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# SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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## Pitt of despair

### Ag defense collapses in second half

By Rob Phillips  
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M football coach Dennis Franchione knew containing Pittsburgh's prolific offense wouldn't be easy, but he never imagined his team would award them so many opportunities.

Costly turnovers and a second-half defensive collapse by Texas A&M (2-2) allowed No. 19 Pittsburgh (3-1) to coast to a 37-26 win Saturday at Kyle Field.

Three A&M fumbles — one snap and two punt returns — resulted in 16 of the Panthers' 37 points.

"We had a 500-yard day offensively but we had some missed opportunities and turnovers," A&M head coach Dennis Franchione said. "You can't turn the ball over three times on our side of the 50 and win football games."

Both teams had similar stats, as A&M amassed 544 total yards to No. 19 Pittsburgh's 478. However, the Panthers played nearly flawless football, committing only one turnover in the game and engineering three touchdown drives of at least 80 yards.

Pittsburgh quarterback Rod Rutherford torched the Aggies' secondary for 283 yards and five touchdowns. His main target was sophomore wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald, who finished with seven catches for 135 yards and three touchdowns.

The Aggies clung to a 13-9 halftime lead but could not slow Pittsburgh's ignited offense in the second half. In the final two quarters, Rutherford threw four touchdowns and the Panthers' rushing attack, led by backup running back Jawan Walker, gained 139 yards.

Pittsburgh head coach Walt



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Pittsburgh wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald makes a catch between Texas A&M's Sean Weston (31) and Ronald Jones (23) during Saturday's game.

Harris said he was proud of his team's inspired performance after last week's 35-31 upset loss to Toledo.

"A lot of people jumped off the bandwagon, but those people don't matter," Harris said. "What matters is those guys in the locker room and those coaches, and the fans that came believed in us."

A&M wasted a golden first-quarter opportunity when sophomore quarterback Reggie McNeal fumbled at Pittsburgh's 8-yard line. The Panthers recovered and executed a 93-yard drive that culminated with a 34-

yard touchdown pass from Rutherford to Fitzgerald.

Save for the impressive drive, the Aggies kept Rutherford under wraps in the first half, limiting him to just four completions. The Pittsburgh offense exploded at the start of the second half, however, manufacturing two consecutive 80-yard drives for touchdowns to take a 23-13 lead.

A&M kicker Todd Pegram missed a crucial third-quarter field goal that would have evened the score at 16. Aggie wideout Terrence Thomas then muffed a punt return at the

Aggies' 15-yard-line, which led to Pitt's third touchdown drive of the quarter and pushed its lead to 30-13.

"We're not good enough to overcome those kinds of plays," Franchione said.

Early in the fourth, after McNeal left with an injury, A&M closed the gap to 30-20 with an eight-play, 75-yard touchdown drive capped by a touchdown pass by backup quarterback Dustin Long.

The Aggies wouldn't get any closer, however.

A bright spot for A&M was freshman running back

Courtney Lewis, who ran for 57 yards on nine carries and caught three passes for 73 yards.

McNeal went 12-for-22 for 215 yards and one touchdown along with 52 yards rushing. Long finished the game and threw for 102 yards, one touchdown and one interception.

Franchione would not disclose McNeal's injury to the media but said he could have continued playing.

"I would say probably Reggie starts (next week at Texas Tech)," he said. "but I get the right to reserve (my decision)."

### Aggie secondary can't keep pace with Panthers' aerial attack

By Blake Kimzey  
THE BATTALION

The Rod Rutherford-to-Larry Fitzgerald show came through College Station Saturday afternoon and, as advertised, one of the nation's leading offensive combinations proved there is substance to the gaudy numbers the two have produced.

Even with home field advantage, it remained to be seen if Texas A&M could stem the tide and hold the Panther passing attack in check.

A&M held tough through the first half before the levee broke and the Panthers' impressive offense poured forth. It took some tweaking at half time, but Pittsburgh found a way to grind down the A&M defense in its first ever trip to Kyle Field.

"We do like we always do, we didn't

panic," said Pittsburgh coach Walt Harris. "We held the course and we continued to do what we thought was open. We ran the ball and threw the ball and it was well executed. Rod came on in the second half."

Rutherford, the nation's leader in passing efficiency, wasn't shy about throwing to Fitzgerald seven times for 135 yards. The 6-foot-3-inch sophomore leads the nation in receiving yards per game, averaging nearly 150 yards per contest.

As the anchor of the Pittsburgh offensive attack, Rutherford picked the Aggie secondary apart for five touchdown passes, three of which were caught by his favorite and most reliable target: Fitzgerald.

"Their receivers were some big guys, but that really doesn't make a difference if you are in position," sophomore safety Jaxson Appel said. "(Fitzgerald) is probably the best I've ever played against and

he'll make a lot of money playing this game one day."

By the time A&M tried to fill the gaps in its defensive secondary, the Panthers had already hit the ground running. The Aggie defense, banged up as it was, managed to hold Pittsburgh to just 56 yards rushing in the first half; that number ballooned to 195 by the end of the game.

Pittsburgh sophomore tailback Jawan Walker, subbing for an injured Brandon Miree, racked up 81 of his 96 yards rushing in the second half; Walker punished the Aggie defense by running hard and over the A&M defenders.

The 37-26 Panther victory came down to the collapse of the A&M defense as much as it hinged on the play of Rutherford and his corps of seasoned receivers. Fitzgerald, who garnered the praise of A&M Head Coach Dennis Franchione,

snatched passes out of the air at will.

"Fitzgerald may be as good a receiver as I've ever seen," Franchione said. "If he's not on ESPN highlights tonight, I don't know."

Growing up as a ball boy for the Minnesota Vikings, Fitzgerald took notes from Chris Carter and Randy Moss that he still studies before each game.

Not to be outdone, Rutherford finished in a typical fashion with 320 yards of total offense, 283 of which flew over the heads of the Aggie defense.

"We are at a disadvantage with them having a really good player (in Fitzgerald)," said A&M defensive coordinator Carl Torbush said. "I don't know if we were at any more disadvantage than anyone else has been. I've said it before, the only position that hasn't grown (in size) is cornerback."

### No. 3 Aggies post fifth shutout in final non-conference tilt

By Troy Miller  
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M finished off its non-conference soccer schedule Sunday at the Aggie Soccer Complex by posting yet another shutout, defeating Washington State 2-0.

Now all eyes are on the Big 12 Conference, where just about anything can happen.

"There were a lot of upsets in the conference today," said A&M coach G. Guerrieri. "Oklahoma beat Texas, Texas Tech beat Kansas, those are some really eye opening results. We've got to get ourselves ready because the next team we're playing, Oklahoma State, is 10-0."

The No. 3 Aggies already have a conference win under their belts as they beat Oklahoma 4-1 Friday before taking the field against Washington State (3-6).

The Cougars came out strong looking for the upset, but it was two

spectacular first-half goals that gave the Aggies (8-1) the edge.

After several good scoring chances throughout the first half, the Aggies finally got on the board in the 34th minute on a goal by freshman forward Kat Krambeer.

Senior midfielder Kristen Strutz played a beautiful serve into the 18-yard box onto the feet of Krambeer, who buried the shot low and to the left of Cougar goalkeeper Katie Hultin.

Eight minutes later sophomore midfielder Becky Olson, with her back to the goal, turned with the ball and struck an arcing shot from the top of the 18-yard box that ducked into the upper left corner of the goal just beyond the outstretched arm of Hultin.

"It's a shot that I've been waiting on all year," Olson said. "I've been practicing it all the time and (assistant coach Phil Stephenson) has so much confidence in me to take that shot."

The second half saw the Aggies put seven shots on the Cougar net while A&M sophomore goalkeeper Kati Jo Spisak made two of her five saves in the half to preserve the shutout.

On paper, the statistics may look good, but Guerrieri was not ecstatic about the play of his team in the second half.

"I wasn't pleased with our effort in the second half," Guerrieri said. "It was the first time that we allowed our youth to show a little bit. If we're going to win championships, champions don't do that."

Now the Aggies must move on to face the Big 12 Conference and defend their 2002 Big 12 regular season championship.

"We're starting over really," Olson said. "This is a completely different season. This is where championships lie in our hands."

The Aggies face off against Oklahoma State in Stillwater Friday at 7 p.m.

### SPORTS IN BRIEF Former A&M asst. to take over 'Zona

TUSCON (AP) — Arizona coach John Mackovic was fired on Sunday, five games into the third season of his tumultuous tenure in Tucson.

Defensive coordinator Mike Hankwitz will take over as interim coach for the remainder of the season. A national search was planned to find a successor for next season.

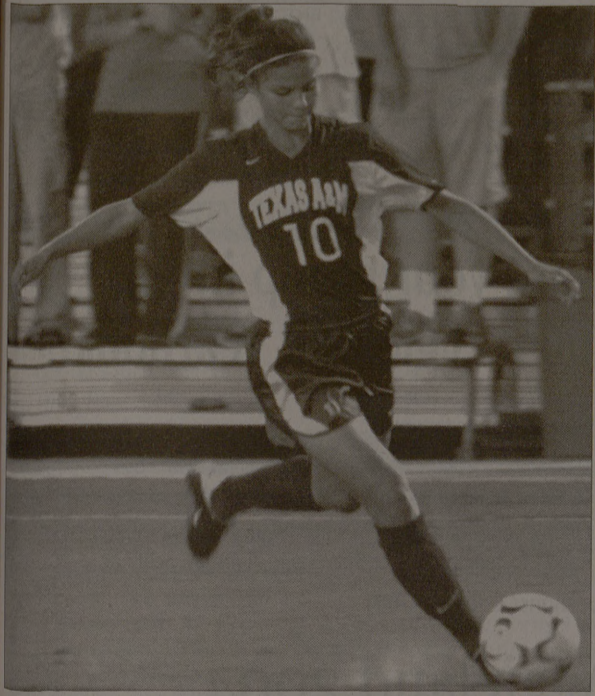
Athletic director Jim Livengood announced the firing at a news conference in Tucson.

"John is a good man and a good coach and a good friend," Livengood said. "It's not a decision that was made without an awful lot of thought put into it."

Livengood offered no specific reason for the firing.

"There's no one single event, no one happening, that all of a sudden had a weight to it," he said.

Mackovic, who turns 60 on Wednesday, survived a player mutiny last season after tearfully promising to do a better job of communicating.



JOSHUA HOBSON • THE BATTALION

Texas A&M freshman forward Kat Krambeer makes a pass Sunday night against Washington State. Krambeer scored a goal in the 2-0 win.