

A Tough Challenge; A Proud Finish

Aggies come four yards short of OU upset

By Brian Ruff
The Battalion

The No. 21 Texas A&M football team came just four yards short of shocking the No. 1 Oklahoma Sooners and the rest of the college football world Saturday as Heisman frontrunner Josh Heupel handed the Aggies their second home loss of the season, 35-31.

Trailing by four points with less than three minutes left in the fourth quarter, senior wide receiver Chris Taylor could not handle a fourth and goal pass from sophomore quarterback Mark Farris. The incomplete pass ended the Aggies' best opportunity to regain the lead and ended the Aggies' dream of the biggest upset in A&M history.

"We are obviously disappointed in the loss," said A&M coach R.C. Slocum. "The kids played hard. You have to give credit to Oklahoma. They made the plays they needed to make to win the ballgame."

The Aggies began their upset bid just four minutes into the game, when special teams standout Jay Brooks darted through the middle of the Sooner line and blocked Jeff Ferguson punt. A&M took over at the OU 12-yard line, and just five plays later, Farris followed sophomore tight end Taylor Whitley's block and leapt into the end zone for a two-yard touchdown run.

With A&M up 7-0, Oklahoma's Heupel found wide receiver Josh Norman deep over the middle for a gain of 55 yards down to the A&M 14-yard line. The Wrecking Crew defense held strong, forcing Heupel to make three straight incompletions and forced the high-flying Oklahoma offense to settle for a 31-yard Tim Duncan field goal.

The teams traded punts for the rest of the quarter, and at the end of 15 minutes of play, A&M led the Sooners 7-3, mustering a mere 39 yards of total offense in the quarter.

Oklahoma's returning threat J.T. Thatcher took a 41-yard Cody Scates punt and returned it 27 yards to set up the Sooner offense in A&M territory. Heupel shoveled the ball to running

back Quentin Griffin on a second-down play and the sophomore found a hole and darted 28 yards to the A&M seven-yard line.

Two plays later, Heupel rolled left and with plenty of time, found wide receiver Curtis Fagan in the middle of the end zone for a seven-yard touchdown.

With A&M trailing in the game for the first time, the team looked to be in trouble when the offense went three-and-out on the ensuing drive. Oklahoma took over and moved the

ball to the OU 20, but had to settle for a 37-yard Terence Kitchens field goal to tie the game at 10.

Just one minute later, OU completed a pass over the middle, but receiver Andre Woolfolk was hit by freshman corner Jonte Buhl, who forced the ball to fall to the ground. A&M safety Michael Jameson fell on the fumble, and the Aggies got a chance to regain their lead at the OU 39-yard line.

Buhl, a true freshman, was playing for an injured Sammy Davis who left the game earlier in the half. Farris completed a 22-yard pass to wide-out Bethel Johnson to start the drive that moved the Aggies to the Sooners' red zone. With only 19 seconds left on the clock, Farris took a two-step drop and fired a quick pass to Ferguson, who got one foot down in the back of the end zone to give the Aggies a 17-10 lead going into the half.

On Oklahoma's opening drive of the second half, Heupel threw high over his intended receiver and was picked off by a diving Terrance Kiel.

Ferguson would come up big again for the Aggies, bringing down a Farris pass that set up the Aggies with 1st-and-goal at the OU four-yard line. Three plays later, fullback Ja'Mar Toombs rumbled behind the left side of the line and into the end zone to give the Aggies their biggest lead of the day, 24-10.

After an OU punt, the Aggies took over and moved the ball to the middle of the field before Oklahoma defensive back Michael Thompson stepped in front of a post route and picked off the Farris pass. Oklahoma would drive deep into A&M territory but was stopped by the Aggie defense and a costly holding penalty close to the goal line.

At the end of the third quarter, A&M clung to a 24-13 lead. On Oklahoma's next possession, the Sooners would find the end zone on a 21-yard draw to the tailback Griffin who eluded the A&M defenders and crossed the goal line to cut the lead to 24-19. The Sooners, looking to make

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

back to midfield, where the Sooners were faced with a 4th-and-1 situation. Stoops elected to go for the first down, but Heupel's attempted quarterback sneak fell short when Aggie linebacker Brian Gamble leapt over the line and stopped the OU quarterback for no gain.

The Aggies moved the ball down to the OU 35, and on 4th-and-18, the Aggies elected to try to convert instead of trying a long field goal. Farris threw to junior receiver Robert Ferguson, but the pass was knocked down at the goal line and fell incomplete.

The Aggies would get another chance to regain the lead two plays later when heavy defensive line pressure forced Heupel to make an errant throw that found its way into the arms of linebacker Jason Glenn who returned the pick to the OU 34-yard line.

On a third-down-and-three play with less than five minutes left to play in the half, Farris found Ferguson on a short route to the sideline that gave A&M its first third-down conversion

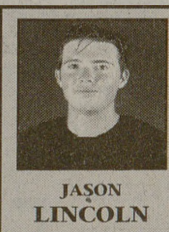


A&M fullback Ja'Mar Toombs scored his second touchdown in dramatic fashion, dragging four Sooner defenders 10 yards to put the Aggies up, 31-21 in the fourth quarter. No. 1 OU came back to win 35-31.

See **SHORTCOMING** on Page 10.

Wrecking Crew big part of near OU victory

Last week Texas A&M's defense provided a fourth-down stop that kept Oklahoma State out of the end zone and preserve the win. This week against No. 1 Oklahoma, the Wrecking Crew played to near perfection, but it was not enough.



JASON LINCOLN

The Aggies may have entered the biggest game of the year with the youngest secondary in the league, a defensive line that has struggled past injuries and a pair of losses, but in front of 87,188 maroon-clad, towel-waving fans, the Aggies left no doubt that the Wrecking Crew was as strong as ever.

In the end, it would take some defensive magic from the Sooners in a fourth-quarter interception-turned-touchdown and then a goal-line stand to retain their elite status as the nation's

only undefeated team with a 35-31 win.

It was only fitting that Oklahoma could not overcome A&M's defensive tradition and powerful crowd with their heralded offense that had already beat a No. 3 Kansas State team, a No. 1 Nebraska team and a Texas team on the edge of the Top 10.

In the past three seasons at Kyle Field A&M's defense has set the stage for upsets over the same teams the Sooners downed this season. In 1998, it began with No. 2 Nebraska, followed by an upset over the Wildcats who had hopes of playing for the national title. Last season, A&M finished out a rocky season with a win, holding No. 5 Texas to just 16 points.

This season, after losses to then-unranked Notre Dame and then-winless Colorado, the Aggies beat No. 10 Kansas State, setting the stage for the showdown against the Sooners.

The Wrecking Crew did everything right. Cor-

nerback Jay Brooks blocked OU's first punt, his fourth blocked punt of the season. Linebacker Jason Glenn posted a first half interception and deflected another pass before leaving with a sprained knee. Safety Terrence Kiel added another interception to Heisman candidate Josh Heupel's numbers.

By the time all was said and done Oklahoma's big-play offense was only allowed one break-out play, a 55-yard catch in the first quarter — the result of a broken play by the Aggie defense. Even then the Aggies were able to rally and hold the Sooners to a field goal.

By the time it was over, the undisputed best team in the country was able to score just 28 points on offense against an Aggie team that was 0-8 all-time against No. 1 ranked teams.

Even when Oklahoma returned an interception

See **WRECKING CREW** on Page 10.



Outside linebacker Jason Glenn returns his interception off OU quarterback Josh Heupel. Glenn left the game with a sprained knee in the 2nd half.

A&M women make cross country history

Staff and Wire

DENTON — The 24th-ranked Texas A&M women's cross country team made school history by winning the 2000 NCAA South Central Regional Saturday at the Eagle Point Golf Course in Denton.

A&M scored 52 points to upset 11th-ranked and heavily-favored Arkansas by 16 points. Arkansas' Lilli Kleinmann and Tracy Robertson finished 1-2 in the individual race, but the Aggies placed five runners in the top 22 to defeat the defending champions.

The victory marks the first time in school history that an Aggie cross country squad has taken a regional title and the first time a women's team from A&M has qualified for the national meet since the sport was sanctioned by the NCAA in 1982.

"Obviously this was a tremendous achievement," said third-year head

coach Dave Hartman. "We had an off day at Big 12s. We thought we had a shot at Arkansas, but I don't think a whole lot of other people did. The girls did a very good job of maintaining their confidence, and they came up here and performed."

The Aggies were led by juniors Andrea Bookout and Melissa Gulli. Bookout finished fourth while Gulli placed seventh.

"Andrea (Bookout) ran an awesome race," said Hartman, who will take his third team to nationals in five seasons of coaching. "She was sick last week, so we were a little worried going in, but she's so mentally tough and came on really strong. Melissa (Gulli) did a phenomenal job. She performed better than expected going into the meet."

Senior Brooke Edwards was the

See **CROSS COUNTRY** on Page 10.



A&M midfielder Kristen Strutz battles for possession against Marquette's Jaimie Krofta Sunday. A&M moved into the Sweet 16 with the 2-0 win.

Aggie soccer wins, moves to Sweet 16

By Brian Ruff

The Battalion

The No. 9 Aggie Soccer team opened its 2000 NCAA tournament play with a 4-0 victory over the Marquette Golden Eagles Sunday afternoon at the Aggie Soccer Complex.

"Our emphasis this week wasn't on changing anything we've been doing," said coach G. Guerrieri. "It was just the fact of cleaning up our game and doing those things better."

Goalkeeper Esther Thompson posted another shutout, the first in Aggie history, after six-straight NCAA tournament appearances.

Just under nine minutes into the game, the Aggies got on the scoreboard when freshman Kristen Strutz sent the ball to Andrea Starns, who dribbled around a Marquette defender and blasted a shot into the bottom left corner of the goal to give the Aggies an early 1-0 lead. Starns' goal would prove to be all the Aggies needed.

Later in the half, the Golden Eagles got their first and only shot and scoring chance of the first half when Marquette forward Kate Gordon gathered a loose ball and took a shot that glanced off the right post and then carreened out of bounds.

With 15 minutes remaining in the half, the Aggies would up their lead when Starns found senior midfielder Heather Wiebe at the top of the penalty box. Wiebe received the pass and blasted the shot into the upper right hand corner of the net to increase the lead to 2-0.

"The people down the middle of the field did a great job," Guerrieri said. "Heather was able to keep control of that portion of the field."

The Aggies mounted another chance shortly after, when Strutz found an open Heather Ragsdale who took a shot deep in the Marquette box, but missed wide left.

See **SOCCER** on Page 10.