Aggies open season against Virginia Tech

Players, fans look to 1976 football season with great expectations

BY JERRY WAGGNER
Executive Sports Editor

Nine months of waiting has elapsed, slowly, painfully. At last, Saturday almost is here and the Texas A&M football team and its multitude of fans can unleash their pent-up emotions, frustrations and, probably, yell to say, "Beat the hell out of everybody."

Saturday begins the 82nd season for Texas A&M football, a season packed with perhaps more great expectations than ever before. After a great 10-2 season last year which ended with the Aggies just as good as last year and even have a chance to be better. At least their goals are set in that direction.

The GREAT EXPECTATIONS are there, but so are 11 roadblocks, beginning with powerful Virginia Tech Saturday at 4 p.m. on Kyle Field's artificial turf.

Where roadblocks are concerned, it's a humdinger for the Aggies to begin with. Virginia Tech comes visiting for the first time ever and does so with huge people, one victory accomplished already, and credentials of having won eight of 11 games last year, including eight of the last nine.

The Gobblers also are in knowing that Texas A&M is the most prestigious team on their schedule. A victory over the Aggies certainly would give them a shot at going undefeated for the year.

The game will mirror two teams of almost equal size (big), the same type of offense and defense and with defense being the primary name of the game. Each team is a physical unit designed to play ball control football, using sound defenses to aid the offense, neither of which spatter too badly.

In short and in coach Emory Bellard's words, "It'll be a head-knockin' son-of-a-gun."

WENDY WEISEND, VT's erstwhile sports information director, had this to say, "Three years ago Texas A&M would have beaten us 60-70 to 0. We had the worst defensive record in the country. This year, if Texas A&M doesn't kill us, with some breaks we hope to be in the top 10 defensively."

Weisend, speaking at the weekly Jaycees luncheon, added, "A&M has the highest quality team we'll play this year. But coach Jim Sharpe feels the Gobblers will come into the game very well prepared and ready to give the Aggies a run for their money. I see where some rankings have A&M ranked anywhere from sixth to 14th nationally. Coach Sharpe says as far as he's concerned, Texas A&M is number one."

Big, yes, but the Aggies have the edge. A&M's offensive averages 224.3 per man to throw against VT's defense which averages 209 per man. Opposite, Tech averages 216 per man offensively to A&M's 220.5 on defense.

The Gobblers return 37 letterman from the 8-3 club, including tiny Ronco Calee, the 5-9, 164-pound mighty mite. He ran for 1,083 yards in 1975 and is using a new record this year. He is a game-breaker with blazing speed and is a small target.

HE'S THE MAIN THREAT the Aggies have to contain, but not the only one. Paul Adams is a 230-pound fullback with power to offset the skittly runs of Coles. He'll pound you up the middle while Coles dazes you on the flanks. And quarterback Mitchell Barnes, who was a reserve last year, performed well last week and hit five of seven passes. The other running back is Chuck Nuttycombe, a 177-pounder who has some of Coles qualities.

Moses Foster, a lanky split end, will be a main passing target as will the backs and tight end Tom Cooper. However, the Gobblers like to use two tight ends and take advantage of the run blocking capabilities. Weisend also noted that the Gobblers might even break from the traditional wishbone once in a while into a double wing, leaving Adams as the runner and the halfbacks split to each side.

The Gobblers had thought the kicking game would be their downfall this year. Sharpe, like Bellard, says the kicking game is highly important. But apparently the question mark was answered last week when soccer-style kicking sophomore Paul Engle hit three field goals, the longest 39, and they got a good punting game. That closed up the one hole Sharpe felt he had.

It is somewhat of a question mark of the Aggies, too. Freshman David Appleby has earned the punting job with practices which average out to 42 yards per punt and good hang time. And Tony Franklin is becoming much more consistent on the field goals. He hit three in a row from 60 yards in practice this week.

THE GOBBLERS GAVE UP only 96 rushing yards to Wake Forest and 66 of those came on a fourth quarter touchdown run against reserves.

Standouts for the Gobblers on defense are tackle Tom Beasley (237), linebacker Rick Razzano (225), noseguard Bill Houseright and tackle Mike Faulknier. And Sharpe likes his ends, Stuart Patterson and Keith McCarter, small but very quick.

There should be a particularly interesting matchup on the left side of A&M's defensive line where 253-pound All-America candidate Edgar Fields lines up against 285-pound Keith Gibson for VT.

Offensively, the Aggies will have only two real vets in the backfield in both quarterbacks, senior David Shipman and junior David Walker. All the running backs are sophomores and freshmen, but talented Adger Armstrong and Darrell Smith, both sophomores, will start flankin 248-pound fullback George Woodard. But freshmen Curtis Dickey of Bryan and David Brothers of Seguin will see duty as their backup men.

Thus you have the ingredients for a super opening football game. Virginia Tech is dedicated to the upset and the Aggies dedicated to winning all 11 games. They know they can't win them all without winning the first..."