

Another Level

Johnson adds depth to A&M receiving corps

BY AL LAZARUS
The Battalion

Michael Bishop, David Boston, Peter Warrick and Ricky Williams all made appearances at Texas A&M football practices during the Aggies' 1998 season. Strangely enough, though, the four collegiate stars all appeared to be the same size — about 5 feet 11 inches tall and 188 pounds — and each of them seemed to feel right at home in Aggieland.

The fact is, the Aggies had an impostor among them. And he was, perhaps, the most awe-inspiring impostor in football history. Forced to sit out his freshman season as A&M's partial qualifier, wide receiver Bethel Johnson found a way to amaze teammates and coaches with his big-play capability, while still contributing to the team by posing as various impact players from opposing teams.

"It helped the team out, by [me] playing all these different players every week," Johnson said. "[It gave] them a good picture of what they were going to face."

Now a sophomore, Johnson finally got a chance to shine when it counts in his collegiate debut Sept. 4 against Louisiana Tech.

He did not disappoint, catching four passes for 106 yards and a touchdown. His longest reception was a 46-yarder, but A&M coach R.C. Slocum said he was equally impressed with one of Johnson's shorter hauls.

"When he caught that five yard [pass] and turned it into 15 yards, that was impressive," Slocum said. "He did on the field what I had

seen him do in practice."

So now that Johnson is eligible, are his days of head-turning practices over? Not according to Dante Hall, the Aggies' senior running back who knows a thing or two about making big plays.

"He's been making big plays in practice, and the Wrecking Crew is no pushover defense," Hall said. "The way he was running past our [defensive backs], that was amazing."

Before the Aggies' opening game, the hype surrounding Johnson had reached a fever pitch, but some remained skeptical at run-oriented A&M's ability to lure a receiver deserving of such praise.

For his part, Johnson said he had a good feeling about A&M during the recruiting process.

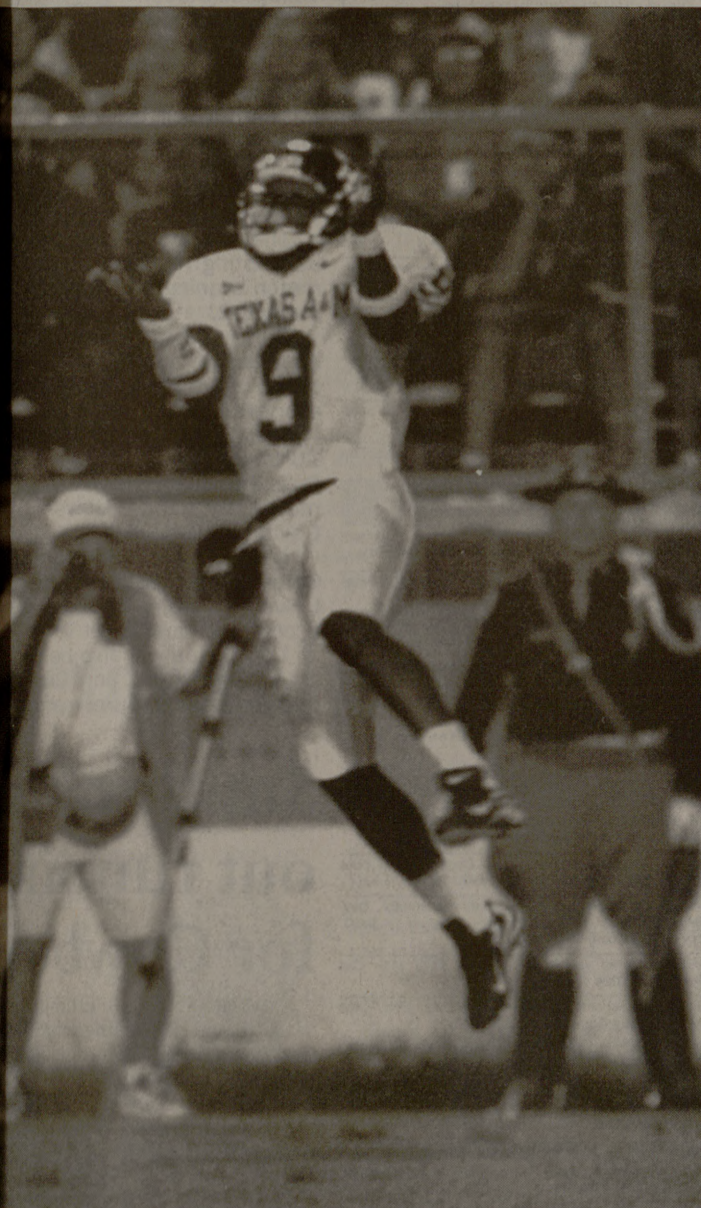
"They told me that coach Kragthorpe was the offensive coordinator and wide receiver coach," he said. "So I was like, 'if he's the wide receiver coach and the offensive coordinator, there's a pretty good chance that he's going to pass the ball.'"

Johnson figured right, as the Aggies demonstrated by racking up 252 pass yards — compared to 219 on the ground — against Louisiana Tech.

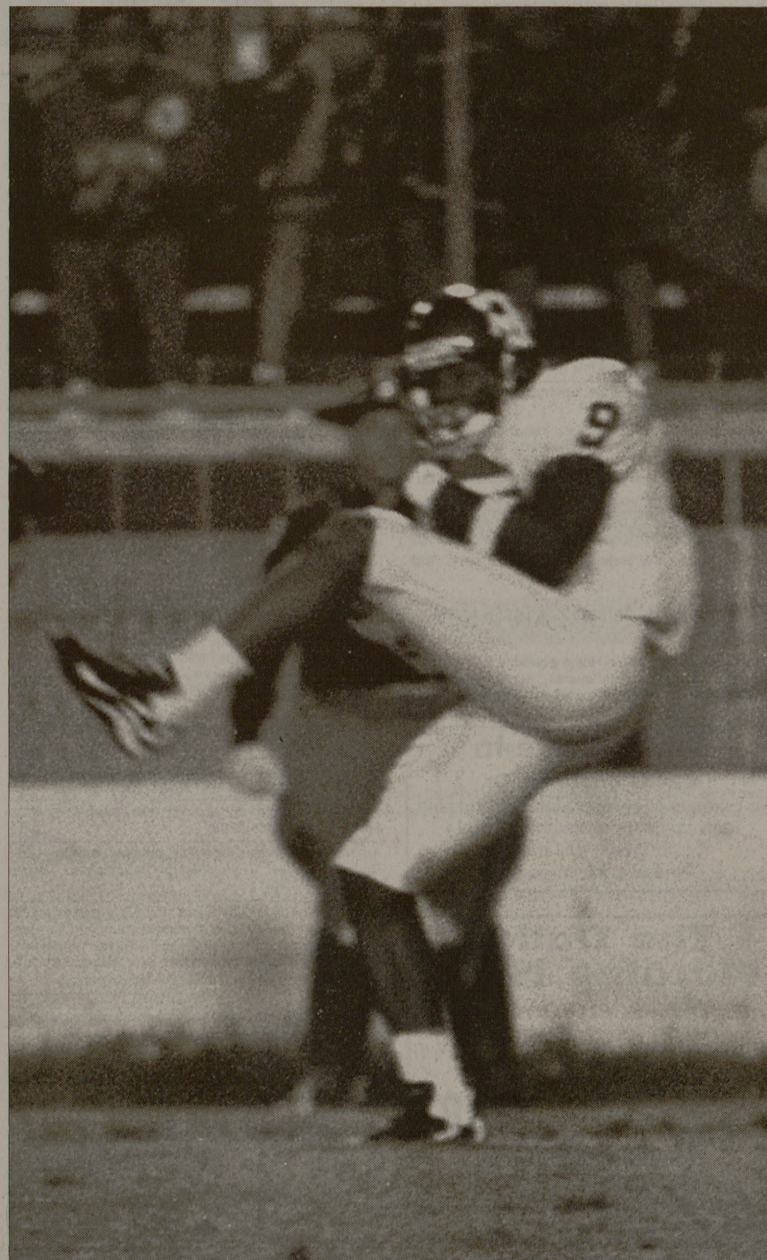
Although he has only seen action in one game, Johnson already claims to have a good idea of what will make him a standout receiver on the collegiate level.

"I like to stay on my feet," Johnson said. "Other receivers will be like, 'you better fall down,' but that's how I've always been."

"I like to compete, basically. I hate falling down after a catch."



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