

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

Texas A&M prepared for Miner invasion

Aggies, Miners square off for first time since 1984 opener

By BLAINE DIONNE
The Battalion

This Saturday marks the Texas A&M football team's last chance for a tuneup before Big 12 Conference play begins on Sept. 30 against Texas Tech University. The Aggies are taking on the University of Texas-El Paso (UTEP) Miners at 7 p.m. at Kyle Field.

The last time these two teams locked horns was in the 1984 season opener, a game that A&M won, 20-17. A&M is coming off a 51-3 win over the University of Wyoming that evened its record at 1-1 after an opening-week loss at Notre Dame. The Miners are riding a win over Southern Methodist University last weekend in El Paso, 37-20. A&M coach R.C. Slocum said

the jury is still out on his team this year, noting that while Wyoming was a quality football team, the Cowboys were not the same caliber of team that the Aggies will face in the Big 12.

"It remains to be seen at this stage how good our team is," Slocum said. "I thought, without a doubt, that we improved Saturday night (against Wyoming). But I think UTEP is a better team than Wyoming, so you look to see if you can improve this week."

Improvement is definitely the mantra for the Aggies this week. Play-

ers and coaches said they are not content with their play right now, but that they can get better.

Senior offensive lineman Chris Valetta was one of the Aggies who reiterated the improvement goal, but he is also happy that the offense is starting to receive recognition.

"It's just been two games, but already the fans, the media and the opposing coaches are talking about this offense," Valetta said. "And I think it's about time. I think we're way past due on having thoughts like that."

The reasons the offense is a hot topic are numerous. From the coaching changes to the personnel and attitude changes, these Aggies are a different bunch than the '99 squad.

Redshirt freshman Richard Whitaker is one

of the new faces who will continue to contribute, and he said he hopes can be a factor against the Miners.

"I want to go out there and be the leading rusher," Whitaker said. "I just want to go out there and help the offense as much as I can. Every time I touch the ball, I want to score. I think we're starting to get on track. We're not that good yet. We just need to go out there every day and get better."

There seems to be a quiet confidence among the team. Although none of the players will admit it, there seems to be a swagger back in the offense.

"I think that UTEP is a better team than Wyoming, so you look to see if you can improve this week."

— R.C. Slocum
Texas A&M football coach



STUART VILLANUEVA/THE BATTALION

Junior wide receiver Robert Ferguson hopes to continue at Texas A&M the success he had at Tyler Junior College.

Robert Ferguson ready to step forward, lead Aggie receivers

By BLAINE DIONNE
The Battalion

Robert Ferguson is on the verge of something special. Saturday against Wyoming, he had the best home debut performance of any Texas A&M receiver. The junior receiver ended his first game at Kyle Field with 174 yards and two touchdowns on seven carries, including the second-longest

passing play for a touchdown in A&M history.

The 93-yard strike was basically a sprint to the end zone for Ferguson, who left his defender in smoke.

After the game, sophomore quarterback Mark Farris heaped praise on his newest offensive weapon.

"I think that when [Ferguson] first came in, being something new, he

kind of overshadowed some of the other guys," Farris said. "That's not a slap at those other guys. I mean, Chris Taylor and Bethel [Johnson] and Dwain [Goynes], they're probably as fast as any receiving corps in the nation."

"Tonight, it wasn't so much us trying to get the ball to Robert, it just kind of happened like that. But when

[Ferguson] catches it, he's got a chance to go all the way every time."

Ferguson hopes to define his career with big plays that electrify crowds and catapult him into star status. At the same time, he does not want to sacrifice team goals for personal gain.

See FERGUSON on Page 10.

Home-field advantage awaits returning Aggie soccer team

A&M to take on University of North Texas at Aggie Soccer Complex, after three weeks of on-the-road play

By REECE FLOOD
The Battalion

After spending the past two weekends flying to the East Coast to take on Hartford, Harvard, Florida and Florida State, the Texas A&M soccer team will stay in the Lone Star State for two games this weekend.

The No. 8 Aggies will host the University of North Texas (UNT) Friday at 7:30 p.m. at the Aggie Soccer Complex. Two days later, A&M will travel to Spring, Texas, to take on Penn State in the Adidas Classic.

A&M soccer coach G. Guerrieri said he knows what to expect from UNT, because he is a good friend of the school's coach.

"We know them pretty well," Guerrieri said. "Their coach John Hedlund is an old friend of mine and an old teammate of mine. We played together when we were kids and

we've always kind of kept in touch as we've moved up as coaches."

Guerrieri described the Mean Green of North Texas as a team that is hard-working and never gives up. He said he is expecting a quick, counter-attacking team.

UNT has found success this season by defeating quality opponents such as SMU and Texas Tech.

"They've won some big games," Guerrieri said. "If they can pull off a win [against A&M], it would make their season."

Friday night's home game will be a change of pace for the Aggies, who have not played at home in nearly three weeks.

"To be able to play on our surface with a friendly crowd will be a welcome change for the players," Guerrieri said.

Freshman defender Aderienne Dillard is

one player looking forward to staying home on Friday. She said it will be better to be cheered for than booed at.

"It's good to know that people are going to come support us," Dillard said. "It's encouraging. It gives us more of an incentive to come out and play."

The Aggies will have one day to regroup before heading to Spring, near Houston to take on Penn State, which is tied with A&M in a No. 8 ranking. This will be A&M's fifth game against a ranked opponent in eight games.

Guerrieri said playing so many ranked teams teaches the Aggies preparedness and encourages them to work hard every game.

That is what happened last weekend when the Aggies played Florida State on the road. The unranked Seminoles defeated A&M 4-

1, sending a wake-up call to the Aggies, who rallied back to defeat 18th-ranked Florida two days later.

The Aggies are expecting Sunday's game against Penn State to be more physical than most games.

"Penn State is not known for playing attractive soccer," Guerrieri said. "They're known for being very, very big; very strong and very fast."

Senior midfielder Alison Peters is confident that the Aggies will be able to handle the physical style of play.

"It's hard to play a big, physical team because they're going to be pushing you around," Peters said. "But coming off the past two weekends away, I think we've proven that we can play with big physical teams."

The Nittany Lions will come to Texas with

All-American goalkeeper Emily Oleksiuk and sophomore forward and 1999 Big Ten "Player of the Year" Christie Welsh on the roster.

This weekend will be A&M's last chance to work out any kinks before conference play begins a week from Friday with a visit from Texas Tech. Guerrieri said playing quality non-conference teams helps prepare A&M for playing in the Big 12.

"That's the reason we play all these tough teams," Guerrieri said. "It was to get ready for the environment of the Big 12. Whether a team in the Big 12 is ranked in the national top 10 or top 20, or not ranked at all — it really doesn't matter. Evidence is when we went into Lubbock and when we went into Waco last year. Neither [Texas Tech nor Baylor] was ranked, but we lost both games because the rivalries are so big."



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the area, but to decide on the zoning. He also said that if the land was going to be developed, he would prefer to see a residential development than a commercial development. The council requires a fence, which will surround the area, he added to the rezoning ordinance before it approved unanimously. Additionally, the council approved changing the intersection at Rock Prairie Road and Longmire Drive from a two-way stop to a temporary four-way stop until a traffic signal can be installed.

aid, adding that people "known for their abilities and disabilities." The group left the stage asquez, director of volunteer and public information, presented the trio with a certificate. George W. Bush declared 2000 Destination Dignity Week to increase awareness about disabilities people with disabilities made in their communities.

its are able to say their mark by purchasing merchandise and attending each class hosts, \$1.50 earned from each fund-raiser — from selling T-shirts to special events — were labeled specifically for the gift. Looking forward to the fall, I'll have to bring my friends and show them proudly what I gave to the University of Texas.

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