

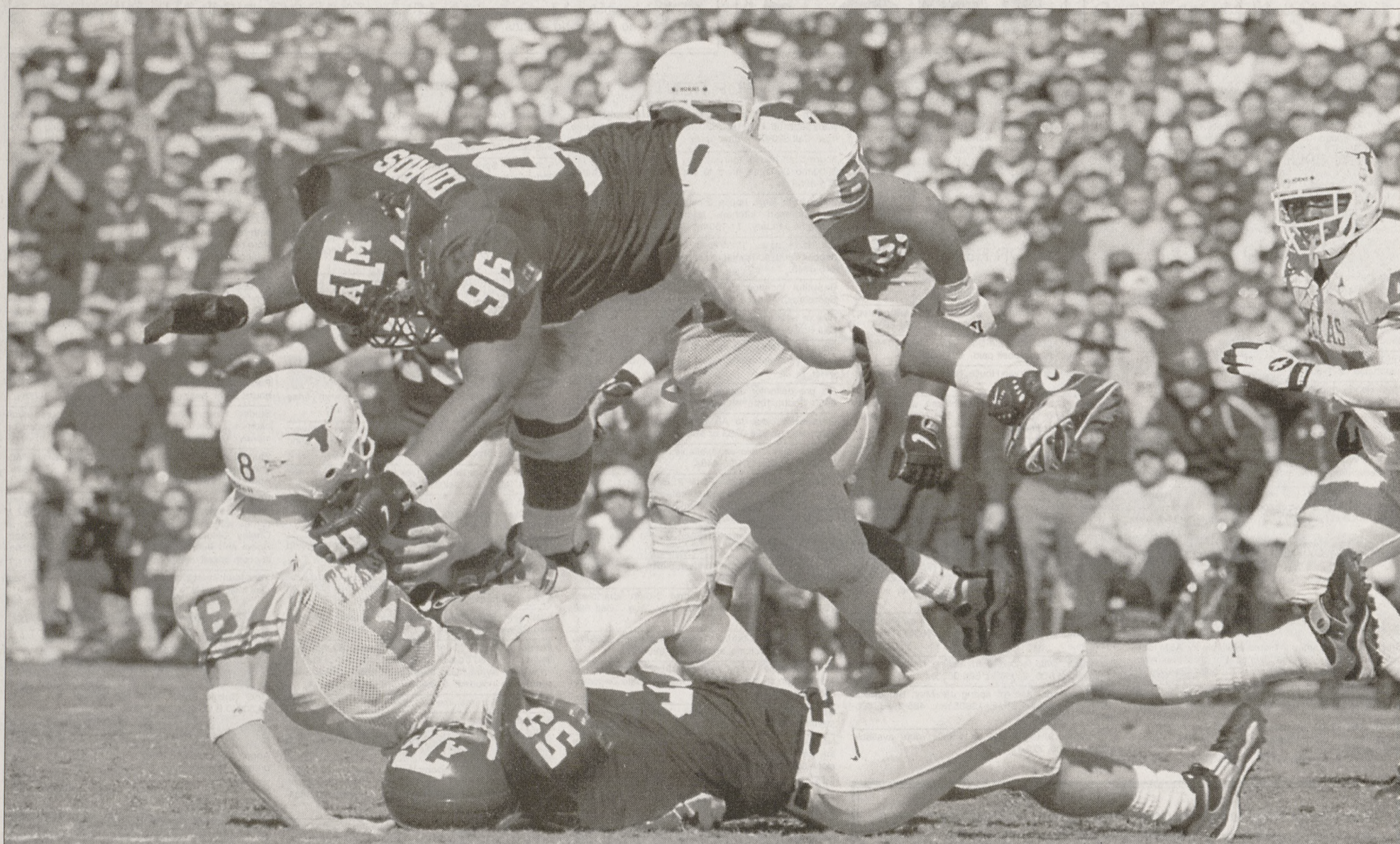
Hooked

"The Twelfth Man is the best thing in college football. People who aren't Aggies just can't understand what this is all about."
— Jason Glenn on the fans at A&M

"We had to play really hard to win. We're not quitters and we were not going to just lay down."
— Ja'Mar Toombs on the team coming back from a 10-point deficit

"It was fun until the end. I enjoyed getting hit more than I enjoyed the crowd. They were loud."
— Chris Simms on the crowd noise at Kyle Field

"A game like this is something you wish for all your life. When we came out for the second half, we saw that the crowd didn't give up and believed in us"
— Randy McCown on the Aggies' come-from-behind win



GUY ROGERS/THE BATTALION

University of Texas freshman quarterback **Chris Simms** (8) is sacked by Texas A&M senior linebacker **Chad Frantzen** (59) and junior defensive lineman **Ron Edwards** (96) during the third quarter of the Aggies' 20-16 victory over the Longhorns Friday at Kyle Field.

Aggies come from behind to upset Texas, 20-16

BY JASON LINCOLN
The Battalion

The Texas A&M Football Team on Friday paid the biggest tribute it could to the 12 who died in the Bonfire collapse — the Aggies beat the University of Texas. It was more than just a game for A&M, but then it always is when the Aggies play the Longhorns.

But Friday's game transcended the 106-game history of the rivalry. Instead of playing for bragging rights, championships, records or bowl bids, the Aggies were paying homage to their classmates who died while personifying the Aggie spirit.

Before the game began, the fans and players who filled Kyle Field to a record 86,128 — the largest crowd ever to witness a football game in the state — reflected on the events of the past week.

Aggies in the Air Force Reserve gave a tribute as they flew over Kyle Field in a "missing-man" formation — a tribute usually reserved for military airmen, Kyle Field joined in prayer

and the football team donned helmets with a commemorative Bonfire decal.

Meanwhile, offensive lineman Chris Valletta was carefully penning a cross and the names of the 12 Aggies who couldn't attend the game on his undershirt.

Then the clock read 10 a.m. and everything came down to a 60-minute performance of two teams on a football field. In the process the Aggies discovered what had been missing in their three road losses this season: unity, emotion and Kyle Field.

The Aggies struck early with a touchdown, but the momentum quickly turned as the Longhorns scored when the extra-point attempt went bad, putting the score at 6-2.

UT would go on to dominate the second quarter as running backs Hodges Mitchell and Chris Robertson added a pair of touchdowns after UT backup quarterback Chris Simms marched the Longhorns down to the goal line.

The second half was a different story for the Longhorns' backs as the Wrecking Crew closed in and limited UT's offensive options.

The A&M defense limited UT to only 89 total yards and four first downs in the final 30 minutes, while the Aggies' offense produced 173 yards and 10 first downs.

Heading into the fourth quarter, things looked good for the Aggies. Trailing by a field goal and with momentum, the possibility of Texas A&M accomplishing a comeback victory was in reach.

As if that wasn't enough, the Longhorns' mascot, BEVO, decided to take a rest and lay down on the sideline going into the fourth quarter — a sign traditionally taken as a bad omen by UT fans.

Fittingly, it was the Aggie seniors who would get the victory in a clutch fourth quarter situation.

Quarterback Randy McCown found wide receiver Matt Bumgardner in the end zone to give the game its 20-16 final score.

During the game, the Aggies discovered what may be the key to the future success of Texas A&M football — Ja'Mar Toombs.

The tailback had 37 carries as he pounded

the Longhorn defense for 126 yards and and two touchdowns.

The performance was a personal best for Toombs and a season best for the Aggies, who only had two individual 100-plus yard rushing performances all season.

The Aggies went to their "jumbo set" of Toombs and D'Andre "Tiki" Hardeman, and the strategy worked as Toombs and Hardeman made up a 500-pound backfield which put continuous pressure on the Longhorn defense.

"We wanted to run the ball to wear [their defense] out," Toombs said. "I know I did because I'm tired too, and I'm a big guy. I think what this game says the most about our team is that we are fighters — we're not quitters and we were not going to just lay down."

In the process, Texas A&M played its best game of the season. While the team may have dedicated the win to the Bonfire victims, it was a win that was the result of 10 previous games in which the Aggies learned what it would take to win big games — a lesson they applied with success on Friday.

For once, final score did not matter in A&M-UT game



GUY ROGERS/THE BATTALION

Texas A&M sophomore running back **Ja'Mar Toombs** avoids University of Texas defensive end **Aaron Humphrey** in the third quarter of Friday's game.

The 106th meeting between Texas and Texas A&M was a battle to the end, with the emotionally-charged Aggies coming out on top, 20-16. For once, though, the final score did not matter.

We all learned what mattered eight days prior to the contest, when 12 Aggies lost their lives in the Bonfire collapse.

We learned that football really is just a game, that there are so many things in life more important than who beats who, and by what score. We learned that touchdowns and sacks are soon forgotten, but lives never are. We learned that the Aggie spirit is alive and well.

We taught the world what it means to be an Aggie. We may have been on the inside looking out, but we explained it.

"[The Bonfire collapse] brought this team back into perspective," A&M punter Shane Lechler said. "Which is that this place is the most special school in the country because of the tremendous support of the fans and how strong a family Aggies are."

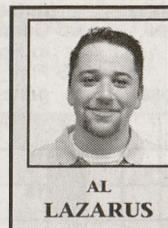
Sometimes we all need a little reminding that it really is just a game.

Losing 12 Aggies, 12 friends, 12 people just like you and me will tend to do that.

It all seems so trivial now — the rankings, the stats, the endless analysis.

The sad thing is that it took an unthinkable tragedy to remind us of what is important.

The A&M-UT rivalry probably will return to normal next year but there's nothing wrong with that. It's OK to dislike another school, to want more than anything



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to defeat it. As long as you know that beneath all the trash talking and taunting, there is a mutual respect.

And that is the way it should be with sports. Be loud, be crazy, be obnoxious. Just remember that when all is said and done, it really is just a game.

The truth is, as emotional as Friday's game was, the outcome was not important. Anyone who thought the A&M football team needed a win to honor the 12 Aggies who died is missing the point.

This school already has honored the dead and will continue to do so. We have done it with our thoughts, our prayers, even our Aggie rings. We can continue to do it by never forgetting them and by reminding ourselves how precious life is.

"Today, the emotion was riding high," A&M running back Ja'Mar Toombs said after the game. "Even when we were down in points, we kept our spirits up. We had to win this game to show we care."

It's touching that the football team felt that way, but like most Aggies, the players already have showed their care. They did not need to win to honor the 12 Aggies who died building Bonfire.

Make no mistake about it, though — Friday's win was for them.

They were with us on Saturday. They were in our hearts and minds, and that may be the greatest honor we can give them.

The announced crowd of 86,128 at Saturday's game was the largest ever to witness a football game in the state of Texas. The funny thing is, A&M officials got the number wrong.

They were 12 people short.

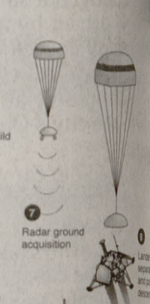
Al Lazarus is a senior journalism major.

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The Battalion

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Colorado 6 5 343 283

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Iowa St. 4 7 247 272

Missouri 4 7 224 371

South

Texas 9 3 438 246

Texas A&M 8 3 318 208

Oklahoma 7 4 405 202

Texas Tech 6 5 253 282

Okla. St. 5 6 267 274

Baylor 1 10 137 414