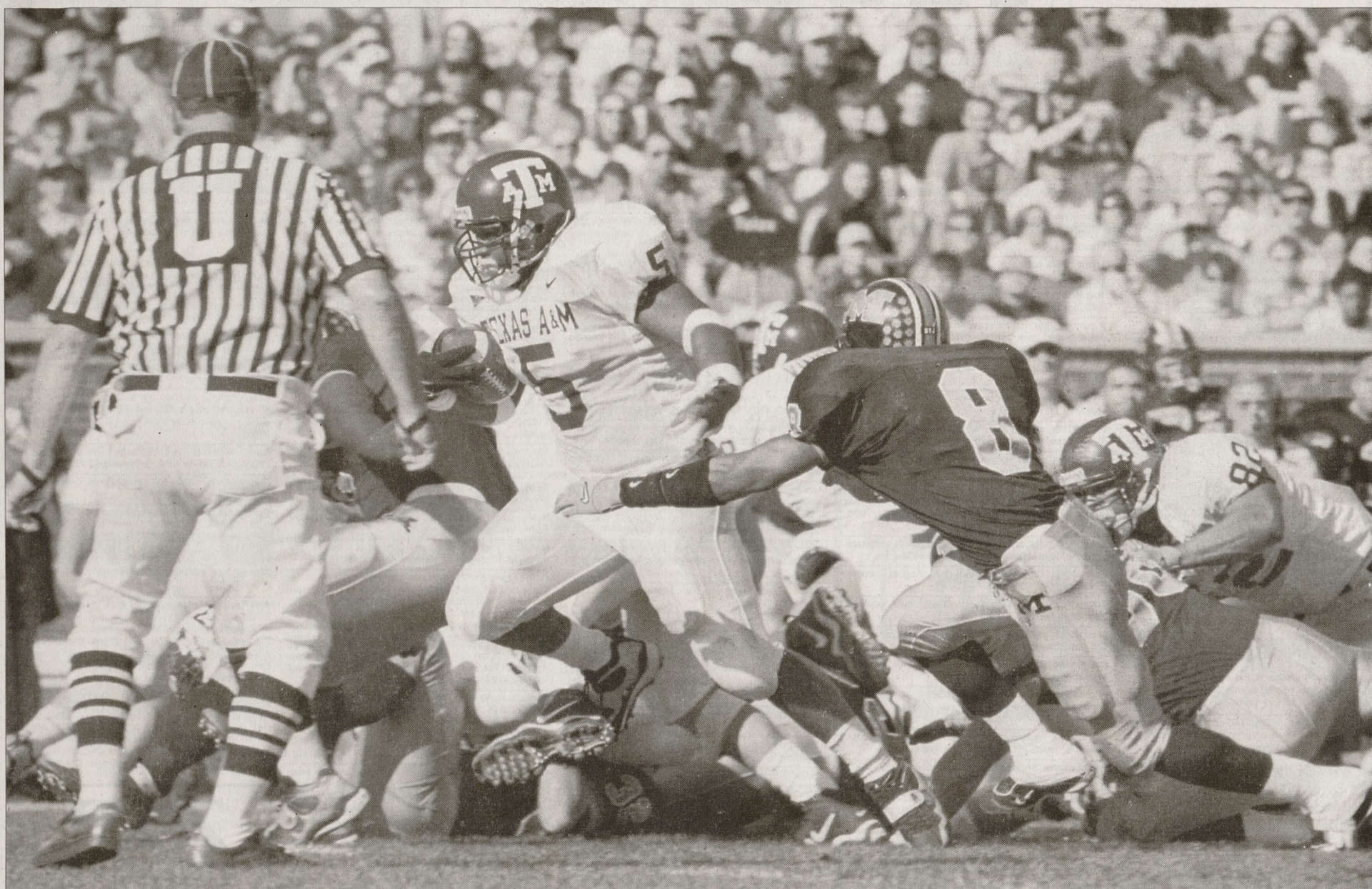


Breakthrough



GUY ROGERS/THE BATTALION

A&M sophomore running back Ja'Mar Toombs breaks away from a pile of University of Missouri defenders in the Aggies' 51-14 win over the Tigers Saturday in Columbia, Mo.

Unpredictable Aggies bounce back from Nebraska loss

BY AL LAZARUS
The Battalion

COLUMBIA, Mo. — After a week in which the Texas A&M Football Team was forced to recover from a 37-0 loss to Nebraska while dealing with the dismissal from the team of senior running back Dante Hall, it was easy to assume the Aggies would come out uninspired in their game Saturday against Missouri.

But to make that assumption would be to forget one of the major themes of A&M's 1999 campaign. Good or bad, the Aggies have been unpredictable — consistently inconsistent.

So when A&M reeled off a 17-play, 70-yard opening drive for a touchdown, it seemed difficult to be surprised — though it was the Aggies' first offensive touchdown in a first quarter all season.

And when A&M was promptly shut down by the Tiger defense for the rest of the half — turning the ball over on a fumble and punting five times — it was not a stretch to assume the Aggies were headed for a war of attrition with a Missouri team desperate to salvage a disappointing season with a win in its last home game.

In the end, though, the Aggies succeeded at doing something they did not do nearly enough in their three conference road losses this season. They put points on the scoreboard. A&M (7-3, 4-3 Big 12) scored early and (mostly) late in crushing Missouri (4-6, 1-6 Big 12), 51-14, in front of 57,472 fans at Faurot Field.

For the first time this season, the Aggies managed to establish a strong running game against a conference opponent on the road. With Hall suspended from the team for disciplinary reasons and senior running back Eric Bernard out with a shoulder injury, A&M started the game featuring its "jumbo" set — the imposing backfield tandem of senior D'Andre "Tiki" Hardeman and sophomore Ja'Mar Toombs.

Although the Aggies' final rushing-yardage total of 254 was inflated due to 33- and 77-yard runs from promising freshman Joe Weber when the game was already in hand, A&M's success running the ball on the first drive set the stage for its dominating afternoon.

Toombs pounded the ball up the middle on the Aggies' opening drive, gaining 24 yards and eventually capping the 7 minute, 16 second drive with the Aggie offense's only

first-quarter touchdown of the season.

"We knew we could run the ball on them," Toombs said. "We wanted to come out and show everyone that the running game the last couple of weeks was not us."

A&M coach R.C. Slocum said the Aggies were aware of the importance of coming out strong on the road.

"We knew that playing on the road against a challenging opponent, we needed to get off to a good start," Slocum said. "I thought our offense came out and set the tempo by getting points on the opening drive."

Senior quarterback Randy McCown balanced out the Aggies' running attack throughout the game, completing 12 of 21 passes for 201 yards, his sixth 200-yard plus passing day of the season. Chris Taylor caught three passes for 35 yards, while Johnson, Leroy Hodge and Matt Bumgardner each caught a pair for the Aggies.

"We knew it was [Missouri's] senior day, and we wanted to match their intensity and outplay them," McCown said. "I thought Ja'Mar and Tiki had a great week of practice, and that reflected in the game."

Leading only 7-0 at halftime, the Aggies were once again faced with an opportunity

to implode in the second half and plummet further in the conference standings. Instead, they responded with their most impressive half of the season, scoring 44 points against a Missouri defense that steadily crumbled throughout the half.

After the Tigers went three and out to begin the second half, the Aggies found themselves at their 45-yard line. Three plays later, McCown hit a streaking Bethel Johnson on the right sideline for a 39-yard touchdown pass, giving A&M a two-touchdown lead and setting the tone for the rest of the game.

Toombs added two more touchdowns, and punter/place-kicker Shane Lechler boot-ed a 32-yard field goal to cap a 24-point quarter for A&M.

Replacing the chronically low-kicking Terence Kitchens, Lechler made his only field goal attempt and four extra points in addition to averaging 53.4 yards on seven punts — the 10th 50-yard plus game of his career. After missing an extra point in the fourth quarter, though, Kitchens came on to kick the Aggies' final two extra points.

Included in A&M's 20 fourth-quarter points was safety Michael Jameson's third interception returned for a touchdown this season, a school record.

A&M running backs respond under pressure

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Last week wasn't exactly the best week to be a Texas A&M running back.

The Aggies were coming off their worst rushing performance of the season, rushing for two yards against the University of Nebraska, and then Monday, A&M coach R.C. Slocum dismissed senior running back Dante Hall from the team.

Heading into Saturday's game against the University of Missouri, the Aggie running backs felt they had something to prove.

The Aggies gained some of their pride back as they hit the ground running against the Tigers.

A&M rushed for a season-high 254 yards on 48 carries, and more importantly, came out with the attitude of establishing the running game.

With Hall gone and senior running back Eric Bernard still nursing an injury, Slocum threw out a new starting backfield.

Although they had played at the

same time in a game before, it was the first time Ja'Mar Toombs and D'Andre "Tiki" Hardeman had started a game together.

The dividends of the TNT backfield payed off immediately.

Behind the punishing running of Toombs and the blocking of Tiki, A&M took the opening possession of the ball game and methodically marched 70 yards in 17 plays, ending with a 2-yard touchdown run by Toombs.

It was the first offensive touchdown the Aggies had scored in the first quarter all season.

That opening drive set the tone for the rest of the day as the Missouri defense got a steady dose of Toombs and Tiki all day.

Toombs finished with 76 yards on 22 carries and three touchdowns, while Tiki ended with 48 yards on nine carries and a touchdown.

While having their best running day of the season, Toombs said the running backs came out to prove a point against the Tigers.

"We wanted to come out and show everyone that the running game the last couple of weeks was not us," Toombs said. "We are bet-

ter than that. I really came out pumped, especially since Coach Slocum put the load on me to run. Our offensive line was good and Tiki blocked great."

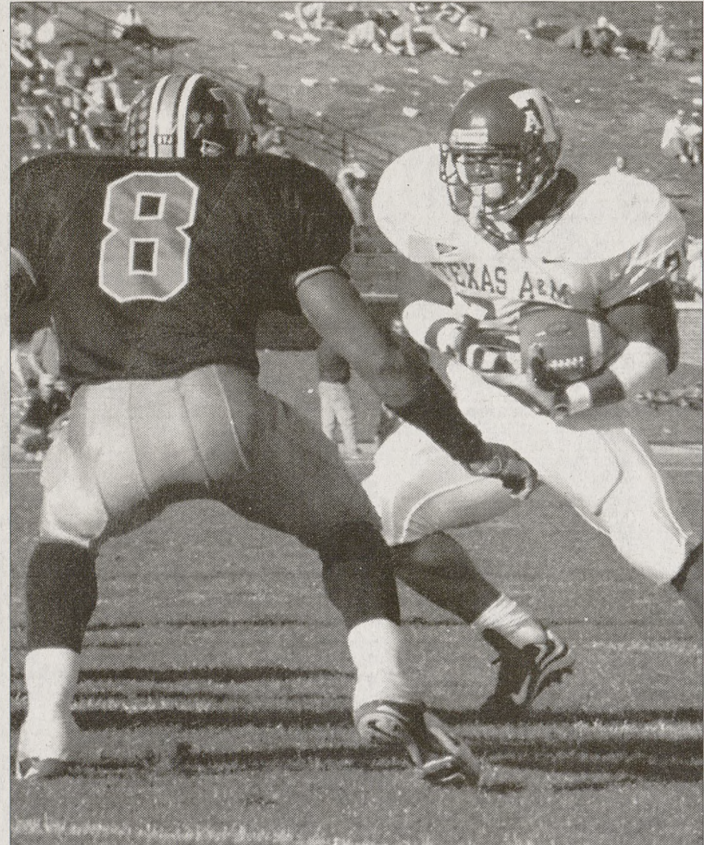
After Tiki and Toombs softened up the defense the first three quarters, freshman Joe Weber came into the game in the fourth and provided a glimpse at what the future holds for the Aggie running game.

On his first carry from scrimmage, Weber broke out over the left side and rushed for 33 yards, the Aggies' longest rush from scrimmage on the year. It was a mark that stood for all of six minutes.

On the Aggies' third possession of the fourth quarter, Weber took a handoff at the A&M 20 and ran 77 yards to the Missouri 3 yard-line. It was A&M's longest rush since 1997 when Sirr Parker had an 80-yard run against Iowa State University.

Weber finished with 121 yards on eight carries, the first Aggie back to eclipse the century mark this season.

Doug Shilling is a junior agricultural journalism major.



GUY ROGERS/THE BATTALION

A&M freshman running back Joe Weber (right) eludes University of Missouri safety Clarence Jones in the fourth quarter Saturday.

The Battalion



"Our overall performance was better; we came out strong. We had a lapse in the second quarter, but we knew coming out in the second half what we had to do to put them away."

— Ja'Mar Toombs on A&M's 51-14 win over Missouri

"This week on defense, we came out and executed our plays right. We made fewer mistakes than we had the last couple of weeks. Our offense gave us a boost with that great opening drive."

— Jason Glenn

on the defense's performance in A&M's 51-14 win over Missouri

"We knew that playing on the road against a challenging opponent, we needed to get off to a good start. ... I'm very proud of this football team and their focus this week on getting the job done."

— R.C. Slocum

on the team's overall attitude

The Battalion Top 25 Poll

Team	Record
1. Florida St.	(10-0)
2. Virginia Tech	(9-0)
3. Florida	(9-1)
4. Nebraska	(9-1)
5. Wisconsin	(9-2)
6. Texas	(9-2)
7. Marshall	(10-0)
8. Tennessee	(7-2)
9. Alabama	(8-2)
10. Kansas St.	(9-1)
11. Michigan	(8-2)
12. Mississippi St.	(8-1)
13. PennSt.	(9-2)
14. Georgia Tech	(7-2)
15. Michigan St.	(8-2)
16. Southern Miss.	(7-3)
17. BYU	(8-2)
18. Georgia	(6-3)
19. Purdue	(6-4)
20. Arkansas	(6-3)
21. Minnesota	(7-3)
22. Mississippi	(7-2)
23. Texas A&M	(7-3)
24. Louisiana Tech	(8-2)
25. Boston College	(7-2)

Associated Press Top 25 Poll

Team	Record
1. Florida St.	(10-0)
2. Virginia Tech	(9-0)
3. Florida	(9-1)
4. Nebraska	(9-1)
5. Wisconsin	(9-2)
6. Texas	(9-2)
7. Tennessee	(7-2)
8. Alabama	(8-2)
9. Kansas St.	(9-1)
10. Michigan	(8-2)
11. Marshall	(10-0)
12. Mississippi St.	(8-1)
13. Penn St.	(9-2)
14. Georgia Tech	(7-2)
15. Michigan St.	(8-2)
16. Mississippi	(7-2)
17. Minnesota	(7-3)
18. Southern Miss.	(7-3)
19. BYU	(8-2)
20. Purdue	(6-4)
21. Georgia	(6-3)
22. Arkansas	(6-3)
23. East Carolina	(8-2)
24. Texas A&M	(7-3)
25. Boston College	(7-2)

Big 12 Standings

North				
	W	L	PF	PA
Nebraska	9	1	356	114
Kansas St.	9	1	367	144
Iowa State	6	4	313	250
Oklahoma	4	7	263	326
Oklahoma St.	4	6	219	241
Missouri	4	6	224	305
South				
	W	L	PF	PA
Texas	9	2	422	226
Oklahoma	6	3	333	157
Texas A&M	7	3	298	192
Oklahoma Tech	5	5	215	254
Oklahoma St.	4	5	226	216
Oklahoma	1	9	123	380

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