

# Sports

THE BATTALION

Friday, August 31, 2001

## Aggs hope to set season tone against McNeese

### A&M welcomes Cowboys for opener

By TRUE BROWN  
THE BATTALION

When Texas A&M football opens its season against McNeese State on Saturday, it will be a night of firsts.

It will be the first time the two teams have locked horns, the first time A&M head coach R.C. Slocum has competed against his alma mater and, more importantly to Aggie fans, the first time A&M will take the field without the offensive firepower of Ja'Mar Toombs and Robert Ferguson.

Also missing from the Aggies are linebackers Cornelius Anthony, Roylin Bradley and Jason Glenn, all of whom have moved on to NFL rosters.

The Aggies, coming off last season's 7-5 disappointment, are looking to prove when they take the field, even if it is against a Division 1-AA school.

"We finished on a down note last year," Slocum said. "This is our first chance to play another ball game, so it is important for us to come out, regardless of who we are playing, and have a lot of intensity and set the tone for the rest of the season."

McNeese probably will provide a decent test for the Aggies. The Cowboys finished the 2000 season with an 8-4 record, good enough to secure a top-20 ranking in the 1-AA polls. McNeese figures to have another strong team this season, beginning the year at No. 9 in two 1-AA preseason polls.

The fact that McNeese is a Division 1-AA school is something the Aggies cannot overlook.

"A lot of people don't realize that a bunch of 1-AA teams have more talent than some of the smaller 1-A teams," said A&M quarterback Mark Farris. "They have a lot of good players and if we come out and aren't focused, they can beat us."

Farris, back for his second season at the helm of the Aggie offense, is the school's first

ages 17.0 yards per reception during his three year career.

This year will mark the second year the Cowboys have opened their season against a major Division 1-A school. Last season, McNeese started against the University of Miami, a team that finished the year ranked No. 2 in the nation. The Cowboys put up a stronger performance than many people expected, falling 61-14. However, McNeese did pile up more than 440 yards of offense.

The Cowboys used the opener to set the tone for the rest of their season, capturing wins in seven of their next eight games.

A&M would like to follow the example of McNeese and use the opener as a springboard for the rest of the season.

"They have guys who can make plays," said junior Brian Gamble, the only returning starting linebacker the Aggies have this season. "The point of this game is for us to go out and set a tempo for the season. It doesn't matter if we are playing McNeese or Notre Dame or Oklahoma. We are going to go out and play against McNeese the same way we would play against anyone."

This weekend will be doubly important to the Aggies, who will play again Thursday night against Wyoming. "The key is going to be getting out of this game with a 'W,'" Farris said. "At the same time, we can't get anyone hurt because we basically



FILE PHOTO • THE BATTALION

Texas A&M quarterback Mark Farris and the Aggies will open the 2001 season Saturday night at 6 p.m. against McNeese State. A&M is looking to rebound after dropping three straight games to close out last season.

just have three days to rest in between games."

With most experts predicting A&M to finish third in the Big 12 South, the Aggies are

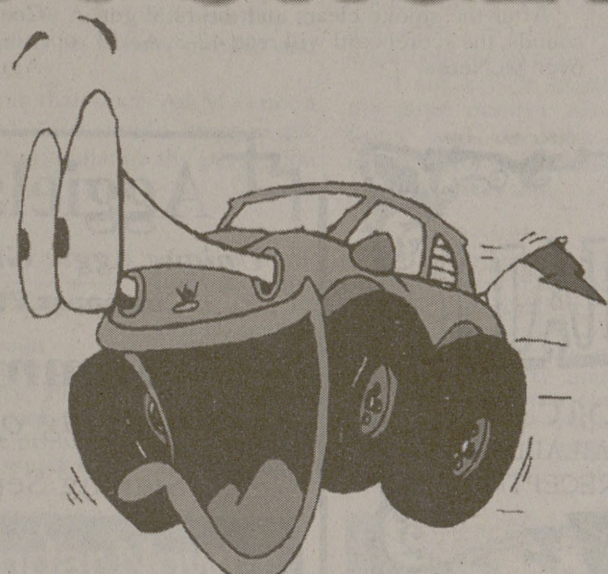
chomping at the bit to begin the 2001 season.

"We want to go out and show our stuff," said senior A&M free safety Jay Brooks.

"People are already counting us out and we are ready to go out there and prove that Texas A&M is something to be reckoned with."

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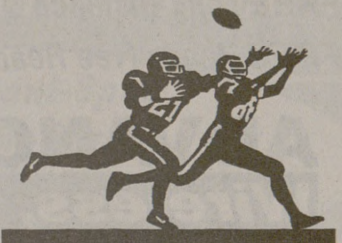
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