

## Defensive backs make gains through school of knocks



JOHN C. LIVAS • THE BATTALION  
Jaxson Appel takes down Kansas receiver Lyone Anderson Nov. 1, 2003, in College Station.

By Jonathan Wall  
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M secondary is out to prove that last season's problems were a fluke.

"I think we've gotten better," said junior safety Jaxson Appel. "We came into camp in the spring to reclaim the 'Wrecking Crew' title, and that's the way we've been practicing every day — to make sure we never get embarrassed ever again."

The Aggie secondary will rely heavily on Appel, a preseason All-Big 12 defensive selection, to anchor the Aggie defense this season. Appel, who played all of last season hurt with one injury after another is feeling great after sitting out of contact hitting in the spring while his repaired left elbow healed. The gutsy safety should continue his incredible play of last season where he set a school record with 135 tackles and led the team with four interceptions.

Safeties coach Melvin Smith said his players are up to the task after making some corrections in the off-season. "We asked each position to reduce missed tackles," Smith said. "If we miss one less tackle at every position, we make big-time improvement."

Small improvements such as this should help the Aggie secondary to gain some confidence in big games against pass-happy squads.

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## Linebackers trying to re-enroll into 'U'

By Jordan Meserole  
THE BATTALION

There was once a time when Texas A&M football was known as "Linebacker U", because it produced some of the best and toughest linebackers in the NCAA. But last season's defensive woes turned ugly and the nickname "Wrecking Crew" was erased, so was "Linebacker U".

For those who have forgotten or weren't in the school of Kyle Field last year, A&M's defense was less than stellar. Of all the teams in the Big 12, the Aggies allowed the most touchdowns, most rushing yards and had the lowest number of sacks. And just as easily as the fans aren't getting those telling statistics, the players aren't forgetting either. But they're not forgetting for different reasons.

"We lived last year, and now we're trying to move on from it," said junior linebacker Archie McDaniel. "Something none of us will ever forget and that's our motivation to not let it happen again."

McDaniel returns as the top starting linebacker last year. McDaniel led the squad with 78 tackles, 12 which were solo tackles and eight for losses. The rest of the linebacker crew returns three starters and brings four junior college transfers.

Head coach Dennis Franchione said the junior college transfers have looked good in spring and fall practices and making quick progress in learning the defensive schemes.

"The j.c. guys are definitely pushing the guys who were already here," Franchione said. "They're getting better with every day."

Headlining the transfers is junior Aaron Brown, who transferred from Compton Community College. Brown broke his arm in spring practices, but has fully recovered and is ready to vie for a starting position. Brown said A&M's losing record last season didn't deter him from signing with the University because of the sense of a team he noticed a visit and is anxious to start the season.

"The way the team looks right now, you wouldn't think this team went 4-8," Brown said. "We look good right now...there's no telling what we can do."

After a few injuries last season to key linebackers thinned out the starting squad, many young and inexperienced players such as Justin Warren were thrown out on the field. Warren, now a sophomore, said he was nervous as a freshman but gained valuable experiences.

"It was a grind, but I'm seeing the benefits now," Warren said. "It should pay off for me and some of the other guys too this year."

As far as re-earning the nickname "Wrecking Crew" or "Linebacker U", all the defensive players said they wanted the title back and feel they have a chance to do it back this year.

"We're on the right track to get it back," McDaniel said. "We have to get it back not just in one game, but every game. And once we get that 'Wrecking Crew' title again, it will earn this 'd' some respect back."

## Special teams ready to start season off on right foot

By Kyle Davoust  
THE BATTALION

Special teams are often overlooked when assessing a football team. Many view them as a minor part compared to offense and defense. The coaches and players at Texas A&M, however, realize that a dramatic improvement in special teams must occur for their team to enjoy success in this upcoming season.

"We need to be more solid across the board, and that's emphatic," said special teams coach Mark Tommerdahl. "Obviously we can point to the turnover situation, but if we really want to get this program where we want it to be, we need improvement across the board — the coverage, the kicking, the whole nine yards."

To fix the punt return game, the Aggies will look to senior Terrence Murphy to handle many of the duties. Already established as one of the nation's most dangerous kick-

off returners, the coaches feel that putting the ball in his hands more often can only lead to good things.

"We look at that as one more touch for Terrence Murphy," said head coach Dennis Franchione. "You can't sit around in this game and worry about injury all the time. You've got to use your weapons, and we'll try to make sure that Terrence gets to touch the ball as a receiver, maybe on a reverse or in different ways, as well as in punt return and kick return."

In the kicking game, the Aggies believe that its best asset is experience. Todd Pegram, now a junior, has been through two years of kicking in front of tough crowds and in big situations.

"I'm fortunate enough to be a junior with two years under my belt, so that's a huge advantage coming into this season," Pegram said. "I don't even think about nervousness

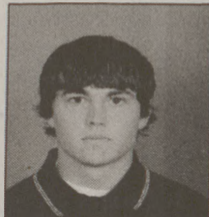
See Special on page 7B

### POSITION REPORT

#### SPECIAL TEAMS

##### RETURNING

Todd Pegram (JR)  
Jacob Young (SR)  
Terrance Murphy (SR)



Pegram



Young

##### LOST

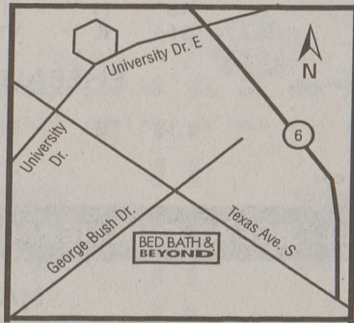
Cody Scates  
Don Muhlback

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