

Ags try to prepare for UT

BY AL LAZARUS
The Battalion

It seems every year in the days leading up to the Texas A&M Football Team's showdown with the University of Texas, words like "bitter" or "heated" or even "hateful" are used to describe the rivalry between the two teams.

But in the wake of Thursday's Bonfire collapse, which killed 12 Aggies and injured 27 others, those words have not been uttered by either team. Instead, the tragedy served to put the "importance" of a football game into question for everyone involved.

"When something like that happens, it really puts football in perspective," A&M senior wide receiver Matt Bumgardner said. "But you still have to play the game. It's really interesting to see how it's going to turn out with the emotions of the team."

The Aggies (7-3, 4-3 Big 12) and Longhorns (9-2, 6-1 Big 12) will square off for the 106th time Friday at Kyle Field. The game is set to begin at 10 a.m. and will be televised nationally by ABC.

Texas senior wide receiver Ryan Nunez said he expects the Aggies to draw motivation from the accident.

"They can be really down, or they could come out on a high emotional level to play for those who were lost," Nunez said. "With the unity and camaraderie at that University, we expect them to come out extremely motivated."

The Longhorns will enter Friday's game assured of a spot in the Big 12 championship game Dec. 4 in San Antonio. If No. 5 Texas defeats A&M and wins the Big 12 Championship, the Longhorns likely will find themselves in the Fiesta Bowl.

"I've been impressed with them throughout the year," A&M coach R.C. Slocum said. "They've got a very balanced offense, and defensively, they've gotten better each week. I think they've got a



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Texas A&M senior running back D'Andre "Tiki" Hardeman runs the ball against the University of Missouri Nov. 13 in Columbia, Mo. The Aggies defeated the Tigers, 51-14.

really good defense."

Texas is led by quarterback Major Applewhite, who has followed up his strong freshman campaign with a stellar sophomore season. He has completed 251 of 414 passes for 3,132 yards and 21 touchdowns.

But more importantly, Applewhite, who has 21 200-yard plus passing games to his credit, has enabled Texas to avoid the drop-off many predicted after the departure of Heisman Trophy winner Ricky Williams.

"He's the heart of the team, but he's also the brains of the

team," A&M freshman linebacker Brian Gamble said. "And you've got to go to the brain to beat them, kind of like in all the old science-fiction movies."

"He's what makes their offense click, and when their offense is clicking and their defense is playing well, it just steamrolls."

Gamble said the Aggies will try to limit Applewhite by constantly pressuring him.

"You have to try to confuse him," Gamble said. "You have to bring a lot of people to pressure him, and since he's not a real tall guy, you

have to get your hands up when you're pass rushing to try to bat down balls."

A&M senior punter Shane Lechler said, at the very least, Friday's game will serve as a welcome diversion from the Bonfire tragedy.

"I'm glad we can be here to maybe take their minds off of it for 60 minutes," Lechler said. "Just anything to help [A&M] out. We're going to have to come out and play a good-attitude, error-free game and just give everyone something good to go home with over the holidays."

Bonfire tragedy casts different light on game

BY DOUG SHILLING
The Battalion

On Friday morning, the Texas A&M University Aggies and the University of Texas Longhorns will battle at Kyle Field for the 106th time in their storied rivalry. But unlike the previous 105 meetings, this year's contest has a different sense to it.

Instead of the bitterness normally present prior to the game, a solemn feeling has been cast over this year's game due to the Bonfire tragedy.

The Bonfire tragedy hit the football players Thursday when most of the team went out to the site to help their fellow Aggies. During the day, when logs still needed to be moved, the football team spontaneously showed up and started helping out.

Senior offensive lineman Semisi Heimuli said helping at Bonfire site was something he and the team wanted to do.

"We just wanted to do anything to help," he said. "We couldn't give blood because we had a practice that afternoon. I was walking to practice and I saw Tiki, Lechler and Andy Vincent getting ready to leave. I asked them where they were going and they said they were going to Bonfire. They said they needed people to help move some logs. I said I might as well go with them. I want to help."

The tragedy has not just affected the Aggie side of the rival-

ry. Even the Longhorns have chipped in all they could to help with the tragedy. Last Friday, all the players who were not expected to play in the game against A&M went out and donated blood. Also, the annual Hex Rally was canceled and the UT athletic department decided not to go with its usual tradition of answering phone calls with the greeting, 'Beat A&M.'

Junior offensive lineman Chris Valletta said the Aggies appreciate the way the Longhorns have reacted in light of the tragedy.

"Just like us, they realize that this is a game and what happened here is a tragedy," he said. "They understand that honoring the victims and the families is more important than a football game, so that's the attitude they've taken and we appreciate that."

Senior punter Shane Lechler said the game should be played not for the players, not for the fans, but for the 12 Aggies who died.

"The lives that were taken at the bonfire," Lechler said, "I would almost promise you that if every one of them could walk through that door, and someone would say, 'Hey, what do y'all want to happen on Friday,' everyone of them would say, 'Beat the hell outta t.u.'"

"You have to look at it in a way to realize what they would want, because they can't be here to support it. But everybody knows that they'll definitely be watching this game Friday."



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