

## 1998 Texas A&amp;M Football Preview

## Just Nguyen, baby!



Texas A&M linebacker **Dat Nguyen** speaks at All-University Night last Wednesday.

## A&amp;M linebacker triumphs over racism

By **JEFF SCHMIDT**  
The Battalion

Dat Nguyen (pronounced DAT-WIN) has come a long way in a short time.

Nguyen recently received a degree in agricultural development and is considered one of the best linebackers in the country. He has been featured in ESPN The Magazine, USA Today, The Sporting News and even had an article in Sports Illustrated before he ever played a down of college football.

But it is thousands of miles from where Nguyen began, both literally and figuratively.

The Dat Nguyen story began before Sept. 25, 1975, his birthday. It began when his parents left their home in Vietnam to flee from the Ho Chi Minh-led communists. Nguyen's parents took their five children from their home near Saigon (now Ho

Chi Minh City) — Nguyen's mother was pregnant with Dat — and went to Thailand to wait for a U.S. Navy ship to evacuate them from Southeast Asia.

"My dad basically left everything he had back there," Nguyen said. "He didn't speak any English or have any money and coming over here, didn't know what to expect." From there, the Nguyens wound up in a refugee camp in Fort Smith, Ark., where Nguyen's mother gave birth to him. A Catholic church in Kalamazoo, Mich., raised enough money to buy the Nguyen family a car. They lived briefly in Kalamazoo, but Nguyen's father, Ho, decided to relocate the family because it was too cold in Michigan to make a living as a fisherman. The Nguyen family eventually ended up in Rockport, Texas, after stints in Dallas, New Orleans

and Biloxi, Miss.

While in Rockport (similar to the name of the city where the Nguyens lived in Vietnam, Ben Da, which means "Port of Rock"), Ho went back to shrimping and opened a restaurant and a marine-supply shop.

However, the Nguyens were not immediately accepted at Rockport. Perhaps it was because Ho was catching more shrimp than his rivals. The Ku Klux Klan came in at the behest of some Anglo shrimpers. A few Vietnamese shrimpers were beaten, and some had their boats burned.

"There was a lot of tension, but we did the best thing — we just ignored it," Nguyen said in a recent The Sporting News article. "I was always wondering why my parents would say to choose my friends carefully, to just stay with relatives. They couldn't trust anyone."

Ho eventually stopped shrimping about 10 years ago. Nguyen's parents sometimes had to work two jobs, but they scraped up enough money to put their children through college.

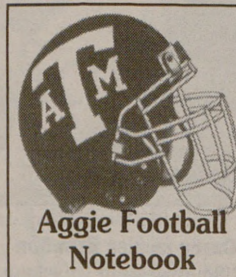
Fortunately for Ho and Tammy, they would not need to pay for Dat's education. Nguyen took up football while in junior high school after he realized he was bigger than everybody else. It was either that or boarding school, which is where his parents threatened to send him if he did not clean up his act.

"I would just go out with my friends and come in late," Nguyen said.

For Nguyen, football would become a good diversion from the tension in the area, and it would actually bring the community closer together.

SEE **NGUYEN** ON PAGE 12B.

## Last three Aggie games serve up tough opponents



Aggie Football  
Notebook



**JEFF SCHMIDT**

Welcome to the first Aggie Football Notebook of the 1998 season. As you should know by now, Texas A&M lost 23-14 to Florida State on Monday, Aug. 31.

It has to be consoling the Seminoles still had to come from behind to beat the Aggies despite A&M's poor showing in the second half.

## Back to the present?

Flash back to 1996. A&M opened the season with a tough 41-37 loss to Brigham Young in the Pigskin Classic.

The team took some time off and then played a team from Louisiana. They ended up losing to the University of Southwestern

Louisiana 29-22 after USL returned two interceptions and one fumble for touchdowns.

The Aggies ended up 6-6, the worst season in coach R. C. Slocum's tenure.

Fast-forward back to 1998. The current Aggies opened the season with a tough loss to FSU in the Kickoff Classic.

The team took some time off and will play high-powered (more on that later) Louisiana Tech Saturday. Kinda spooky, huh?

However, Slocum said he knows what he did wrong after the BYU game.

"We probably worked too hard," Slocum said. "We probably assumed the [1996] team was more mature than they were at the time."

## Nguyen, Lose or Draw

Senior linebacker Dat Nguyen had 13 tackles against FSU, giving him a career total of 383, fourth in A&M's annals.

He is on pace to be the school's career leading tackler.

## Tickets do not runneth over

Due to construction on The Zone, Kyle Field is about 12,000 seats smaller this season.

The October 10th game against Nebraska is already sold out, with more capacity games expected in the future.

## A season for the records

Louisiana Tech quarterback Tim Rattay has already thrown for 1,114 yards and seven touchdowns in two games this season.

Compare that to Aggie quarterback Brannndon Stewart's season in 1997. Stewart threw for 1,429 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Rattay is on pace for 6,684 yards (the NCAA record of 5,221 yards is held by former Houston Cougar David Klingler) and 42 touchdowns.

## Top five woes

Take a look at A&M's last three games. The Aggies played Nebraska, UCLA and Florida State. All three teams were (or are) in the top five.

This has to be one of the most

brutal stretches of games any team has ever faced.

## Impact starters

Sophomore linebacker Cornelius Anthony made his first start against the Seminoles and contributed 10 tackles.

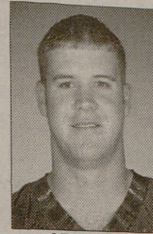
Redshirt freshman Jay Brooks made the splashiest debut, returning a fumble for a touchdown and making five tackles.

## Getting his kicks

Junior punter Shane Lechler is not a natural placekicker, but he may have to play one on TV (pay-per-view against Louisiana Tech). Lechler worked at kicker during practice this past week.

Sophomore kicker Russell Bynum hit two extra points against FSU, but Slocum said they were shaky.

Slocum will wait until game time before deciding on a kicker.



**LECHLER**

## Who in the world is Chad Frantzen?

Frantzen is a 6-feet 2-inch, 226 lbs. junior linebacker from Diana, Texas. He started out as a 12th Man, but was impressive enough Slocum gave him jersey No. 59.

He is now backing up Nguyen at inside linebacker.

## Injury update

Freshman linebacker Harold Robertson will miss the Louisiana Tech game due to shoulder surgery.

Junior wide receiver Matt Bumgardner is doubtful for the game because of a sprained ankle.

Junior guard Semisi Heimuli (sprained knee), sophomore wide receiver Chris Taylor (sprained ankle), sophomore defensive lineman Rocky Bernard (stinger) and senior running back Sirr Parker (muscle pull) are probable for the game.

Jeff Schmidt is a senior journalism major.

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## Director's Cut

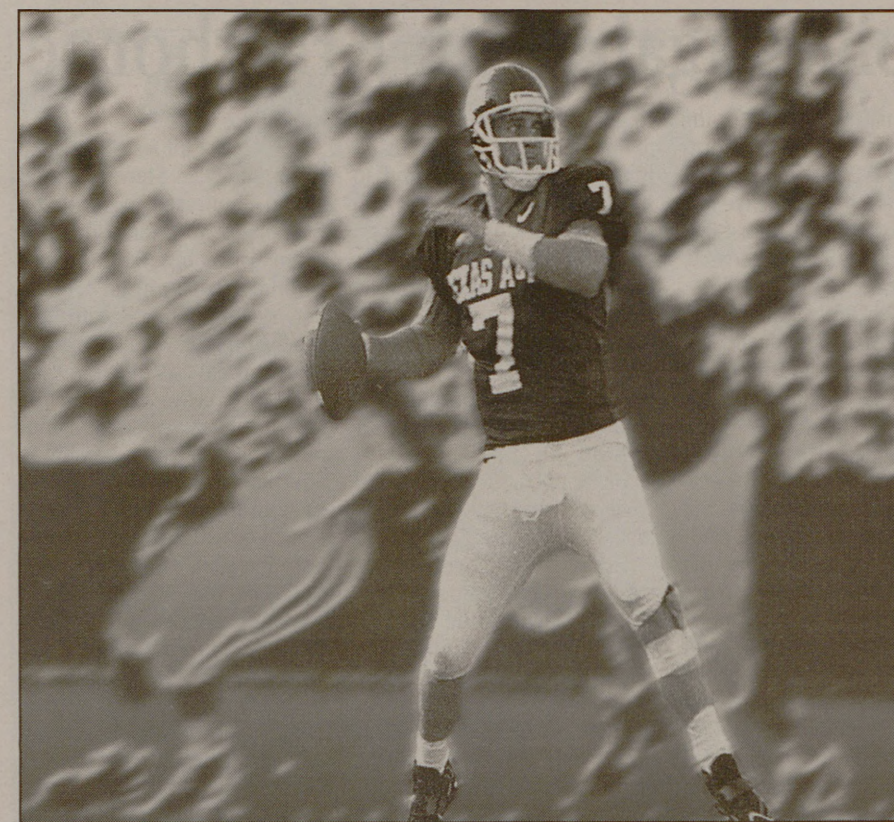


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JAKE SCHRICHLING & BRANDON BOLLOM/THE BATTALION

## Senior Brannndon Stewart serves notice: the Aggie offense is his

By **ROBERT HOLLIER**  
The Battalion

Every dark cloud has a silver lining. Or, look for the positive in a negative situation. Either way, that is what Aggie senior quarterback Brannndon Stewart did with his college football career.

In 1994, when Stewart was deciding where to play college football, he had a chance to come to Texas A&M, but he chose to take his talents to Tennessee. Unfortunately for Stewart, he was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

He had all the skills to be the quarterback for the Volunteers. He had only one problem; Tennessee already had a guy named Peyton Manning.

As a result, Stewart left Tennessee, transferred to A&M and brought a lot of hope, excitement and expectations with him.

"I wasn't too disappointed about what happened at Tennessee," Stewart said. "Peyton and I were playing well and the coaches had to make a decision. I wasn't getting outperformed. He just had a better understanding of the offense.

"The first time I came to A&M, I was really impressed. A&M would have been my second choice if I hadn't gone to Tennessee."

Now that he is in his third year as the Aggies' starting quarterback, the fifth-year senior is looking forward to leading this team to another Big 12 South title and, he hopes, a lot more.

"I think anytime you're a senior," Stewart said, "the coaches and players expect more from you. They want us to help the younger players as much as possible."

In his career at A&M, Stewart has completed 257 passes in 495 attempts and has thrown 19 touchdowns and 11 interceptions.

His most prolific game came in his sophomore year against Colorado. He completed 34 passes for 385 yards and one touchdown.

However, his best game was last season against Oklahoma State. With the Aggies trailing the Cowboys by 15 points in the fourth quarter, Stewart led the Aggies to a come-from-behind 28-25 overtime win. He completed 18 passes for 226 yards and one touchdown. But more importantly,

the win seemed to spark the Aggies as they went on to win the Big 12 South and earn a trip to the Cotton Bowl.

This season could have even better results as Stewart will be working with new offensive coordinator Steve Kragthorpe and an offense that will have the Aggies throwing the ball more.

Kragthorpe is the Aggies' fourth offensive coordinator in three years and he knew changes had to be made for A&M to compete at a higher level.

"It's not a big transition," Kragthorpe said. "We're going to do a lot of the same things as last year. The changes are subtle. It's mainly the terminology that we use."

"We've got a senior quarterback coming back and he's got a good command of the offense. He's got a lot of support and guys are helping him make plays."

Even though this is Stewart's fourth offensive coordinator, the changes are nothing new to him.

"I've got a unique problem," Stewart said. "I've never had the same offensive coordinator two years in a row. I'm used to coming in each spring and learning changes."



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