

FOOTBALL PREVIEW 2001

THE BATTALION

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Aggies look for balance behind QB Farris

By TRUE BROWN
THE BATTALION

The name of the game this season for the Texas A&M offense is balance. With just six starters returning to the lineup, the Aggies will count on a balance of veteran leadership and new faces to fill the holes left behind after last season.

Gone are wide receivers Chris Taylor and Robert Ferguson, tight end RoDerrick Broughton, fullback Ja'mar Toombs and of-

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Texas A&M quarterback

fensive lineman Chris Valletta. With their jump to the NFL, Ferguson and Taylor took with them half of A&M's receiver production from last year — something that will not be easy to replace.

Thrown into the mix will be two new coaches, Ken Rucker and Dino Babers. Rucker, who has spent time coaching for Baylor, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Alabama will begin his second term as A&M's running

backs' coach. Babers will be the Aggies new offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach. Babers set a Pac-10 record in 1999 for offensive yards per game (471.9) as the offensive coordinator for Arizona.

“I was pleased this spring with how quickly Coach Babers came in and meshed with the other coaches and players that are here,” said A&M head coach R.C. Slocum. “I think they have developed a very good relationship.”

The Aggies will return quarterback Mark Farris. Last year, in his first season at the helm of the offense, Farris set a school record for season passing yards with 2,551, breaking a fourteen year old mark. Farris also ranks second all-time at A&M for single season completions (208) and completion percentage (.599), and third for attempts (347).

Farris will lead the team into the season with a low-key attitude.

“I am just going to go out there and do what I can do and not worry about outside pressure,” said Farris. “If we can stay consistent we will have a good year. You can be occasionally great or consistently good, and I think it would be better to be consistently good.”

“Consistent” would be a good word to describe the Aggie receiving corps. Senior Bethel Johnson, although a short target at 5-11, is a good runner with breakout speed. Johnson has caught at least one pass in every game he has played in, and will play a large part in the Aggies' aerial attack.



CODY WAGES • THE BATTALION

Sophomore running back **Richard Whitaker** and the A&M offense will take to the field this season searching for balance after losing Robert Ferguson and Ja'mar Toombs.

Also, at wide receiver will be junior Dwain Goynes. Goynes earned the job after a strong showing in the spring game, recording five catches for 90 yards and one touchdown. Senior wide receiver Mickey Jones and junior

Greg Porter will also get plenty of playing time. The duo combined for 30 receptions in 2000.

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Offense will find new go-to players

Since Ja'mar Toombs and Robert Ferguson declared for the NFL draft in January, this debate has raged: Will the Aggie offense be able to find replacements for their departed big-game playmakers?

The answer is, without a doubt, yes.

The biggest hit to the Aggie offense was the departure of Ferguson, who was the Big 12 Newcomer of the Year and an All-Big 12 selection last season, and who set a school record for receiving yards after transferring to A&M from Tyler Junior College. Ferguson and his 6-foot, 2-inch, 220-pound frame's jump to the NFL put a blow to the Aggies' skill and size.

But what the Aggies lost in size, they have replaced with speed. Senior Bethel Johnson (5-foot-8-inches, 188 pounds) and junior Dwain Goynes (5-foot-10-inches, 179 pounds) bring explosive speed to A&M's group of young receivers. Goynes runs a 4.26 40-yard dash and is the fastest player on the team. Touchdown receptions of 76 and 43 yards last season are a testament to his speed.

Couple that quickness with the dependability of Johnson, who has had at least one catch in every



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game in his career, and you have a very dangerous group of front-line receivers.

Junior Greg Porter grabbed 21 passes last season and will be used in possession situations. Porter's height and Velcro-like hands will make him a valuable asset in short, must-have situations. Senior Mickey Jones will get playing time too, and as a fifth-year senior, will be counted on as a leader.

A&M's biggest weapon, however, is quarterback Mark Farris. Farris established himself as a major player in the Aggie offense with a stellar 2000 campaign. Farris is A&M's first returning 2,500-yard passer in school history and was second among Big 12 quarterbacks in completions, third in passing yards and fourth in yards per game.

Farris proved he can run the ball effectively last year as well, piling up 116 ground yards, the most by an A&M quarterback since Bucky Richardson in 1991.

The loss of Toombs will hurt, but not quite as much as that of Ferguson. Granted, Toombs led the team in scoring last season with 14 touchdowns and almost led A&M to a win over Mississippi State in the Independence Bowl, but the Aggies still have their

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TEXAS A&M FOOTBALL WALK-ON / 12TH MAN Informational Meeting

DATE: Monday, September 3, 2001

TIME: 3:45 PM

WHERE: The Auditorium - West Side of
Kyle Field

- * MANDATORY ATTENDANCE
- * MUST BE ENROLLED IN 12 HOURS AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY COLLEGE STATION
- * MUST HAVE STARTED COLLEGE NO EARLIER THAN THE FALL OF '99