

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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Slow-starting Aggies ease past Arkansas State

Aggies notch opening win despite sloppy game play

By True Brown
THE BATTALION

In a game that was anticipated to be a showcase for Texas A&M's quarterbacks, a different group stole the spotlight Saturday.

The Aggies' special teams, a unit that struggled last season, accounted for 14 points and 179 yards to make up for a slow offensive performance in the

Aggies' season-opening 26-11 win over Arkansas State.

"I know we have a lot of work to do," said A&M coach Dennis Franchione. "In so many ways in a first game with a new offense and a new defense, there were a lot of positives and I certainly

don't want to dwell on negatives, but we have some things to work on."

Terrence Murphy returned two kickoffs for 135 yards, including a near score on a 77-yard return before he was tripped by teammate Jamaar Taylor.

Still, his return set the stage for the Aggies' first touchdown. Murphy's other return, a 58-yarder in the second quarter, set up a field goal.

"When your special teams play good, you're going to win football games," said defensive back Jaxson Appel, who had an interception in the third quarter. "This is a game of field position, and when your special teams are playing well you can pin them down, and the offense gets good field position."

Months of speculation came to an end when Reggie McNeal started behind center for the Aggies (1-0), but neither he nor

Dustin Long put together an impressive performance.

McNeal, who played the first and third quarters and part of the fourth, was 7-for-13 passing for 82 yards. Long was 5-for-7 with 44 yards. Both had an interception.

"Anytime you come out with a new

offense in the first game, we had a bunch of stupid mistakes where guys didn't block right or we didn't go through the right reads," Long said. "We've got to get better than that and look at the film and try and get better each week."

"A win is a win, no matter how ugly or how pretty it is," McNeal added.

A&M's offense managed 257 yards but had to settle for a field goal four times on drives



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A&M freshman running back Courtney Lewis powers through Arkansas State safety LeUndo Adams for a touchdown during the Aggies' 26-11 win Saturday night. Lewis finished with two touchdowns and 74 yards.

that advanced inside the Arkansas State 30-yard line. Kicker Todd Pegram connected on all four of his field goal attempts, hitting against the 14-mph wind from 42, 32, 35 and 30 yards.

In last season's opener against the University of Louisiana-Lafayette, Pegram missed four of his five attempts.

"Last year I could have used a little more experience," Pegram said. "My teammates have worked really hard with me after

practice and getting my confidence going. I knew (the 45-yard attempt) would go in because we've been working into the wind all week in practice."

The Aggies' defense held strong all night, allowing 208 yards and one field goal.

After Pegram put the Aggies up 3-0 early in the second quarter, the Indians (0-1) threatened to take the lead after advancing deep into A&M territory.

Arkansas State had two chances to score from inside

A&M's 5-yard line, but the Aggies stiffened and forced a field goal. Arkansas State only crossed midfield once after that.

"We were just real close to breaking some plays that would have been difference-makers in the ballgame," said Arkansas State coach Steve Roberts. "We didn't break them and obviously Texas A&M had a lot to do with that."

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Special teams unit leads way for A&M

By Dallas Shipp
THE BATTALION

The offense never really clicked. The defense showed signs of potential. But the Aggie special teams unit saved the day in front of a record opening-night crowd that came to see new A&M coach Dennis Franchione lead the Aggies for the first time.

Junior wide receiver and kickoff return specialist Terrence Murphy said he never doubted how important special teams would be to the Aggies' success.

"When Coach Fran and his staff came in they emphasized special teams," Murphy said. "We practice special teams almost as much as we do regular practice. Hopefully, we can lead the nation (this year) in kick returns."

Arkansas State managed just 208 yards on offense while A&M racked up 257.

But it didn't matter.

Murphy returned two kickoffs for a combined 135 yards, including a 77-yard return to begin the second half. The return should have resulted in a touchdown, but the special teams unit committed its only blunder of the night, as Aggie wide out Jamaar Taylor tripped up Murphy at the ASU 17-yard line.

"I couldn't believe it," Murphy said. "I was 20 yards away from going to the house, and I was looking at nothing but end zone. Then

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