



EYES OF TEXAS ON KYLE FIELD

Fans from both schools ready for McNeal vs. Young

By Michael Crow  
THE BATTALION

It is late November in College Station, evidenced by orange and yellow leaves scattered across the lawns and streets of the Texas A&M campus. This Friday, the most vibrant color will be the burnt orange of the University of Texas visiting Aggieland in what has become one of the most anticipated rivalry games of the college football season. While this year's meeting might appear to lack the significance of seasons past, neither of the teams seems convinced.

"I watched this rivalry when I was a kid on TV," said A&M coach Dennis Franchione. "I always remember the intensity of the rivalry ... and the pride the two teams played with. This is what you coach for and what you play for."

Texas coach Mack Brown agreed Friday's game would be important, regardless of the two teams' records.

"I think the rivalry will be just as big because it's about history; it's not just about this season," he said. "They will pull out all the stops and we need to as well. I think it will be a great game."

While the Aggies (4-7, 2-5 Big 12) will largely be playing for pride, a win for No. 6 Texas (9-2, 6-1) would most likely mean a spot in a major bowl game, capping off a strong 2003 campaign.

Leading the way for the Longhorns is quarterback Vincent Young.

Along with A&M's quarterback, sophomore Reggie McNeal, Young was one of the country's most sought-after recruits two years ago. The two have drawn further comparisons on the playing field, particularly in terms of their athleticism.

"The two offenses are similar, and the plays you see look a lot alike," Brown said. "When you look at these two guys, it's been amazing to see what they've done and the roles they play. When Reggie and Vince are in the game, you see things you can compare."

Young has had more opportunities to run the football and has taken full advantage. The redshirt freshman is UT's second-leading rusher, with 858 yards and 10 touchdowns on the ground.

Texas running back Cedrick Benson has picked up 994 rushing yards and 16 scores, helping boost the 'Horns to a hearty 227.2 rushing yards per game.

With one of the most balanced offenses in the country, Texas gets things done in the air as well. Senior wide receiver Roy Williams has compiled 969 receiving yards and eight touchdowns and is, not surprisingly, a candidate for the Biletnikoff award, given to the nation's top receiver.

Defensively, it is junior linebacker Derrick Johnson who has garnered the most attention for Texas. Johnson is a tough presence in the middle of the field, boasting a team-leading 108 tackles, including 16 for negative yardage.

Senior cornerback Nathan Vasher has been a leader in the defensive backfield, with five interceptions.

Brown said he has described Friday's meeting as an elimination game, a must-win to gain a BCS bowl bid.

"These guys have done a tremendous job turning the season around since the loss to Oklahoma," he said. "They have put themselves back in the mix, and now it's time to win again."

Friday's kickoff is scheduled for 2:30 p.m. at Kyle Field.



COURTESY OF KRT CAMPUS

University of Texas quarterback Vincent Young tries to slip past a Nebraska defender during UT's 31-7 win in early November. Young and A&M quarterback Reggie McNeal will lead their teams into Friday's game.

Win would leave Aggies with better taste in their mouths

It goes without saying that Texas A&M coach Dennis Franchione and the Aggies would just as soon forget about this season. After all the pomp and circumstance that surrounded his arrival in Aggieland last year, some fans have begun to doubt his ability to turn around the program.



DALLAS SHIPP

But by 6 p.m. Friday that could change with a win over the Longhorns.

With a win against arch-rival Texas, the Franchione bandwagon may not be able to sell seats fast enough to all of those who jumped off through the season.

It would put a stamp of legitimacy on the preseason hype of Coach Fran.

It would give sophomore quarterback Reggie McNeal one more chance this year to show he can lead the team, and that his performance against Oklahoma last year was not a fluke.

It would show the team that Franchione's system just might work.

It would silence many Sunday morning critics — at least for a while.

"It always gives you a little momentum going into the offseason and recruiting and those kinds of directions," Franchione said. "It lets you finish with a good taste in your mouth. It would be beating a top-10 team and another victory at Kyle Field."

But it's going to take more effort than the Aggies have given so far this season.

In their previous three matchups against top-25 teams (Nebraska, Oklahoma State and Oklahoma), the Aggies have been outscored by a combined score of 163-22, including a 77-0 whipping, courtesy of the Sooners.

If the Aggies are going to stand a chance against the highly favored Longhorns, McNeal has to step up and be a leader on offense.

After leaving the game against Missouri at half-time, junior Dustin Long ignited the offense, putting doubts in the minds of many that McNeal truly is "the real deal."

Friday is his chance to either put it to rest or fire up the Internet chat rooms, begging Long, who is rumored to be transferring to Sam Houston State after the season, to stay at A&M.

Other than the quarterback situation, the Aggies have nothing to lose Friday. And that should scare coach Mack Brown and the Longhorns.

After assuring their first losing season in two decades against Missouri, the Aggies don't have to worry about becoming bowl eligible. They don't have to worry about finishing the season with a .500 record. And for that, they should thank the Tigers.

Now it's about one game. There is no practice next week. There is no bowl game to get ready for. This is it.

The Aggies have nothing to lose, while the Longhorns are teetering on the edge of a BCS bowl game birth.

And, lucky for the Aggies, they do have at least two things going for them. Unfortunately, neither of them are that tangible for the 11 guys on the field. But in a season filled with disappointments, it's okay to have a little fun this week.

First, the Student Bonfire, which at the time is the closest thing A&M has to the Aggie Bonfire, fell after midnight, meaning the Ags are supposed to win.

Second, the Aggies have never lost a Maroon Out game in the five-year history of the "tradition," including the most improbable upset of all against No. 1 Oklahoma last year.

For the Aggies' sake, they had better believe in superstitions. It's about all they have going for them.

BACKYARD BRAWL PREDICTIONS

- 43-17, Texas.** The Longhorns have more than enough weapons to exploit A&M's defense, and unfortunately, I'll graduate without seeing the Aggies beat the Longhorns. - True Brown, sports editor
- 45-17, Texas.** Will defensive coordinator Carl Torbush be the scapegoat for this season's defense? - Kyle Davoust, sportswriter
- 45-21, Texas.** Vincent Young will win the battle of the youthful, athletic quarterbacks. - Blake Kimzey, sportswriter
- 28-24, Texas.** Aggies put up a good fight but can't overcome Texas. - Elizabeth Webb, managing editor
- 37-20, A&M.** Just kidding, 34-17 Texas. - Troy Miller, sportswriter
- 48-10, Texas.** I'll be rooting for the Aggies, but let's face it: it's just not in the stars. - Sarah Szuminski, news editor
- 42-10, Texas.** 0-4 for Class of 2004. - Jeff Allen, sportswriter
- 30-27, A&M.** Kyle Field is always a wild card for ranked teams. Just ask Oklahoma. - Robert M. Gates, A&M president
- 48-16, Texas.** Texas should finish season strong and get the BCS bid they are wanting. - Michael Crow, sportswriter
- 41-27, Texas.** Vincent Young and Cedric Benson won't have a problem running around on a maligned Aggie defense. - Pete Burks, sportswriter
- 35-31, A&M.** It's been a long season, but the Class of 2004 will see the 12th Man magic one more time. - Matt Josefy, student body president



John C. Livas • THE BATTALION  
Texas A&M running back Courtney Lewis runs against the Missouri Tigers on Nov. 15. Lewis will square off with high school friend Vincent Young during Friday's A&M-UT game.

Friends Young, Lewis to square off for first time

By Troy Miller  
THE BATTALION

When the University of Texas pays a visit to Kyle Field to take on Texas A&M on Friday, two players will line up on opposite sidelines for the first time after playing four years together in the same backfield.

Texas redshirt freshman quarterback Vincent Young and A&M redshirt freshman running back Courtney Lewis not only shared the same backfield at Houston Madison High School, they became best friends.

"We always do things together," Lewis said. "We talk at least twice a week every week. I see how things are going on his end, and he sees how things are going on my end."

Now the two will go head-to-head in not only a ballgame, but in the race for Big 12 Freshman of the Year. Lewis, with 940 rushing yards and 11 touchdowns, is on pace to become the first 1,000-yard back at A&M since Dante Hall in 1998. Young has rushed for 858 yards and 10 touchdowns while passing

for 1,043 yards and five touchdowns after replacing senior Chance Mock as the Longhorn starting quarterback.

"(Big 12 Freshman of the Year) means a lot to both of us," Lewis said. "Our coach in high school and our families are very proud of us. We both want to be the best."

Being the best is something Young and Lewis are used to. In 2001, the Madison duo was one of the best in Texas, if not the nation, combining for more than 5,800 yards of total offense. Young was heralded as being one of the top prospects in the country while Lewis sailed under the radar in the shadow of Young.

That was just fine by Young and Lewis, who resemble the Texas football version of the odd couple.

"Vincent is more outgoing, while Courtney is quiet," said Madison football coach Ray Seals. "You'd be around (Lewis) and not know he was there. Vincent would speak up more."

During their 2001 senior campaign at Madison, the duo led the Marlins all the way to the Texas 5A Division II State Semifinals, the furthest a Madison team

had advanced in school history.

Young was courted by national powers such as Miami before settling in Austin, while Lewis committed to the Aggies because they were the only team close to home that wanted him as a running back.

The two friends had dreamed of playing college football together, but Texas did not recruit Lewis as a running back, and A&M already had another highly-praised quarterback commit in Lufkin's Reggie McNeal.

"(Young) first wanted to go to Miami, then Texas," Lewis said. "A&M wanted me to be a running back so I chose A&M. I thought it was better for my situation. We both wanted to stay close to home to our families."

With the two living 106 miles apart, compared to five minutes at home in Houston, they still keep tabs on each other's progress. During the Aggies game with Utah, Young called Lewis' mother, who was in the stands at Kyle Field, to get an update. The following week, Lewis drove to Austin to see

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