

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

Page 5 • Tuesday, October 29, 2002

Big 12 Championship hopes are all but dead

Despite improvements, same old season finish

TUESDAY TALKING
Points =
Dallas Shipp



For all intents and purposes, the Big 12 South title is out of reach for the Aggies after dropping their second conference game to Nebraska Saturday.

Although they still have a chance mathematically, the Aggies are behind Texas Tech, Texas and Oklahoma in the south standings and will need to win out and receive an enormous amount of help from other teams. So much help that it would require another article to explain.

"We won't give up on (the Big 12 title) until it's officially done," said A&M head coach R.C. Slocum. "We are honest with ourselves, we aren't front runners and it's not as likely theoretically, but we don't know what's going to happen in the conference race, no one does."

That help won't matter because unless this team becomes a national championship caliber team, it will be doing good to win one of its last four games, most likely against Missouri.

The Aggies do not have history on their side either, at least not recent history. Since 1999, the Texas A&M football

team has a 1-7 record in the month of November and it's not by coincidence. November matchups always include quality teams, with quality defenses such as the Oklahoma Sooners, and as much as it pains Aggie fans to admit it, the Texas Longhorns.

This season, the Aggies are starting what has become their annual November collapse before Halloween. After coasting through weak defensive teams such as Baylor and Kansas, A&M learned this week that its offense may not be all it's cracked up to be.

Nebraska held the Aggie offense to 17 points and 322 yards of total offense, its lowest output since Sept. 21 against Virginia Tech when it was held to 156 total yards.

Following that game, head coach R.C. Slocum decided to hand over the play calling duties from offensive coordinator Dino Babers to assistant head coach Kevin Sumlin.

Sumlin appeared to be the savior for the offense, which averaged more than 400 yards and 40 points per game under Sumlin's play-calling. However, Nebraska showed everyone how to beat the Aggies Saturday night.

As much blame as the defense shouldered following the game Saturday night, without its two fumble recoveries and a blocked punt returned for a touch-

down, the final score would have been a lot worse for the Aggies.

The Aggies' remaining schedule is going to get a lot worse before it gets better.

This weekend, the Aggies head to Stillwater, Okla. to face Oklahoma State, a team that beat Nebraska last weekend.

Following that tough road test, A&M comes back to brutal confines of Kyle Field where the Aggies have played their worst football, to face off against No. 1 Oklahoma and Missouri.

The OU defense is ranked No. 2 in the country and could equal another home loss for the Aggies, their fourth home loss of the season.

Missouri should be beatable, giving the Aggies their sixth win of the year and bowl eligibility, but nothing should be taken for granted this year.

The Aggies will finish their season in Austin against the No. 7 Longhorns, who have the No. 3 defense in the country.

Aggie football will have another disappointing November this season and there is enough blame to go around.

It's not just the defense, it's not just the offense, it's not just the coach. There are plenty of problems in each of these areas, the question is what to do about them to get to the next level, and when?

Until then, Aggie fans will continue to "look to next year" — again.



JOHN C. LIVAS • THE BATTALION

Assistant head coach Kevin Sumlin releases his frustrations in a press conference after falling to Texas Tech 48-47 in overtime.

Bengals coach guarantees a win over Texans this weekend

CINCINNATI (AP) — The NFL's worst team is going to win next week. Guaranteed.

Says who? The lowly Cincinnati Bengals themselves.

The league's only winless team is short on victories, but not on nerve. After a 30-24 loss to Tennessee, coach Dick LeBeau brashly predicted a victory Sunday in Houston.

Given a chance to take it back a day later, LeBeau wasn't backing down.

"I think this team's going to start winning," LeBeau said Monday. "I think we played a hard game, a competitive game, and we did as much as the other team did. We just didn't win the game."

"I think the result will be different in the very near future. I'll make that prediction."

Got that, Texans? LeBeau was even more emphatic on the sub-

ject after Sunday's loss, which ended with a memorable Bengal blunder. Pulling guard Matt O'Dwyer tripped Corey Dillon inches short of the goal line with 68 seconds left, dropping the Bengals to 0-7 for the fourth time since 1991.

LeBeau, who has done an Elvis impersonation in minicamp, sounded a little like Joe Namath as he summed up the game and looked ahead.

"I thought the team fought. We had every opportunity to win, and next week we will win," he said, delivering the last line with extra emotion.

Asked whether that amounted to a prediction, LeBeau said, "I believe this team is going to win."

The bulletin-board material didn't end there. Informed of their coach's brash statements, his players backed him up.

"Next week, I assure you a win," receiver Chad

Johnson said. "I guarantee you we will win."

If they do, it will be an upset. The expansion Texans have two more wins than the Bengals and are favored to get another one on their home field Sunday. Houston (2-5) beat Dallas to open the season, and is coming off a 21-19 victory over Jacksonville.

Until LeBeau made his prediction, there was nothing special about their matchup. Now, the Texans have plenty of motivation — the league's worst team is showing them no respect.

A loss by the Bengals would clinch a 12th straight season without a winning record. Cincinnati is 53-130 since 1991, the worst record in the NFL over that span.

Although LeBeau's prediction was unexpected, it wasn't uncharacteristic. Despite his 10-26 record as the Bengals coach, LeBeau has made

some surprising remarks from time to time.

—During training camp in 2001, he started referring to the upcoming "championship season." Cincinnati went 6-10.

—During minicamp last May, LeBeau donned a Superman shirt and ran through a banner that said "Bengals Super Bowl 2002."

—When he announced Gus Frerotte as the starting quarterback during training camp, he looked over the crowded media room and said, "This will be the second-largest crowd we have in here, subject to the Monday after we clinch the playoffs."

The players bought into his playoff talk in pre-season. Seven losses later, they're compelled to back him on the first-win talk as well.

"I'm with him," Dillon said. "There's no other choice."

December Graduates

The Official Texas A&M Graduation Announcements



<http://graduation.tamu.edu>

Make sure you get the Official Announcements

MSC Box Office
M-F 11am-8pm
979-845-1234
1-888-890-5667

Organizational Development Seminar

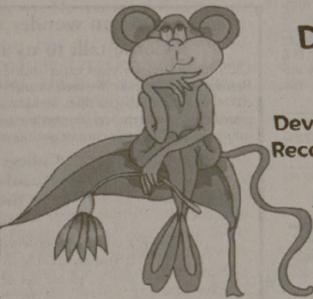
Don't Get Caught Sittin' Pretty

Deadline October 31, 2002

Remember to attend an Organizational Development Seminar as an addition to the Pre-Recognition Seminar you have already attended.

Please sign up for the seminar at:
<http://studentactivities.tamu.edu/Workshops/studentrecseminar.htm>

If you have any questions, call Monica at 458-4371. Risk Management Services, Department of Student Activities



Mr. Gatti's Fall Buffet Savings!

<p>\$3.99 Plus Tax</p> <p>Lunch Buffet</p> <p>All-You-Care-to-Eat & Drink Adult Buffet</p> <p>Monday thru Thursday ~ 11am - 2pm</p> <p>Up to four people per coupon. Must purchase a buffet to enter. Coupon not valid in combination with other coupons or special pricing. Valid thru 12/30/02. B</p>	<p>\$4.59 Plus Tax</p> <p>Dinner Buffet</p> <p>All-You-Care-to-Eat & Drink Adult Buffet</p> <p>Monday thru Thursday ~ 5pm - 9pm</p> <p>Up to four people per coupon. Must purchase a buffet to enter. Coupon not valid in combination with other coupons or special pricing. Valid thru 12/30/02. B</p>
---	---

Plus, check out our Back-to-School Weeknight Specials...going on NOW!

<p>Monday Night</p> <p>Every Kid's Buffet comes with \$2.50 in Gameplay FREE!</p>	<p>Tuesday Night</p> <p>Mr. Gatti's Gourmet Night featuring any of our delicious Gourmet Pizzas and a special Italian Entrée!</p>	<p>Wednesday Night</p> <p>Double Gameplay!! Buy \$5 in Gameplay, get \$5 FREE!</p>
---	---	--



Bryan 1673 Briarcrest 776-1124