

Sports

Football
A&M 38
McNeese 24
A&M at Wyoming
Thursday, 9 p.m.

Weekend
Update

Volleyball
A&M def. SFA,
30-16, 30-27, 30-17
A&M def. Rice,
30-15, 31-29, 30-26

Monday, September 3, 2001

THE BATTALION

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No. 18 Ags sweep Rice

Staff & Wire

HOUSTON — The No. 18 Texas A&M volleyball team swept the Rice Owls, 30-15, 31-29 and 30-26 to capture the Crowne Plaza-Rice Invitational on Saturday.

Senior setter Jenna Moscovic was named the tournament's most valuable player and was joined by senior outside hitter Erin Lechler on the all-tournament team.

The Aggies (4-0), who never trailed in the first game, were ahead 8-5 when they pulled away by scoring eight unanswered points. Rice pulled to within seven points at 16-9, but were unable to get any closer as A&M cruised to a 30-15 win.

The third game also was a close race to the end. Rice held a 17-16 lead, but an Owl attack error and a kill by Moscovic gave the Aggies a lead they never lost.

Lechler strung together four of her match-high 15 kills to put A&M ahead 22-17. The Aggies extended the lead to seven points at 26-19 for their biggest lead of the game, but the Owls continued to fight and twice moved within two points at 26-24 and 28-26.

The Aggies put themselves in position to win the Invitational by defeating Stephen F. Austin, 30-16, 30-27, 30-17 earlier Saturday. Seniors A.D. Achilefu led A&M with 15 kills and Michelle Cole recorded a match-high 16 digs.

A&M opened up its season with two victories Friday, sweeping the Samford Bulldogs 30-15, 30-19 and 30-18, and the Houston Cougars 30-20, 30-13 and 30-25.

The Aggies return to action Tuesday when they play their home opener against the University of Texas-San Antonio Roadrunners at 7 p.m.

Crew salvages opener

By BRIAN RUFF
THE BATTALION

Entering the season, many wondered about the strength of the defensive unit of the Texas A&M football team. On Saturday evening, everyone who was focused on the Wrecking Crew found some confidence as the Aggie defense gave a struggling A&M offense time to settle in and recover from a 16-0 deficit.

McNeese State began the game exactly like they wanted to — get out on top of the heavily favored Aggies with a 55-yard fumble return for a touchdown. Then, as the offense continued to fail, the A&M defense continued to foul up every attempt at offensive success that the Cowboys threw at them.

McNeese mounted a drive late in the first quarter that led to a field goal, but with 9:27 left in the half, the Aggie defense found themselves down 16-0 despite their first half success.

"It was just one of those things where they were well prepared," said senior line-

backer Christian Rodriguez. "They obviously came here to play."

The Aggie offense finally found its rhythm before the half and gave the defense some breathing room by cutting the McNeese lead to six points at 16-10.

The Cowboys then came out for the start of the second half with confidence and mounted their most impressive drive of the game, going 80 yards in seven plays to take a 24-10 lead after converting on the two-point conversion.

Preseason All-American Sammy Davis gave the Aggies all the chance they needed, stepping in front of a McNeese pass and returning it 26 yards and returning it 26 yards to give the offense the ball at the McNeese 16-yard line.

With the Aggies clinging to a

seven point lead with only 5:18 remaining, the Cowboys took over at their own seven-yard line looking to tie the game. Facing second down and nine yards to go, McNeese quarterback Slade Nagle was intercepted by Rodriguez, who was patrolling near the line of scrimmage. Rodriguez walked easily into the endzone, sealing the 14-point win for the Aggies.

"The defense played really well in a game when their backs were against the wall," said A&M football head coach R.C. Slocum. "You play defense best when you have a few points to play with, and they didn't have that."

The Wrecking Crew opened the door for the offense to score 28 unanswered points and gave the Aggies their chance to crush any thoughts of a Cowboy upset.

MCNEESE

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After the next three drives resulted in punts, the Cowboys opened their lead to 9-0 on the strength of a 45-yard Charlie Hebert field goal with 4:14 remaining in the second quarter.

A&M's offense continued to sputter and failed to drive the ball past its own 25 yard line on its next three possessions.

"I'm disappointed with the offense," Slocum said. "We didn't move the ball effectively with the run or the pass."

With 9:27 remaining in the half, Farris committed his second turnover when a deflected pass was caught by McNeese State linebacker Joe Judge and returned 22 yards for the Cowboy's second defensive touchdown of the night. The PAT gave the Cowboys a 16-0 lead.

A&M's offense finally got on the board when fullback Joe Weber scored on a one-yard run with just under two minutes remaining in the first half. The score was set up by a 38-yard pass from Farris to freshman Terrence Murphy.

Murphy made a strong debut, catching four passes for 79 yards and was A&M's leading receiver.

McNeese State was forced to punt after three plays giving the Aggies the ball back with 45 seconds left in the half.

The Aggies drove 30 yards in four plays, setting up sophomore Cody Scates' 44-yard field goal with one second left, cutting the McNeese lead to 16-10.

"(Getting ten points right before the half) was huge," said A&M linebacker Christian Rodriguez. "We went in to halftime with the momentum instead of them having the momentum. That was a turning point in the game."

After the half, McNeese looked to take control, driving 80 yards in seven plays and scoring on a six-yard run by fullback Luke Lawton. On the drive, quarterback Slade Nagle was four of four on passes, tallying 62 yards. The 62 yards was double what Nagle compiled in the entire first half.

The Cowboys also completed a two-point conversion on a shovel pass to Lawton to up their lead to 24-10.

A&M's offense came to life on its next possession, driving 77 yards before scoring on a Farris run. The first five plays of A&M's drive were passes and resulted in 40 quick yards of offense, including a 37-yard reception by sophomore Jamaar Taylor.

Farris finished the game 24-of-40 for 254 yards.

But it would be the Wrecking Crew that would provide the biggest plays.

A&M's defense closed out the game by forcing six punts and two turnovers in the final eight McNeese drives.

Junior cornerback Sammy Davis, a preseason All-American, pulled down two interceptions in the third quarter to set up the tying and go-ahead points for the Aggies.

Davis returned the first one 26 yards to the McNeese State 16-yard line.

A&M needed just one play to tie the game as Farris found Murphy on a fade route in the corner of the end zone, tying the game 24-24.

A&M gained its first lead seven minutes later on another touchdown run by Farris, the first time in his career he has run for two touchdowns.

From there, the Wrecking Crew did the rest, stalemating McNeese on its next four drives. Rodriguez put the nail in the coffin when he picked off a Nagle pass and ran it in for a touchdown with under five minutes left, giving the Aggies a 38-24 lead.

A&M held McNeese to just 57 yards of offense in the fourth quarter. "Early on in the game, we had some jitters," said junior linebacker Brian Gamble. "After we settled down and got in our groove and got some momentum, things started going well. It really showed the second half when we shut them out."

The A&M squad will have just four days to rest before traveling to take on the Wyoming Cowboys on Thursday night.

AG AUDIO

"Coming in, I was underrated, and I was just happy to have a chance to get on the field."

— A&M freshman receiver Terrence Murphy, on his college debut

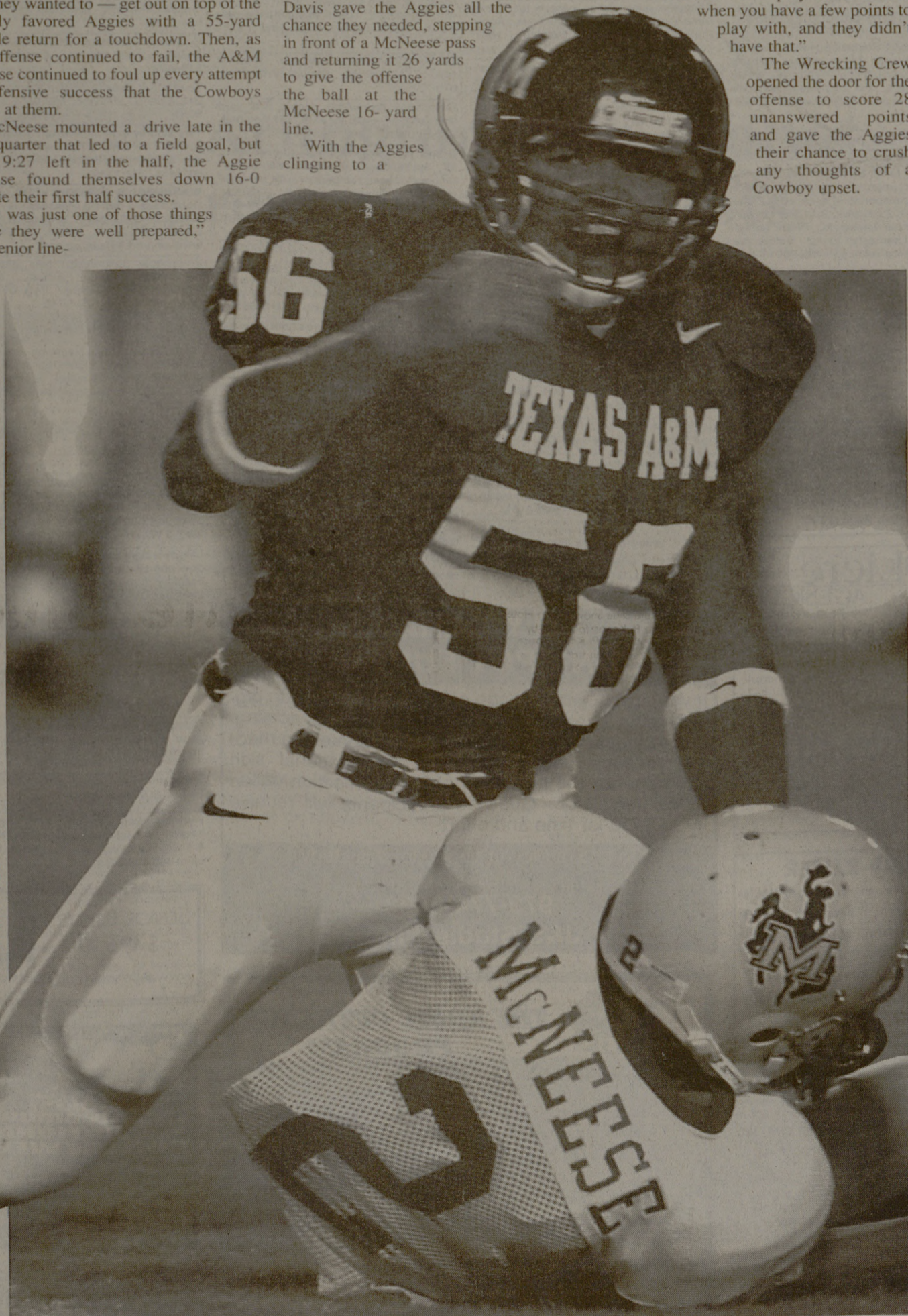
"Coming in, we didn't really know how good he was going to be, but he showed it today. He is a big-time receiver."

— A&M cornerback Sammy Davis, on the play of Terrence Murphy

"I thought we were well prepared, and that showed on the field. This was definitely an intimidating atmosphere with the crowd and the traditions, but I thought we handled it well."

— McNeese State head coach Tommy Tate on his team's play coming into Kyle Field

GUY ROGERS • THE BATTALION



Freshman linebacker Brandon Johnson and the Wrecking Crew defense were a major factor in the Aggies' 38-24 comeback victory.

Season not over despite Aggies' near disaster



When most of you look at the game story of Saturday's match-up with the McNeese

State Cowboys, you will, no doubt, worry about the 2001 Texas A&M football season. Not to worry Aggie football fans, that game was very deceiving.

The offense performed at a sub-par level for most of the first half, but the defense looked extremely good except for one drive at the start of the second half.

The defense allowed only 241 yards of total offense and gave up just 10 points for the

duration of the game. The Wrecking Crew also kept the offense in position to reclaim momentum by allowing the Cowboys to convert on only one of 14 third-down attempts. When a defense puts those kinds of numbers up, the squad should have no problem getting the chances they need to put an end to an opponents' thoughts of victory.

Defensive leaders Jay Brooks, Brian Gamble and Rocky Bernard produced solid performances, recording nine, eight and six tackles respectively. Bernard should help out the defense this season, despite missing the entire 2000 campaign with a knee injury.

The linebacker unit was a major question mark coming in to the season, but the core of the defense did more than

expected. They put the game away when the Cowboys were attempting to tie the game late in the contest.

Junior preseason All-American Sammy Davis also played well, picking off two McNeese passes to end Cowboy drives and setting up one Aggie passing touchdown.

If you cut out two minutes of the first half for the Aggie offense, it looked like the high-flying squad that the A&M faithful wanted. Young players such as true freshman Terrence Murphy and redshirt freshman Keith Joseph, got a shot to shine under the lights of Kyle Field. Murphy came down with a huge touchdown catch in the third quarter that tied up the game. Murphy also was the leading receiver for the Aggie offense, who was in

search of a replacement for Robert Ferguson. Murphy may just be the go-to guy that Mark Farris needs.

Joseph ran well and showed some flashes of greatness despite only carrying the ball 10 times for 61 yards on the night.

McNeese State is a 1-AA team, and the Aggies should have blown them out the same way Miami did at the start of the 2000 season, but the Cowboys are not the average AA team. They happen to be ranked No. 9 in the country by both the ESPN-USA Today and The Sports Network.

So do not worry about this season yet. The greatest teams in college football win even when they play their worst, and for the 2001 season's sake, let's hope that was A&M's squad at its worst.