

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

Redeeming performance

Texas A&M men rebound from humbling loss with rout

By BLAINE DIONNE
The Battalion

When the Texas A&M men's basketball team lost to Birmingham-Southern by 20 points Sunday night, coach Melvin Watkins was livid. His team had just lost to a program that had never won on the Division I-A level.

He called a 5:30 a.m. practice the next day after questioning his team's character. He declared it a turning point in the season and said his team could either spiral into a losing streak or begin putting the pieces together against the Morris Brown Wolverines.

The Aggies chose the latter as they trounced the Wolverines Wednesday night in front of 2,833 fans at Reed Arena, 79-46.

Watkins said after the game he was pleased with the way his team responded to the challenge, but it still has a long way to go.

"Was tonight the turning point? No — but it's in the right direction," Watkins said. "Tonight was a by product of the practices that we've had. We came out and did some things that, had we done them against Birmingham-Southern, I think the outcome would have been different."

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— Melvin Watkins
Texas A&M men's basketball coach

The outcome was looking a little shaky after the first half as the Aggies went back and forth with the Wolverines, with A&M leading 29-19 at the break.

But when the Aggies came out for the second half, they seemed to gain new life. They went on scoring runs of 10, nine and 12 to extend their lead to 68-37.

Watkins said his players needed the point breakout in the second half to make a statement for themselves.

"What we wanted to do was forget about the

scoreboard," Watkins said. "Let's come out and see if we can continue to play with intensity as a team and execute. Let's see if we can pick it up another notch. I thought we did a pretty good job of that tonight."

The Aggies' defensive play seemed to kick-start them in the second half. They collected seven points off turnovers and 11 steals on the night.

A steal got the crowd into the game after two minutes of play in the second period.

After stealing the ball for an easy two points on a layup, forward Carlton Brown decided to mix things up a little.

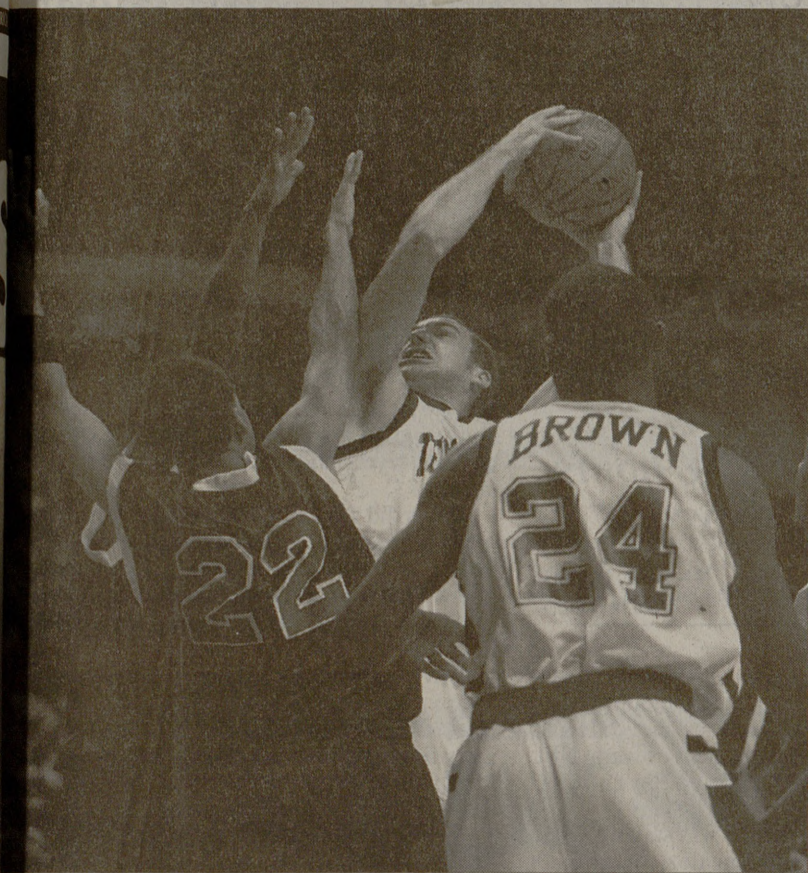
Stealing the ball in transition, Brown had a clear view to the hole and slammed the ball home. In the process, he kept the Aggies' first scoring run alive.

Guard Andy Leatherman led the Aggies in scoring with 15 points, followed by guard Bernard King, who chipped in 14.

A&M also upped its efforts on the boards, pulling down 39 rebounds, more than doubling its dismal 17 against Birmingham-Southern.

The Aggies' performance at the charity stripe

See REDEEMED on Page 3B.



CODY WAGES/THE BATTALION

Forward Aaron Jack pulls down a rebound in the Aggies' 79-46 win over Morris Brown Wednesday. Jack finished with eight points, nine rebounds.

Wildcats hope to rain on Sooners' parade

By BLAINE DIONNE

The Battalion

For those of you who might have missed the first game, the No. 8 Kansas State Wildcats and the No. 1 Oklahoma Sooners will face off Saturday in the Big 12 championship game, a rematch of their October game that helped propel the Sooners to the top spot in the polls.

This time the stakes are a bit higher, though. A Big 12 championship and a possible Orange Bowl trip for the national title is in the works for the

Sooners if they can pull out a win, but the Wildcats would like nothing more than to ruin that for OU.

KSU was knocked out of the national picture by the Sooners in that October loss, and coach Bill Snyder said his 'Cats will be ready to play Saturday.

"We're pleased to have the opportunity to play in the Big 12 Championship," Snyder said. "It's a tremendous opportunity to play the No. 1 team in the country."

Oklahoma pinned 385 total yards

of offense and 41 points on Kansas State in October. Snyder said he will do his best to prevent such a loss from happening again.

"We won't make wholesale changes," Snyder said. "But whatever we do, we're going to have to do it better than we did."

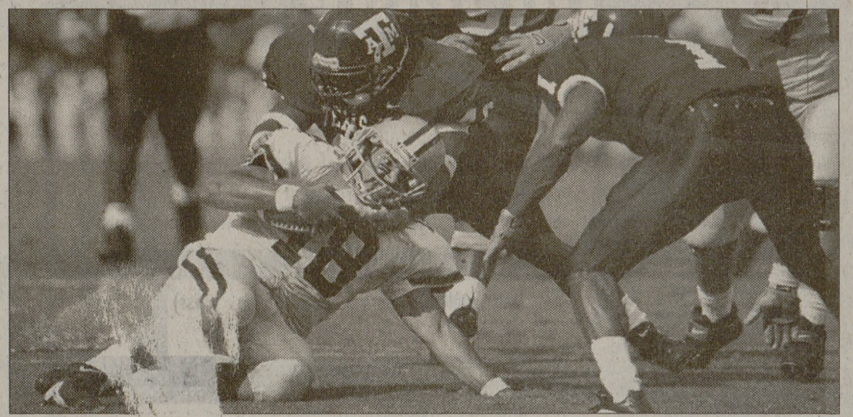
Oklahoma has been slumping since its October charge, when it beat three consecutive opponents ranked in the Top 10. The Sooners hit bottom last week against their cross-state rival, Oklahoma State.

OSU, with only one win in the Big 12 this year — against Baylor — held the usually high-powered Sooners to 12 points, a miserable performance against any foe.

Oklahoma's coach Bob Stoops vowed his team would be ready to take on the Wildcats.

"We don't need to make any excuses (about OSU)," Stoops said. "We found a way to win that football game."

"We're excited about it (Big 12 Championship Game). It's another game, so let's go have fun with it."



FILE PHOTO/THE BATTALION

Kansas State quarterback Jonathan Beasley, shown here against the Aggies, will try to lead his Wildcats past No. 1 Oklahoma on Saturday.

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