

First-class exit

In his last game in Texas A&M uniform, senior tight end Derrick Spiller pulled in 5 passes for 43 yards in the Nokia Sugar Bowl.



SPILLER

Say what?

"We never thought about being out of it. We've come back so often, we always think we can do it again."

— **Brannond Stewart**
A&M quarterback

"In the first quarter we just didn't play well. It was just one of those things."

— **Dat Nguyen**
A&M linebacker

Big season ends in 'Big Easy'



LEFT: Aggie senior quarterback **Brannond Stewart** completed 22 of 39 passes in the Nokia Sugar Bowl on Jan. 1, setting A&M bowl records for both passes attempted and passes completed.
ABOVE: A&M senior linebacker **Dat Nguyen** recorded 14 sacks against Ohio State University in the Sugar Bowl, his 30th career double-digit sack game and sixth in a row.

BY JEFF SCHMIDT
The Battalion

NEW ORLEANS — The Big Easy was not too easy on the Aggies.

But more importantly, it was not exactly easy on the Ohio State University Buckeyes.

The Buckeyes defeated Texas A&M 24-14, but the Aggies proved to themselves they can play with any team.

"We're not going to be intimidated by anybody," senior tight end Dan Campbell said. "We're on Ohio State's and Florida State's level. We can hang with people like that."

"That's what we learned this year, and we passed it along to the younger guys."

OSU was playing with a large chip on its shoulder, looking for a blowout victory over A&M and a sluggish Florida State win in the Fiesta Bowl to vault itself into the national title hunt.

Ohio State did not get the victory it wanted, but for awhile it looked like they might. A nine-minute span in the first quarter during which the Buckeyes scored 21 unanswered points cost the Aggies dearly.

But after that stretch, A&M relaxed and held the Buckeyes to a single field goal.

"I felt coming out in the second half our team settled down on both sides of the ball and played much better," coach R. C. Slocum said, "but it took us too long to get going."

Campbell said, "The best thing about tonight

was we never quit. We never quit all year. We don't have any quitters on this team. You can only hang your head to a certain extent."

The Wrecking Crew shut down the high-powered Buckeye offense in the second half and the A&M offense put together an 11-play, 68-yard drive — helped by three Buckeye penalties — ending in a touchdown by junior wide receiver Leroy Hodge that closed out the scoring.

Despite the loss, junior running back Dante Hall predicts big things for the Aggies.

"We should be right there in the mix [next year]," he said. "We'll come back next year gunning for the national title. If we come back with a higher goal in mind, I think we can accomplish it."

Sports Illustrated All-Bowl Team

Ja'Mar TOOMBS

HEIGHT: 6'1"
WEIGHT: 235 lbs.
YEAR: Freshman
POSITION: FB
HOMETOWN: Kilgore, TX



TOOMBS

Rushed for 62 yards on 10 carries; Caught two passes for 19 additional yards.

Dat NGUYEN

HEIGHT: 6'1"
WEIGHT: 213 lbs.
YEAR: Senior
POSITION: ILB
HOMETOWN: Rockport, TX



NGUYEN

Recorded 14 sacks, including 10 solos; Made 51st straight start of career.

STAT line

■ The Sugar Bowl marked the 30th time linebacker **Dat Nguyen** recorded 10 or more sacks in a game.

■ In 15 career games against Top 25 teams, Nguyen averaged 12.8 sacks per contest.

■ The first-quarter punt block by OSU's **Derrick Ross** was the first block of an A&M punt since 1993.

■ Aggie QB **Brannond Stewart** completed 22 of 39 passes, both A&M bowl records.

■ The second-half shutout of OSU was their first of the year.

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