

Toombs and Ferguson would benefit from staying extra year

The 2001 version of the Texas A&M football team has already suffered a major blow and it hasn't even made it to National Signing Day yet.



DOUG FUENTES

Two of the Aggies' most talented offensive players, junior fullback Ja'Mar Toombs and junior wide receiver Robert Ferguson, decided last week to forgo their senior seasons and head for the riches of the National Football League.

Toombs led the team in touchdowns this season with 14 and Ferguson set a new single-season record for receiving yards, with 885 in only 10 games.

Toombs and Ferguson cited financial strains as the main factor in their decisions.

While it is hard to fault them for going after the money, both do carry question marks with them on their quests.

During his time at A&M, Toombs gained a reputation as a big-game back. His 71-yard rumble against Nebraska in 1998 helped provide the Aggies with a spark. In 1999 against Texas, he almost single-handedly willed the Aggies to

victory. This season he stepped it up again with his performances against Kansas State, Oklahoma and Mississippi State.

His tendency of not showing up for the other games is cause for alarm, however. For the season, Toombs gained only 564 yards on 152 carries — an average of only 3.7 per tote. Those are decent numbers, but hardly the numbers of a back ready to tear up the NFL.

Another thing going against Toombs is history.

Three A&M running backs declared for the draft early in the 1990s (Robert Wilson, Greg Hill and Leeland McElroy), and none went on to have a distinguished NFL career.

On the other hand, Rodney Thomas resisted the call of the NFL and stayed for his senior season. He was drafted in the third round in 1995 by the then Houston Oilers. He is still in the league and was a member of the Tennessee Titans team that made it to the 2000 Super Bowl. Food for thought, Mr. Toombs.

Ferguson is a different story. From the first day he came to Aggieland, Ferguson was the most talented receiver the Aggies ever had. He had the speed, quickness and physical play required to compete at

the next level.

He set one A&M receiving record and would have rewritten the Aggie record book if he had stayed.

Talent was never an issue, but readiness to compete against the top NFL cornerbacks will be.

Ferguson is only one year removed from Tyler Junior College.

He adjusted well this year to Division I competition, but the jump from junior college to Division I competition is nothing like the jump from Division I to the pros.

As good as Ferguson is now, he only would have improved his senior year and would have had a good chance to solidify himself as the top wide receiver, if not the top player, in the 2002 draft.

ESPN draft guru Mel Kiper rated Toombs as the 16th-best player on his draft board, with Ferguson coming in at No. 19. Most NFL scouts see both players as second- to fourth-round picks.

The talent is apparent in both players and both will probably do well in the NFL. But another year in Aggieland would have cleared up the questions and made the road to stardom a bit easier.

Doug Fuentes is a senior journalism major.

OKLAHOMA

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Heupel's popularity by picking off the senior quarterback twice during the contest and holding him to only one touchdown in the game.

Despite the onslaught of criticism that piles up on head coach R.C. Slocum and the rest of the coaching staff, Slocum readied his troops for the biggest battle of his 12 seasons as head coach.

He came just short of ending OU's national championship season and possibly giving the Aggies a shot at another Big 12 Championship.

Slocum had Aggies on both sides of the ball ready to

go to battle on that chilly Saturday afternoon, even though the team was devastated by injuries late in the game.

Junior fullback Ja'Mar Toombs added several plays to his highlight reel, including a 27-yard rumble into the end zone that will remain in the minds of Aggie football fans for years.

When Aggie fans look back at the 2000 season, they should not dwell on the disheartening loss to Colorado that ended a four-year win streak at Kyle Field or the thumping by the Longhorns in Austin.

They should remember the Aggies' 26-10 beating of the No. 8 Kansas State Wildcats and the startling Oklahoma game that could have shook-up the Big 12 Conference and possibly the entire college football nation.

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back, had at least one starter miss a game. A&M's injury situation was so bad that Slocum said it was the worst he had ever been through in his coaching career.

In the new year, A&M hopes that at least part of history repeats itself as it moves into 2001. After all, Oklahoma's last loss was at the 1999 Independence Bowl.

"It's definitely disappointing when you lose your final game, not to mention your last three games, but we're going to learn from this and not

let it happen again," linebacker Brian Gamble, who will anchor next season's Wrecking Crew, said. "We're not going to let it dishearten us or affect our play next year. Oklahoma was in this same boat last year at this time, and they were able to build on it. We're going to use it for motivation and be ready for 2001."

Kubiak interviews with Texans

HOUSTON (AP) — It seems only a matter of time until Denver Broncos offensive coordinator Gary Kubiak lands a head coaching job in the NFL.

The native Texan is frequently on the candidates' list when a job comes open and he returned home Monday for an interview with the expansion Houston Texans that could be the most attractive of all to the former Denver and Texas A&M quarterback.

"This is a no-brainer for me, something I've really looked for the past two years so I'm enjoying today," Kubiak said after talking with owner Bob McNair and general manager Charley Casserly. "I've been in contact with Mr. (Pat) Bowlen, our owner, about what was going on and whether Houston would get the opportunity for a team."

"When they did, as a football coach and a guy coming up in this business, I was very interested in what was going on. It's been a long process and something I've really waited on to meet these guys and see what's going on here at home."

Kubiak played high school football at Houston St. Pius and then played quarterback at A&M. He spent nine seasons as a backup to John Elway with the Broncos and has been the team's offensive coordinator for the past six seasons.

Kubiak interviewed with the Cleveland Browns in 1998, and more recently with the New Orleans Saints and New England Patriots. He also was a finalist for the University of Colorado job before deciding to stick with the Broncos.

The Browns and Bills are currently looking for head coaches but Kubiak said he hadn't been contacted by those teams.

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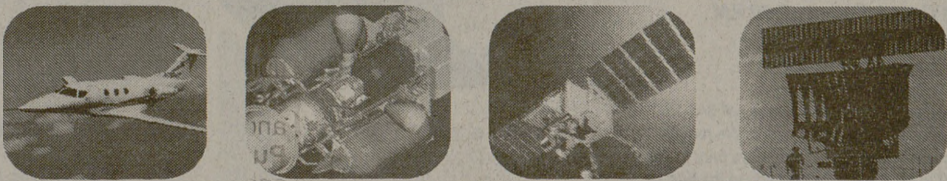
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