

## Big 12 football holds media days

Matthew L. Thigpen  
The Battalion

Friday at the Big 12 Conference media days in Dallas, the Aggie football team stated that despite being unranked, they are ready to battle for not only the Big 12 Conference championship but for the national championship.

Safety Jay Brooks summed up the team's attitude, saying, "Each team in America wants to make it to the big dance. That is our team's goal."

Head coach R.C. Slocum brought quarterback Mark Farris, center Seth McKinney and Brooks to answer questions from the press. Each player said that being unranked was not a bad thing because the Aggies normally shine as underdogs.

"We like being sleepers. Right now, we are the sleepers of the Big 12. Oklahoma, Texas and Nebraska have the pressure all on them," Brooks said.

Last season's disappointing 7-5 record is a large part of the reason the Aggies are unranked. "It's disappointing anytime you don't win a championship.

### Ags savor new role as underdog

But every year is a new season and at this time a year ago, nobody was predicting that OU would play for the national championship," Slocum said.

A major cause of last year's disappointment were early season injuries.

"We had the worst run of injuries (last year) since I have been a head coach," Slocum said.

So far, the Aggies are healthy, but losing Ja'Mar Toombs and Robert Ferguson to the NFL draft leaves a void on the offense.

"Anytime you lost two guys the caliber of Robert Ferguson and Ja'Mar Toombs, it's tough. But we have a lot of players who can step in, and, on the whole, make this a better unit than last year's," Farris said.

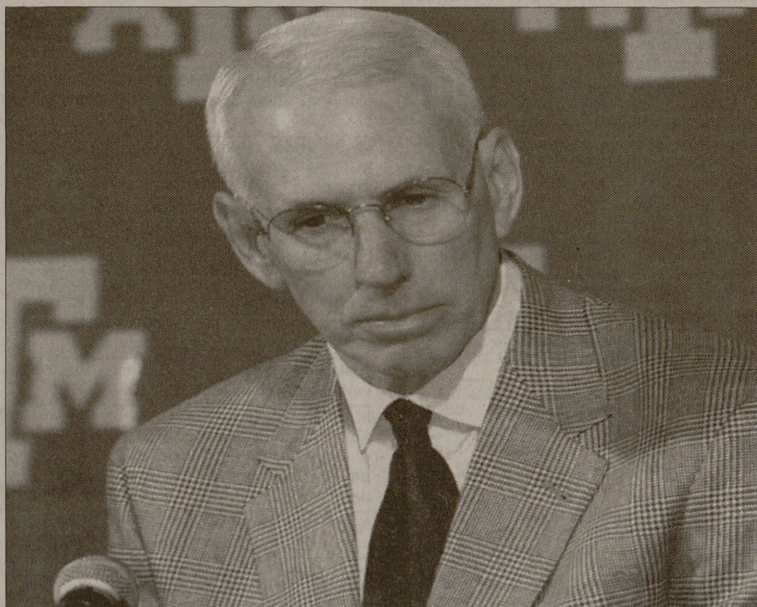
This year's schedule puts several obstacles in the Aggies' way to a conference title. Notre Dame visits Kyle Field September 29, and A&M must travel to Kansas State, Texas Tech and Oklahoma. The Red Raiders have a history of playing well against the Aggies in

Lubbock, and playing the Sooners in Norman is never an easy task.

A&M's arch-rival, the Texas Longhorns, must come to Kyle Field. The Aggies are hoping

to avenge last season's debacle in Austin.

"We made (Longhorn quarterback) Chris Simms who he is after he exploded against us last season. But, Texas has to come play us at Kyle Field this November," Brooks said.



FILE PHOTO/THE BATTALION  
Texas A&M head football coach R.C. Slocum and several members of the 2001 team attended Big 12 media days in Dallas.

### Horns, Huskers start as favorites

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After years of playing second fiddle to Nebraska, Kansas State and Oklahoma, the University of Texas took center stage at Thursday's annual Big 12 Conference media days in Dallas.

A No. 1 ranking from The Sporting News increased the Longhorn's media attention. When asked about the possibility of winning a national championship, Texas head coach Mack Brown said, "One of the advantages of being in a conference like this is it puts you in a great position to win a national title if your team wins out. It also gives your program national attention and makes it easier to recruit. However, it also makes it harder to win."

Longhorn quarterback Chris Simms is considered to be one of best quarterbacks in the country, although he has started only seven games with

a 5-2 record. Simms seemed surprised by the attention, saying "I think there are lots of good players who have proven themselves for more than one year in college. I've got to prove myself first."

1999 Offensive Player of the Year Major Applewhite is waiting in the wings if Simms fails to produce. With a schedule designed for a national championship run, including national powers like New Mexico State and Houston, the hardest game for the Longhorns is likely to be against Oklahoma. The Longhorns also have to travel to Kyle Field, where they historically have not fared well.

Despite being the defending National Champions, Oklahoma is not picked to win the Big 12. Quarterback Josh Heupel is gone, but head coach Bob Stoops is optimistic about this season.

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## Welcome to the Tour De Lance, Armstrong triumphs

PARIS (AP) — Lance Armstrong raised his arms in triumph on the Champs-Elysees yet again Sunday, easily capturing his third straight Tour de France title after surviving life-threatening cancer and taking the world's toughest cycling race to another level.

His leader's yellow jersey was lost in the main pack as he crossed the finish line, but the man from Austin, Texas, already had shown he is in a class of his own — the only American to win three Tours in a row.

With the majestic Arc de Triomphe behind him, Armstrong listened to the band play "The Star-Spangled Banner" and savored an end to three weeks of gut-wrenching treks through mountain peaks.

He stepped down from the podium and embraced his wife, Kristin, pregnant with twin girls, and toddler son Luke, dressed in yellow like his father.

"It's the best feeling of the last three (wins)," Armstrong said in faltering French. "As always, I am happy to finally arrive, to finally finish the Tour. It's a special feeling."

He later took a lap of honor down the graceful, tree-lined Champs-Elysees with his U.S. Postal

Service teammates behind him, and smiled in amusement when the Texas flag he was waving became entangled in his bike chain.

It was about time something went wrong. Armstrong's ride to victory was smooth from start to finish, and reached perfection in the five mountain stages.

By the time he had finished in the Alps and the Pyrenees, his awestruck rivals were acknowledging defeat with a whole week of racing to go.

His most memorable triumphs came in the climb to L'Alpe d'Huez — his first-stage victory — and in the ride to the top of Pla d'Adet, where he claimed the yellow jersey that he wore all the way to Paris.

Then, with the title already locked up, Armstrong further tightened his grip in the flat stretches by winning the last individual time-trial.

His main rival, Jan Ullrich of Germany, was left trailing the Texan by 6 minutes, 44 seconds in the overall standings, a deficit he carried with him to the finish line.

Only sickness or accidents could have prevented Armstrong from claiming victory, and his leisurely finish in 70th place in the final stage changed nothing.

"I never thought I would get to this point. It was a surprise for me even to make it back to the sport," he added, referring to his comeback from advanced testicular cancer that had spread to his lungs and brain.

Like Armstrong, U.S. cyclist Greg LeMond also won three times, but with a two-year gap between his first and second titles. The Tour record is five titles, but for now Armstrong says he isn't interested.

"I'm not chasing a record," he said.

Armstrong's triumph crowned a Tour that was almost free of doping scandals: The Texan denied once again that he has ever used performance-enhancing substances after it was revealed he had ties to an Italian doctor linked to doping. Then, Spanish rider Txema Del Olmo was dropped from the race by his team after testing positive for what his squad called "abnormalities."

Czech rider Jan Svoboda won Sunday's stage, ending a more than 2,100-mile ride through France and Belgium in 20 legs.

Svoboda was clocked in 3 hours, 57 minutes, 28 seconds. Germany's Erik Zabel was second and Australian Stuart O'Grady finished third, both in the same time as the stage-winner. Armstrong also finished in the same time as Zabel.

With Ullrich in second overall and Spaniard Joseba Beloki third, the finish was identical to last year's. It was only the second time in Tour history that the same riders have finished 1-2-3 in consecutive years.

Armstrong won the 1999 Tour with a 7:37 lead over Switzerland's Alex Zuelle. In 2000, he faced stiffer competition, but managed to beat Ullrich by 6:02.

"It was one of the funner victories I've had here," he said. "Definitely the strongest I've ever been, stronger than the previous two."

But there's more to come. "I have a lot left," he said. "I love it. I love what I do. As long as the passion is there, I'll be around for years."

As for Armstrong winning over the hearts of the French — well, not yet.

The public admires Armstrong's huge talent, but sees him as somewhat cold and distant.

"Arch-dominator," the daily Parisien newspaper called him recently. "Armstronginator," said the sports daily L'Equipe.

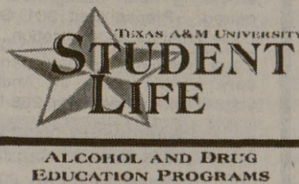
For his part, Armstrong has tried to warm to the crowds by speaking a mildly mangled form of French in TV interviews.

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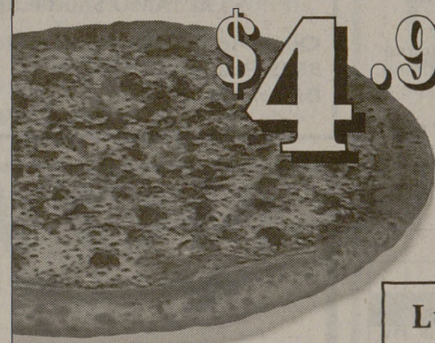


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