

Snowed over

Independence Bowl loss culminates up-and-down 2000 season for Aggies

By JASON LINCOLN
The Battalion

A snow-covered Sanford Independence Bowl on New Year's Eve in Shreveport, La., capped off a season with more than its share of unexpected shortcomings and disappointments for the Texas A&M football team.

Aggie miscues negated a pair of 14-point leads as the Mississippi State Bulldogs worked their way back for a 43-41 overtime victory.

"People talked about all week how evenly matched Texas A&M and Mississippi State were," said A&M coach R.C. Slocum. "At the end of 60 minutes of play, the score was tied, and when the game was over, only two points separated the two teams, so they were obviously right."

Despite the miscues, junior fullback Ja'Mar Toombs did everything he could to carry the Aggies to victory, as his 25-yard touchdown run on the first play of overtime capped off a 193-yard, three-touchdown performance.

Carrying the ball 35 times, the 250-plus pound fullback looked at home while running in snow for the first time.

"I haven't given the records any thought. I'm a team guy and my only concern is the team," Toombs said following the loss.

The team-first attitude lasted only so long, as the Independence Bowl star became the first Aggie since Leeland McElroy in 1995 to forego his senior season and enter the NFL draft.

Junior wide receiver Robert Ferguson was the next to jump ship as he announced two days later that he too would leave for the NFL. Only one year removed from junior college, Ferguson shattered A&M's single-season receiving benchmarks in his first and only season at A&M.

Both cited financial reasons for their decisions and said they were acting in the best interests of their families.

The early departure of two offensive players only highlighted the fact that the strength of the 2000 Aggies was the offense.

Mark Farris came out on top of the preseason three-way quarterback derby and proved a perfect fit for a revamped Aggie offense.

Farris joined the NCAA's growing ranks of former minor league baseball players to return



Texas A&M running back Ja'Mar Toombs carries the ball in the Aggies' 43-41 overtime loss to the Mississippi State Bulldogs.

to Division I football and perform well on the playing field. Farris' leadership and quick release helped the Aggie offense become oriented around what he and A&M's diverse group of wideouts could do.

The new vertical offense was the result of a new braintrust of coaches that included running backs coach Pete Hoener, former offensive coordinator at Iowa State and wide receivers coach Larry Kirksey, who held that same job with the San Francisco 49ers.

That duo teamed up with offensive coordinator Steve Kragthorpe to help Farris the best passing season in school history.

While the offense performed well, the strongholds of Aggie football, the Wrecking Crew and special teams unit, deserted the Aggies in the crucial moments of 2000.

Breakdowns in these Aggie mainstays ultimately resulted in a three-game slide that was capped off by the Independence Bowl loss.

The Wrecking Crew fought through the year

with a young secondary and hardly any depth on the line. Although the defense played well in the upset of No. 10 Kansas State and the near upset of eventual national champion Oklahoma, it appeared lethargic in games against Colorado, Baylor, Oklahoma State and Texas.

Injuries also proved to be a major setback over the course of the year. During the year, every position, with the exception of quarter-

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OU title comforts Ags' squad

By BRIAN RUFF

The Battalion

Despite the Aggies' blunder in the snow in Shreveport on New Year's Eve, A&M football fans can be positive when they look back at the 2000 season.

Oklahoma's win over Florida State in the Orange Bowl gave the Sooners their seventh national championship and shed a positive light on the Aggies' season.

For those who do not remember, Oklahoma head coach Bob Stoops' Sooners came into the jam-packed Kyle Field on Nov. 11 ranked No. 1 in the nation.

The Aggies gave the high-powered Oklahoma offense all it could handle, coming just four yards and four points short of dethroning the Sooners and gaining some much-needed respect from a national audience.

The Aggies were not taken in by the publicity of the matchup that attracted ESPN's "Gameday" crew to Kyle Field for the Aggies' first home game with a top-ranked national opponent since the team fell to Texas in 1977.

The Aggies did more than let the Sooners slide by with a 35-31 win.

The team showed that they could play with the best teams in college football on any day and could also use the team's deafening home field crowd to destroy the opposing team's intentions of walking all over the underdog Aggies on their turf.

The Aggies contributed to the decline of Heisman hopeful Josh

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