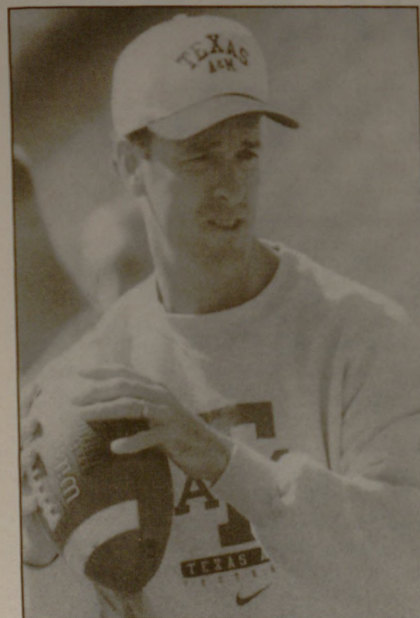


## Offensive coaching staff evolves again with Kragthorpe

BY JEFF WEBB  
The Battalion



COURTESY OF SPORTS INFORMATION/THE BATTALION  
Steve Kragthorpe, new to the Aggie coaching staff, is A&M's fourth offensive coordinator in three years.

It happens every fall. Leaves change color and fall to the ground. Students scramble to their new slates of classes. The Texas heat slowly melts away to reveal cooler temperatures and the beginning of Bonfire construction.

The Aggies change offensive coordinators.

Texas A&M Football has truly arrived for another season.

Nothing about the fall season rings more true than A&M losing an offensive coordinator, a tradition more than four years in the making.

And you know what they say around Aggieland: Do it thrice and it's a tradition.

Steve Kragthorpe will guide the Aggie offense for 1998, a job that comes with little security but high job placement. Steve Marshall, who held the

position in 1997, bolted for the same position at North Carolina. Mike Sherman accepted a job as offensive line coach for the Green Bay Packers. Steve Ensminger now runs the offense at Clemson.

And Bob Toledo, an Aggie offensive coordinator who left in 1993, coached Cotton Bowl-winner UCLA. Incidentally, the Bruins sent the Aggies home with a 29-22 loss on New Year's Day.

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

The A&M coaching staff promises big changes in the offense this year, namely the institution of a deep-threat passing game to complement the steady rushing attack.

"Throwing the ball deep is something we'd like to do," Kragthorpe said. "Defenses are

so good nowadays. It's so hard to line up and run 12 to 14 [plays a drive] each time to score. We want plays that will break the back of the defense."

Senior running back Sirr Parker said the new philosophy should open up opposing defenses by introducing more variables.

"Kragthorpe brought a whole different side to our offense," he said. "In the past, if you stopped the A&M ground game you stopped A&M. Now, that won't happen."

However, that very thing happened to the Aggies in their season opener, the Kickoff Classic against Florida State. The Seminoles held the Aggies to 33 yards rushing, and senior quarterback Brannndon Stewart netted only 100 yards passing on 10 completions.

Stewart is playing under his fourth offensive coordinator in as many years as a college sig-

nal caller.

"There's a lot less change of terminology," Stewart said. "From Tennessee to A&M, or Ensminger to Marshall, [the change] was big. For instance, at Tennessee, we used a number system. But Kragthorpe coached under Marshall, so the change wasn't as much."

A&M coach R.C. Slocum said the turnover at the coordinator position has not affected what he is trying to do with the ball.

"It's just different terminology," he said. "The guys have changed, but the philosophy has not changed. What we are trying to do in our offense has not changed. Who the guy is who has the title of offensive coordinator may change, but our philosophy has not changed."

Neither has the tradition of replacing yet another A&M offensive coordinator.



FILE PHOTO/THE BATTALION

Left guard Cameron Spikes blocks a Sam Houston State defensive lineman last season.

## Out with the old, in with the new



FILE PHOTO/THE BATTALION

Right guard Semisi Heimuli leads a sweep against Sam Houston State last season.

## Three young starters try to anchor heart of A&M offense

BY JEFF WEBB  
The Battalion

Senior left guard Cameron Spikes carried his solid frame into Cain Hall, wearing a sweat-drenched T-shirt reading "F.O.O.L." across his chest. But do not be fooled. Spikes knew the meaning of what he was wearing.

"It stands for

"Fundamentals of Offensive Line," he said.

It is back to the fundamentals for an offensive line that has had to replace three starters from a unit that led the Texas A&M Football Team to the Big 12 South title in 1997.

Freshman center Seth McKinney (brother of Indianapolis Colts starter Steve McKinney), senior left

tackle Rex Tucker and junior right tackle Andy Vincent enter the starting lineup as regulars for the first time in their careers.

However, two of the three grabbed precious playing time last season and figure to be huge (literally and figuratively) in the Aggies' bowl hopes in 1998. A&M senior running back Sirr Parker gave his

endorsement to the new-look line.

"There are a lot of fresh faces, but they played last year," he said. "We lost three guys, but the players we have now are just as good. We're just like Nebraska, where they have three deep ready for the NFL each year."

see **Offense** on Page 11B.

## The Three R's

Sophomore defensive linemen Rocky, Ronald and Ron enter 1998 as starters

BY JEFF SCHMIDT  
The Battalion

Coach Bill Johnson does not rebuild the defensive line—he reloads it. Last season's starting trio of seniors, Brad Crowley, Zerick Rollins and Marcus Heard, have exhausted their eligibility. So what. Johnson will just plug in a trio of sophomores: Rocky Bernard, Ron Edwards and Ronald Flemons.

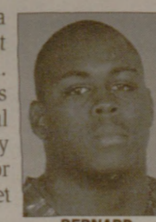
"Each one of them is a little different," Johnson said. "Rocky Bernard's a guy that has playmaking ability and a guy that can get off the block. He's a guy that has a good feel for the game,

and he sees a lot of things that you can't coach.

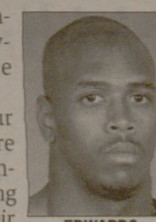
"Ron Edwards is a powerful guy. He is a guy that is hard for anybody to get movement on.

"Ron Flemons is getting better before my eyes. He's a guy that has great range. He can be on the backside of a play and be involved in a play that is on the other side of the field. He probably has more range for a defensive lineman than I've seen in a while."

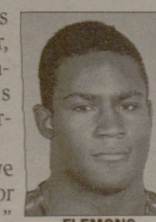
Those three join Evan Perroni, Terry Nichols and Lonnie



BERNARD



EDWARDS



FLEMONS

Madison as members of the ballyhooed defensive line Class of '97.

"All of our other guys are doing a tremendous job of being consistent in their technique," Johnson said. "I can't say there is a nickel of difference in ability from our first to our seventh guy."

Despite the praise, the defensive line appeared at times to be overmatched by Florida State. After all, they were the first line of a defensive unit that gave up 152 rushing yards to Florida State run-

ning back Travis Minor. However, Johnson is content with his players' performances.

"We still have a lot of area for improvement," Johnson said. "I was really pleased with the way they competed against a really good football team.

"I'd say our weakness is a lack of game experience, and that is just going to take some time. But if we keep developing at the rate we did in the game against Florida State and keep improv-

ing, I feel good about where we are going to be."

Bernard said he agrees with Johnson, but stresses they still have a long way to go.

"We've got to get together as a group," Bernard said. "We've a lot of work and a long way to go. We've gotten so much better than last year. We've just got to prove we can get the job done."

One advantage the Aggies have is the fact they can throw seven different linemen at their opponents. Johnson said he tries to mix different packages of linemen and throw them at the offense, while trying to keep them from playing more than 40 plays a game.

## Secondary to none

• A&M has history of producing NFL quality cornerbacks.



FILE PHOTO/THE BATTALION

BY JEFF SCHMIDT  
The Battalion

Death, taxes and NFL All-Pro former Texas A&M defensive backs. Aggie football has produced more defensive backs than any other school in college football.

Dave Elmendorf, Lester Hayes, Yale Lary, Bob Smith and Pat Thomas are just a few of the great defensive backs A&M has put into the NFL. Throw in some recent names like Kevin Smith, Aaron Glenn, Patrick Bates and Ray Mickens and you have quite a collection of talent. However, this Aggie team does not feature the outstanding individ-

ual talent of previous A&M teams.

"The big thing is that we have a bunch of guys who work hard," defensive backs coach Larry Slade said. "We have guys that are dependable. I'm not interested in a guy that has a lot of flash and that's great on two or three plays and that will give up two or three plays.

"I'm more interested in a guy that is going to go out, there and be reliable time in and time out and I think as a result, you win a lot of football games."

A&M's strength is clearly its experience—all four starters return from last year's 12th-

Junior cornerback Sedrick Curry tackles Brandon Stokley of the University of Southwestern Louisiana.

ranked pass defense—and there is a plethora of talented newcomers. Cornerbacks Sedrick Curry and Jason Webster and safeties Rich Coady and Brandon Jennings will again be the headlines, although redshirt freshman Jay Brooks has seemingly taken out and I think as a result, you win a lot of football games."

"Curry is definitely in the rotation," Slade said. "He's one of those guys who has started

some games around here. He had that injury [that required arthroscopic knee surgery] that set him back, but he's worked hard to come back from it.

"He kind of 'lost his glove' to Jay Brooks, and there is still a lot of competition going on there. Sedrick wants the opportunity to win his starting position back. We'll play Sedrick in a lot of nickel and dime situations."

SEE **DEFENSE** ON PAGE 11B.

### DEPTH CHART

CB	39	*JASON WEBSTER, 5-10, 178, Jr-2L, Houston
	31	ERIC JENNINGS, 5-10, 187, Jr-RS, Pomona, Calif.
CB	26	JAY BROOKS, 5-9, 180, Fr-RS, Killeen
	21	SHUN HORN, 5-9, 190, Sr-3L, Jasper
(or)	18	*SEDRICK CURRY, 6-2, 192, Jr-2L, Houston
FS	30	*BRANDON JENNINGS, 6-1, 191, Jr-2L, Houston
	5	TOYA JONES, 6-1, 204, Sr-3L, Refugio
SS	48	*RICH COADY, 6-1, 210, Sr-3L, Dallas
	1	MICHAEL JAMESON, 5-10, 179, So-1L, Killeen

\* Denotes returning starter.