

Ags fall to Bears at home, 81-75

BY JASON LINCOLN
The Battalion

On the back of the Texas A&M men's basketball team's jerseys are the stenciled words "Defense Wins." That philosophy held true on Wednesday night when the Aggies faced off against Baylor. However, it did not hold true the way A&M coach Melvin Watkins intended.

The Aggies' defense could not get in a rhythm for a game which quickly turned into a perimeter shoot-out. The Aggies' poor transition play and relaxed pressure on the Bear guards allowed Baylor to shoot its conference high from the floor, 51 percent, to outscore the Aggies 81-75.

"We don't like to lose any of them, but did we deserve to win — no, we didn't play well enough," Watkins said. "We didn't come out and play with any enthusiasm. Give Baylor some credit for the win, but we played some very uninspired basketball."

Baylor's win marked its first conference win on the road in 19 games, while A&M is now 0-3 since defeating the 12th ranked Oklahoma State University on Jan. 22.

"It is always good to get a road win," BU coach Dave Bliss said. "[Tevis] Stukes shot the ball well, and we made our free throws down the stretch when it counted. We made our open shots today. ... It is just a terrific win for us on the road in conference."

The Bears' perimeter players established the game early. Baylor was able to stretch out to several first-half leads by dominating the outside. After 50-plus percent shooting from the floor and a 6-11 performance outside the arc, the BU players looked to control the court.

Where the Aggie guards may have had few answers for Baylor in the first half, A&M's big guys inside made up for it on offense. After the Aggies fell to an early 8-2 deficit, freshman center Andy Slocum took over.

In a matter of minutes, Slocum added new life to the Aggies on both sides of the court. The 6-11 big man for the Aggies had four defensive rebounds and followed them up on offense, hitting three-of-four free throws and closing it out with a 3-pointer.

The Aggies' other big man, senior forward Aaron Jack, was there for the rest of the early turnaround with a lay up, a steal and a pair of rebounds.

After Jack and Slocum's eight-point run, the Aggies were ahead by a narrow two points.

Slocum would score two more points — finishing the night with 10 points and seven boards, both career highs for the young center.

BU guards DeMarcus Minor and Tevis Stukes continued to make A&M pay from outside, stretching Baylor back out to a 40-32 halftime lead. Stukes and Minor combined for 26 points of the Bear offense.

"Every time you didn't have a hand in his face, he made us pay," Watkins said of Stukes.

Watkins knew the Aggies would need to become more aggressive outside the paint for the final twenty minutes, if A&M hoped to fend off the Bears.

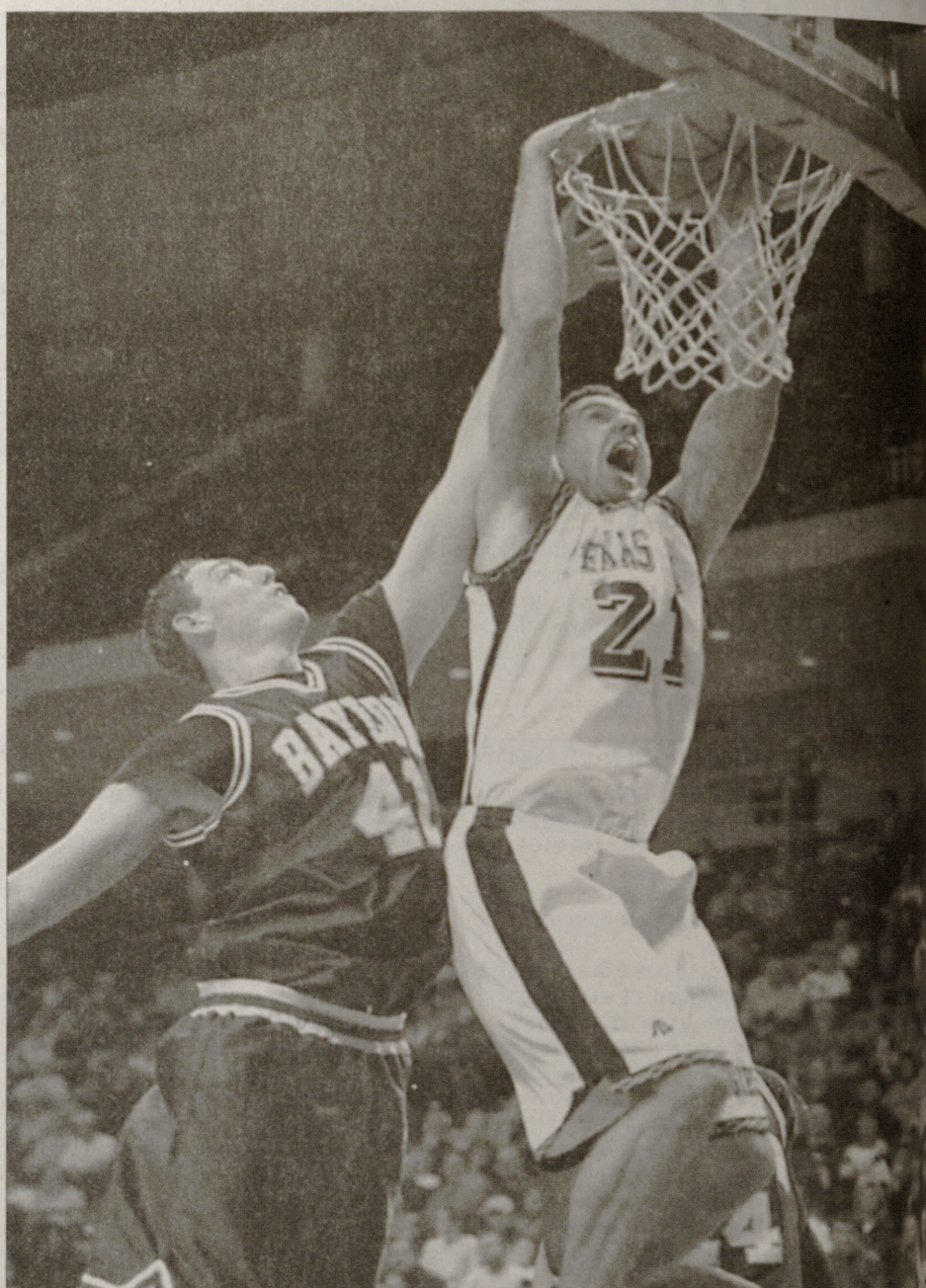
"We tried to get our perimeter to be a little more aggressive," Watkins said. "I tried to tell them: If you get a good shot, take a good shot, so we could get a little bit of energy flowing."

With the original starting line-up in the game, the Aggies gave up seven straight points to be down by 15.

At one point, A&M missed the transition onto defense and allowed three BU players under the basket for an uncontested two.

Watkins quickly called a timeout and made some drastic changes to the Aggie line-up. The team that took the court was comprised only of the Aggies' perimeter shooters — Carlton Brown, Jamaal Gilchrist, Andy Leatherman, Tomas Ressa and Larry Scott.

Scott quickly ended the Aggies' second half drought by hitting back-to-back threes. Ressa and Leatherman added one each as the Aggies hit four three-pointers without a miss.



A&M senior forward Aaron Jack slams the ball over Baylor center John Flippen in the Aggies' loss to the Bears last night at Reed Arena.

Freshman guard Bernard King returned to the lineup and immediately sunk a 25-footer to make it five as the Aggies narrowed Baylor's lead back into single digits.

The Aggie perimeter players hit 13 3-pointers, a school record, while shooting 46-percent outside the arc. A&M also hit 12-of-14 from the free-throw line.

In the next 10 minutes, Baylor would stretch the lead out to 17, and A&M would close it back to 10.

Just outside the three-minute mark, the game would take a turn for the worse for the Aggies. Baylor center John Flippen was on his way up for an uncontested dunk after the Aggies missed the defensive transition.

However, a hustle play by Ressa resulted in Flippen rimming the easy jam. Ressa drew his fifth foul, but Flippen subsequently missed both free throws.

The play had the potential to turn the momentum in favor of the Aggies. Yet, in a mistake characteristic of the Aggies' defensive performance that night, the Aggies did not box out BU forward Jamie Kendrick, who got the rebound and converted it into a pair of points.

A&M could not recover from the play. While A&M scored 18 points in the final 3.5 minutes, Baylor hit 12-

of-13 from the charity stripe to hold off the Bears for a final charge.

"It was a game we have to win. You have \$4 billion connected your home court," Jack said. "We just didn't make it too late to start playing. We can't wait to make people think our shot."

Jack had a career high 18 points to go along with the topic of boards. King led A&M with a six-of-twelve performance outside the arc on his way to a 20-point night.

Minor had 21 points and 12 assists for Baylor. Stukes hit five-of-seven threes on his way to 12 points.

"Tonight we hit our shots, and that was the key," Minor said. "The posts made their quick tonight and kicked it out when they were open. That gave us some good looks and we made an open shot."

The game marked one of the strongest offensive showings for the Aggies. However, A&M could not combine their offensive prowess with a strong defensive performance.

A&M shot over 46 percent, yet allowed Baylor to come off a sub-25 percent performance against the Aggies to hit over 50 percent.



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