think he has got all the talent to be a top major college safety."

Coach R.C. Slocum said

"I think he has got all the talent to be a major college safety."

— Rich Coady
Senior safety

Weisinger has had no trouble fitting in at A&M.

"The first night he was at practice, the seniors from the Corps came over to wish the team luck for the season, and a couple of guys from San Antonio started talking with him about playing against him in high school,"

Slocum said. "Pretty soon he was surrounded by a large group of cadets who were talking [about] playing high school football, so he pretty much fit in here from the beginning."

Weisinger hopes to follow in the footsteps of a fellow Uvalde High School graduate named Vann McElroy. McElroy is the only other player from Uvalde to ever receive a Division I football scholarship. Like Weisinger, McElroy played both quarterback and safety in high school and went to college, where he started out as a quarterback and was switched to safety. McElroy went on to be a star at Baylor and had a successful 10-year career in the NFL with the Oakland Raiders and the Seattle Seahawks.

Weisinger said he has always looked up to McElroy.

"He is a great guy," Weisinger said. "He is a Christian guy with great morals and great values who cares a lot about his family. He has been a big influence in my life."

DEPTH CHART

RT	78	ANDY VINCENT, 6-3, 301, Jr-2L, Sulphur, La.
	79	SHEA HOLDER, 6-5, 304, Jr-1L, Arlington
RG	62	*SEMISI HEIMULI, 6-2, 303, Jr-2L, Euless
	71	CHRIS VALLETTA, 6-2, 306, So-1L, Plano
C	77	SETH MCKINNEY, 6-3, 293, Fr-RS, Austin
(or)	56	TOBY MCCARTHY, 6-2, 283, So-SQ, Midland
LG	73	*CAMERON SPIKES, 6-3, 310, Sr-3L, Bryan
	70	MOSES VAKALAH, 6-5, 307, Fr-RS, Euless
LT	53	REX TUCKER, 6-5, 290, Sr-3L, Midland
	74	TANGO MCCAULEY, 6-4, 290, Fr-RS, Oklahoma City, Okla.

* Denotes returning starter.

OFFENSE

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Spikes and junior right guard Semisi Heimuli are the only returners from last season, which means they will have to shoulder the load of leading the squad.

"That's part of being an offensive lineman," Spikes said. "Learning to trust the people around you and knowing your buddy is going to do his job is important. We've got the best athletes."

New offensive line coach J.B. Grimes replaces former coach and offensive coordinator Steve Marshall, who is now with North Carolina. Grimes said Spikes might be one of the most athletic linemen in the country and someone who can provide leadership for the unit.

"He's an unbelievable athlete,"



SPIKES

he said. "He's 303 lbs. and 8.8 percent body fat. There are not five linemen in the country that are like that."

"His work ethic is phenomenal, and the way he attacks the weight room and the practice field is awesome."

The entire line is composed of prototypical NFL linemen. The A&M line averages 6-feet, 3-inches per man and a scale-tipping 299 pounds.

Injuries have been a problem for the Aggies in the past and 1998 is no exception. This season, lineman Brandon Houston is out with back problems.

"We've got enough experience, but we need to bring kids along in the second line," Grimes said. "Tango McCauley is a redshirt freshman who we've moved to the offensive side of the ball [from defensive line]. We felt like we needed a guy after we lost Houston to injury."

For the Aggies to dominate opponents in 1998, a strong, injury-free offensive line will be needed. Ask Spikes. Even a fool would know that.

BACKS

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"It really doesn't bother me because I know that whomever is behind Brannon [Stewart] at the time will get the job done," Parker said.

The brute force that defenses hate to see comes rumbling at them in the form of D'Andre Hardeman. The senior from North Shore is known as a specialist in powering over defensive linemen and anyone else who tries to stop him. Hardeman is currently ninth on the school's all-time rushing touchdown list. After a preseason injury to full-back Marc Broyles, Slocum said Hardeman would take over as the muscle in the backfield.

Hardeman is confident because of Slocum's faith in Hardeman's ability.

"I take pride in knowing that

DEFENSE

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Brooks received a baptism by fire against Florida State, lining up against All-American Peter Warrick. Warrick ended the game with nine catches, 106 yards, one touchdown and a Player of the Game trophy.

However, Brooks made some plays of his own, recording five tackles and two fumble recoveries, one of which Brooks returned for a touchdown.

Overall, A&M Football coach R. C. Slocum is gratified with Brooks' ability.

"I was pleased with Jay Brooks' performance and coverage of Peter Warrick to the extent that he did in the Florida State game, since it was the first game of his college career," Slocum said. "He'll take big leaps from having had that intense of an experience that early in his career."

Slade agrees with Slocum's assessment. "I think the thing Jay Brooks brings, along with

his athletic ability, is his awareness," Slade said.

Once again, Coady and Jennings will be patrolling from their safety spots.

"Rich has played a lot of football around here," Slade said. "He's seen a lot of different pictures. He's got tremendous work ethic."

The defensive back situation became more muddled this summer after the dismissal of Jeff Wilson and Delvin Wright. Fortunately, A&M was able to lure track standout Michael Price back to the football team after a one-year hiatus.

"It was in his blood, and he wanted to play ball," Slade said. "Will he contribute or not? I'm not sure. He does have some real good ability. He has some things like speed that you can't take away. What he lacks is strength and knowledge. He'll have to catch up."

The secondary better be as good as advertised. After all, Louisiana Tech's record-setting pitch and catch tandem of Tim Rattay and Troy Edwards comes to Kyle Field. Edwards had 21 receptions and 405 yards against Nebraska in a game earlier this year.

HEISMAN

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When Couch was a freshman, he considered leaving Kentucky after a disappointing season backing up Billy Jack Haskins.

But in came Coach Hal Mumme and out went the passing records. Couch's sophomore season: 3,884 yards and 37 touchdowns.

2. Wisconsin running back Ron Dayne. The only thing keeping Dayne from the Heisman is that he's never put up great stats against a REAL team. He did manage to rush for 1,457 yards despite missing the equivalent of nearly three games with injuries.

3. UCLA quarterback Cade McNown. McNown was the undisputed leader of the

nation's hottest team last year. Under McNown's direction, the Bruins averaged 40.7 points per game.

He is adept at both running and throwing, and he plays for a great team. That certainly will not hurt his Heisman chances.

4. Texas running back Ricky Williams. Williams is everyone's preseason favorite player, but I don't think he will win the Heisman simply because he IS the favorite to win it. The preseason favorite never wins it. Don't believe me? Ask Peyton Manning.

5. Syracuse quarterback Donovan McNabb. McNabb is a strong sleeper. He was absolutely brilliant against Tennessee earlier this year, throwing for 300 yards and making several spectacular plays. I believe McNabb could

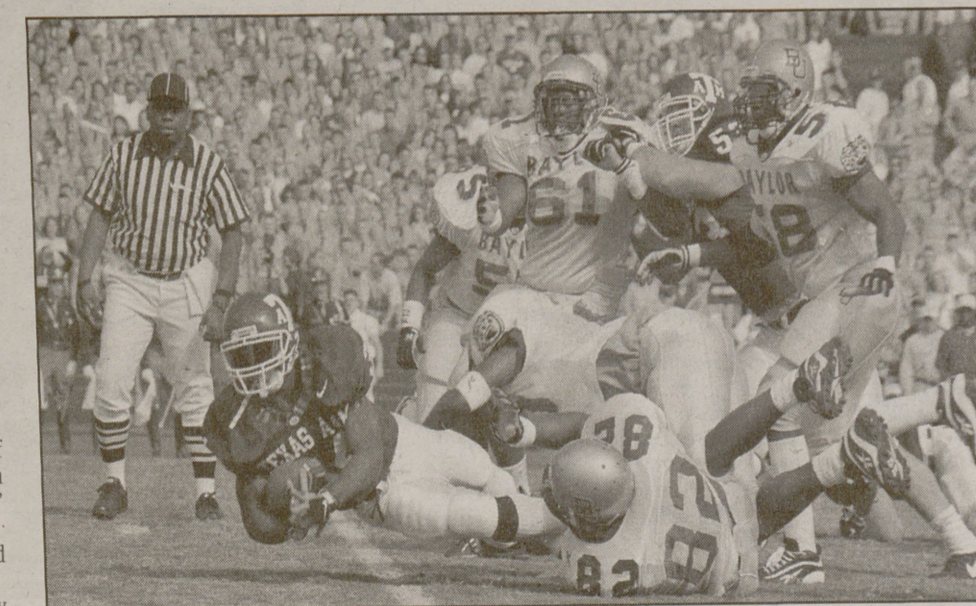
be another Steve McNair when he gets to the NFL.

6. Central Florida quarterback Daunte Culpepper. A lot of people are hopping on Culpepper's bandwagon, thinking it "trendy" to tout a small-college unknown. Culpepper was overlooked by many Division I schools because his grades were supposed to be poor.

Those same schools are kicking themselves. Culpepper went to UCF because they stuck by his side when the big schools stopped calling.

He has repaid UCF by becoming the university's all-time greatest player but he's still not going to win the Heisman.

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FILE PHOTO/THE BATTALION

Junior running back Dante Hall breaks through the Baylor defensive line for crucial yardage last season.