

THE BATTALION

Thursday, September 2, 2004

Utah

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The Utes return 15 starters, including seven on defense, but it will be difficult to replace defensive back Dave Revill and linebacker Ray Holdcraft. However, Utah is still confident in the improvements made in the off-season.

"We're more experienced," said Utah defensive back Morgan Scalley. "We know what to expect and I think we're in better shape."

The side story going into Thursday night's match-up will be the Aggies' inexperience on the field. Twenty-seven redshirt freshmen are traveling to Salt Lake City, leading coaches to wonder about the unknown.

"Thirty-four to 36 players will be playing in their first Division I football game," Franchione said. "I don't know if you can go into the first game completely knowing what you have. It's easier to know in year two than year one."

What the Aggies do know going into this first season game is that playmakers will continue their ways. Sophomore running back Courtney Lewis, who rushed for 1,024 yards last season as a freshman, will start in the backfield. Junior quarterback Reggie McNeal is entering his third season calling plays for the Aggies, senior wide receiver

Terrence Murphy is expected to break the school record for receptions, and junior free safety Jaxson Appel will continue to dominate opponent offenses. McNeal summed up his thoughts about Murphy, the team's quiet but strong leader.

"What's not his strength?" McNeal said. "He's got great hands, he's got leaping ability, he's got the speed, he runs good routes and he can block."

Defensively, Appel leads a confident group seeking to regain the Wrecking Crew status of years past. He said opening with No. 19 Utah instead of a weaker opponent suits him fine.

"I would rather open with a top-20 ranked team," Appel said. Meyer, in similar fashion to the walk-on 12th Man Kickoff Team that A&M features, has employed a tactic to unify his Ute squad.

"There will be a young man, Billy Kinsey, a walk-on, on special teams with 'Utah Man' as the name on the back of his jersey," Meyer said.

No matter who takes the field against the Aggies on Friday, Franchione affirmed that one of A&M's football traditions will still be alive and well.

"Defense at Texas A&M will always be known as the 'Wrecking Crew,'" he said. "Although the stats may not always show it, the Texas A&M defense will always be synonymous with the 'Wrecking Crew.'"

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Rangers lose to Twins in eighth

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Terry Tiffe hit a go-ahead two-run double in his major league debut to give the Minnesota Twins a 4-2 victory over the Texas Rangers Wednesday night.

Trailing 2-1, the Twins scored three runs in the eighth with the last two coming on Tiffe's high chopper off Francisco Cordero (3-1) that hopped over first base. Cordero had converted 21 straight save opportunities.

It was the Rangers' third straight loss, dropping them five games behind Boston in the AL wild-card race. The Red Sox beat Anaheim 12-7.

Shannon Stewart homered for Minnesota, which extended its lead over Cleveland in the AL Central to eight games.

Jesse Crain pitched two perfect innings for his first major league win. Joe Nathan pitched the ninth for his 36th save in 39 chances.

Michael Young and Mark Teixeira each had two hits for Texas. Mulholland allowed two runs and eight hits in six innings.

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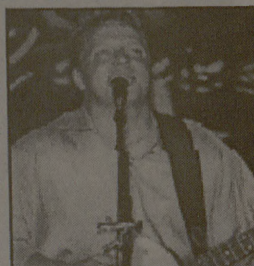
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