

# 12th Man

2021 | VOLUME 26, NO. 1

FUNDING SCHOLARSHIPS, PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES  
IN SUPPORT OF CHAMPIONSHIP ATHLETICS



## GAMEDAY IN A PANDEMIC

STUDENT-ATHLETES, STAFF AND  
SUPPORTERS COME TOGETHER  
FOR AN UNFORGETTABLE  
AGGIE FOOTBALL SEASON



# TEXAS A&M FOOTBALL SEASON TICKET RENEWALS

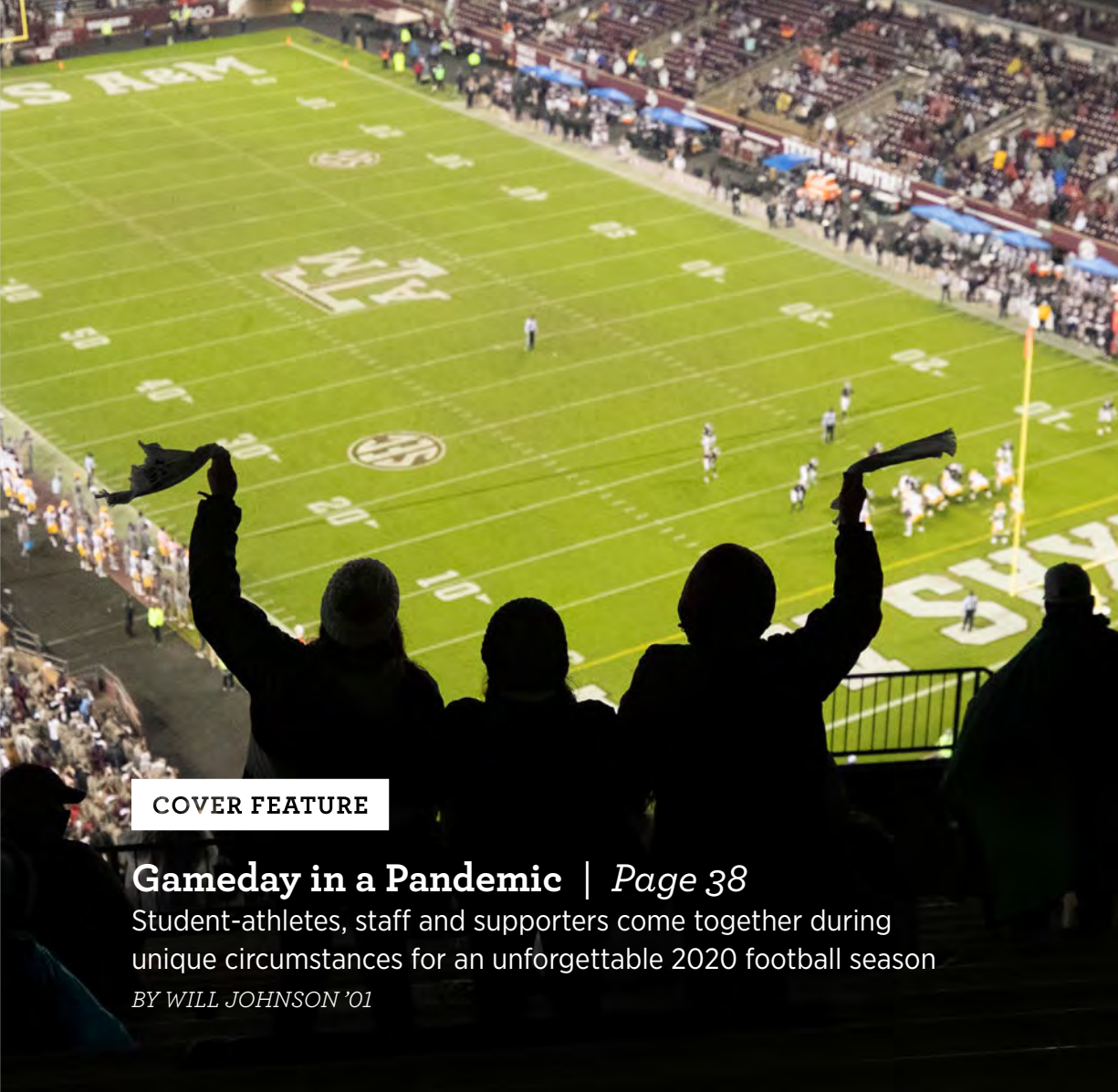


**FEB. 2 - MARCH 2, 2021**

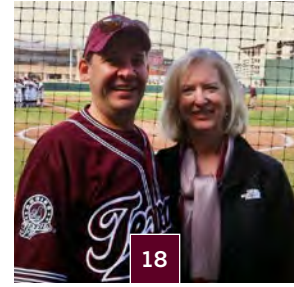
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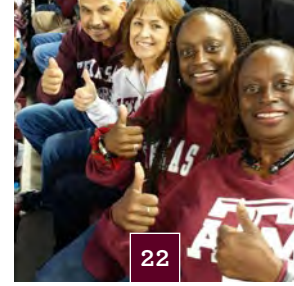
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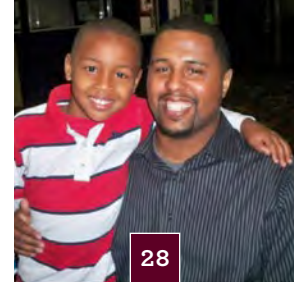
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# 12th Man

2021 | VOLUME 26, NO. 1



## MAGAZINE STAFF

Brian Davis '01  
Samantha Atchley '17  
Adam Quisenberry

## MAGAZINE CONTRIBUTORS

Craig Bisacre, *Photographer*  
Olin Buchanan, *Writer*  
Braden Huggins, *Photographer*  
Will Johnson '01, *Writer*  
Bailey Orr, *Photographer*  
Charean Williams '86, *Writer*

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*Manager of Donor Relations*  
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*Manager of Development Services*

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Marketing & Communications*  
Brian Davis '01 979-260-7590  
*Director of Communications & Creative  
Services, Editor of 12th Man Magazine*  
Samantha Atchley '17 979-260-2396  
*Communications Manager*

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*Ticketing Coordinator*  
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*Manager of Business Analysis*  
Matt McQuillan 979-260-7573  
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## 12TH MAN FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 2800 | College Station, TX 77841-2800  
Main Office Line: 979-846-8892 | 888-TAM-12TH  
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*Funding scholarships, programs and facilities  
in support of championship athletics*



**TO OUR DONORS,**

We take pride in *12th Man Magazine* being a platform to celebrate the accomplishments of our Aggie student-athletes as well as the incredible donors who partner with them for their success in competition, the classroom and in life. This edition is no exception as we highlight the christening of the new home for the Aggie swimming and diving teams, the Anne S. & Henry B. "Hank" Paup '70 Pavilion.

While this world-class facility showcases the commitment made by donors, I believe the building's namesakes stand out by the manner in which they represent with class and dignity their fellow donors, Texas A&M University and our outstanding athletics programs.

An Aggie swimming letterman who parlayed the opportunities he was given into success long after his time on campus, Hank, along with Anne, are shining examples of the hopes we hold for all student-athletes.

Far beyond their significant personal and professional achievements, it is the Paups' selfless commitment to give back that upholds the most cherished values of our university. Their support represents a transformative investment toward our shared aspiration of molding future generations of leaders ready to make their impact in society.

Thank you to Anne and Hank as well as every 12th Man Foundation donor whose generosity makes our mission of supporting championship athletics possible.

Gig 'em!



Travis Dabney '96  
President & CEO



With their generous gift in support of Texas A&M Athletics, Anne and Hank Paup led the way to the new swimming and diving facility becoming a reality. See page 10 for more on the grand opening of Paup Pavilion.

**IMPORTANT DATES**

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February 2 - March 2, 2021  
*2021 Football Season Ticket Renewals*

Late Spring 2021  
*Football Seat Selection Process*

June 24-27, 2021  
*2021 12th Man Foundation Summer Meeting*



**RHONDA & FROSTY GILLIAM JR. '80 RECOGNIZED AS 2020 E. KING GILL AWARD RECIPIENTS**

The 12th Man Foundation honored stalwart supporters Rhonda and Frosty Gilliam Jr. '80, as the 2020 recipients of the prestigious E. King Gill Award during halftime of the Texas A&M-LSU game at Kyle Field. Longtime donors who contribute to a variety of vital areas throughout Texas A&M University, the Gilliams' exceptional impact on Aggie Athletics has benefited virtually every athletics program and played a pivotal role in A&M's ambitious goal to support student-athletes with the nation's best athletics facilities. The Gilliams will be featured in an upcoming issue of *12th Man Magazine*. Visit [www.12thmanfoundation.com](http://www.12thmanfoundation.com) for more information about the E. King Gill Award.



## AGGIES RECORD BEST FALL ACADEMIC SEMESTER IN SCHOOL HISTORY

**3.003**

Semester GPA (Fall Semester Record)

**3.039**

Cumulative GPA (Fall Semester Record)

**354**

AD Honor Roll (Fall Semester Record)

**69**

4.0 GPAs (School Record)

**18**

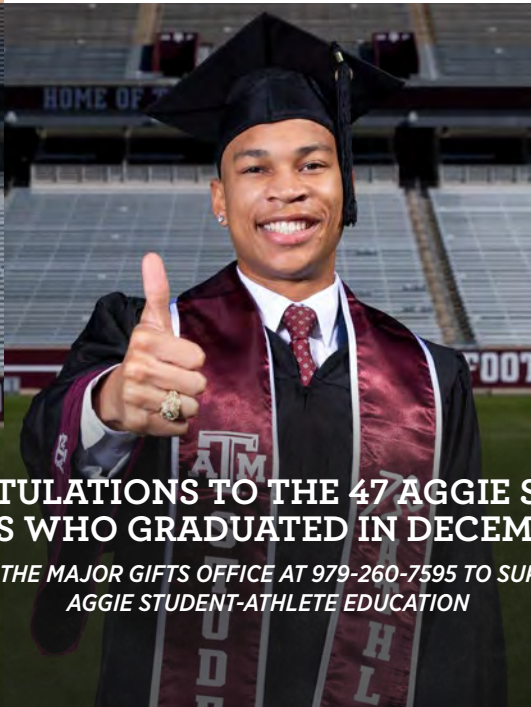
Dean's Honor Roll (Fall Semester Record)

**12**

Teams with 3.0 GPAs (School Record)

**17**

Distinguished Students



**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 47 AGGIE STUDENT-ATHLETES WHO GRADUATED IN DECEMBER 2020**

*CALL THE MAJOR GIFTS OFFICE AT 979-260-7595 TO SUPPORT AGGIE STUDENT-ATHLETE EDUCATION*

## AGGIE ACCOLADES



### AGGIE SOCCER WINS THIRD SEC REGULAR-SEASON TITLE

Texas A&M soccer claimed the program's third SEC regular-season title in November after ending conference play with a six-match win streak to tie Arkansas atop the standings. Including conference tournament titles, the Aggies' six league trophies since 2013 are the most in the SEC with Florida the nearest team with four. A&M, which boasts 18 conference titles in the 28-year history of the program, ended the fall portion of its 2020-21 slate with an 8-2-0 mark and will continue its split season this spring.



## AGGIE ACCOLADES



### AGGIE FOOTBALL COMPLETES HISTORIC SEASON AS ORANGE BOWL CHAMPIONS

The Texas A&M football team concluded a historic run to end the 2020 season with eight straight wins and the program's first Orange Bowl victory and first appearance in a New Year's Six game. In the regular season, the Aggies won eight of nine games against an all-SEC slate, with the lone loss coming on the road to eventual national champion Alabama. A&M ranked No. 4 in the final Associated Press Top 25 poll, the program's highest finish since the 1939 national championship season.







TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS

# THE BIRTH OF THE 12TH MAN

Centennial anniversary of world-famous tradition to be celebrated throughout 2021-22 school year

**JANUARY 2, 2022, WILL MARK THE** 100th anniversary of the iconic 12th Man's origin, which ranks as perhaps the most famous tradition in all of sports.

The 12th Man dates back to the 1922 Dixie Classic bowl game when Texas A&M student E. King Gill came out of the Fair Park stands in Dallas and stood ready to enter the game as injuries mounted for the under-manned Aggies against the mighty Praying Colonels of Centre College. While Gill never entered the game, which the Aggies went on to win 22-14, his actions have been forever remembered by the Texas A&M student body, which remains standing throughout Aggie football games to symbolize their willingness to come out of the stands and enter the contest if needed.

In current vernacular, the 12th Man refers to the student body at Texas A&M, as well as all supporters of Texas A&M Athletics teams. The Centennial of the 12th Man celebrates fans of the Aggies – past and present – and will be recognized by all 20 A&M varsity programs in the 2021-22 school year.

Often imitated but never duplicated, Texas A&M University has defended its 12th Man trademark against infringement over 500 times since becoming the sole owner in 1990.

As part of the 12th Man Centennial celebration, which will be officially announced this summer, Texas A&M Athletics is planning a multitude of content, collectibles and activities that honor the storied 12th Man tradition. 🏈

# WELCOME TO PAUP PAVILION

Anne & Henry B. “Hank” Paup ’70 Pavilion opens as  
new home for Texas A&M Swimming & Diving

BY BRIAN DAVIS '01

**IN JANUARY, TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS UNVEILED** a game changer for collegiate swimming and diving. The Anne & Henry B. “Hank” Paup ’70 Pavilion officially opened as an expansion of the A&M Student Recreation Center’s Natatorium and will serve as the new home for the Aggie men’s and women’s programs.

The \$8.2 million facility, which broke ground in 2019 and was constructed during the COVID-19 pandemic, was made possible by \$6.2 million in contributions from more than 115 donors.

“I’m humbled by the generosity of our donors,” said Dr. Robert Dennis, chair of the 12th Man Foundation Board of Trustees. “They epitomize the 12th Man Foundation’s mission of funding scholarships, programs and facilities in support of championship athletics. That’s what we do, and we are

glad to be a part of it.”

The world-class facility features a grand lobby entrance, spacious men’s and women’s locker rooms, a lounge for student-athletes with a fueling station, an athletic training room with hydrotherapy pools and a one-of-a-kind dryland diving room as well as offices and meeting spaces for the coaching staff.

Jay Holmes says other schools can claim some of these pieces in their swimming and diving facilities, but few, if any, have the total package.

“We’ve more than doubled the size of our locker rooms,” said Holmes, the longtime A&M men’s swimming coach. “The athletic training room is right off of the pool deck. The student-athletes don’t have to go to another building across campus anymore. Our team lounge – we’ve never had



Paup Pavilion's grand lobby showcases the past success of the Aggie programs, while the dryland diving and athletic training rooms give A&M student-athletes an edge above the competition.



“

**HAVING A PLACE TO MEET RECRUITS AND THEIR FAMILIES AND FOR THEM TO SEE THAT LEVEL OF COMMITMENT WHEN THEY WALK IN IS TREMENDOUS. WE ARE INCREDIBLY GRATEFUL AND EXCITED FOR THE FUTURE.**

— JAY HOLMES



“  
**IN THE WORDS OF JIMBO FISHER, ‘WE AIN’T DONE YET.’ I BELIEVE WE ARE ENTERING THE GOLDEN AGE OF TEXAS A&M SWIMMING & DIVING.**

— HANK PAUP ’70

that before. The dryland training room – there’s not another place like that on any other college campus that I’m aware of.”

Holmes says that having the coaches offices within a few steps of everything will be invaluable for the program’s synergy.

“One of the biggest things about this facility is our lobby,” Holmes added. “Having a place to meet recruits and their families and for them to see that level of commitment when they walk in is tremendous. We are incredibly grateful and excited for the future.”

The lead gift for the facility was made by the pavilion’s namesakes – Anne and Hank Paup ’70. Steadfast supporters of Aggie Athletics, the Paups’ commitment to the project and the swimming and diving programs was critical to the facility’s construction.

“Anne and I are honored to be in a position to share some of our lifelong blessings in order to lead on this project,” said Hank Paup.

As a swimming student-athlete during his time at A&M from 1966-70, Paup set the school record in the mile and grew his passion for the university and its athletics programs. That passion continues to pay dividends to Aggie Athletics.

“Paup Pavilion will allow our coaches to recruit, train and compete at a championship level,” said Dennis.

“In the words of Jimbo Fisher, ‘We ain’t done yet,’” Paup added. “I believe we are entering the golden age of Texas A&M Swimming & Diving.”

The spacious locker rooms are more than double the size of the previous space, while the student-athlete lounge features a fueling station and is an ideal setting for team gatherings.





**THANK YOU TO THE MORE THAN 115 DONORS WHO HELPED MAKE PAUP PAVILION A REALITY**

“I would like to thank the donors for providing everything we need and more and for helping us become better student-athletes while we’re here.”

**MARK THEALL '21**  
MEN'S SWIMMING & DIVING

“I want to thank the donors and the people who made this expansion happen and for seeing the value and the potential that swimming at A&M has.”

**HALEY YELLE '21**  
WOMEN'S SWIMMING & DIVING



POWER OF A SCHOLARSHIP

# ALEX SEZER '16

Aggie Heart Award winner turned opportunities at A&M into remarkably successful career

BY OLIN BUCHANAN

**TO SOME, EARNING A SCHOLARSHIP IS A** life-long goal. It can provide an opportunity to compete at the highest level of collegiate athletics.

Alex Sezer's football scholarship was that. And much, much more. His scholarship was a key that opened doors to vast possibilities.

Sezer used his opportunity at Texas A&M to earn a degree, build relationships and launch a successful career in real estate.

Just four years after completing his Aggie football career, the 25-year-old Sezer manages over \$75 million in property as the president of Twin City Properties in Bryan. He's also the founder of his own company, Sezer Enterprises, and has authored books.

The affable Sezer credits the meteoric rise of his business career to the education and connections his Texas A&M Athletics scholarship made possible.

"The people I met and the things I learned – obviously, tied to my scholarship at Texas A&M – changed my life," Sezer said. "The position I'm in is all through Texas A&M and the people involved with the university."

Yet, those who know Sezer best maintain he was destined for success regardless of where he chose to continue his education.

"He's one percent, of one percent, of one percent," said Twin City CEO Doug Pederson, a former A&M basketball player who became Sezer's

mentor almost by accident. “I think you could put him anywhere and he would excel. He’s brilliant, and he’s driven to be excellent.”

Sezer was a star running back and cornerback at Little Cypress-Mauriceville, a small high school near Beaumont. His parents valued academic achievements over athletic accomplishments. Don’t get an “A,” don’t play.

Sezer never missed a game. He was Salutatorian. He was offered the opportunity for an Ivy League education.

But when former A&M football coach Kevin Sumlin offered a scholarship, the allure of continuing his football career was too tempting to pass up.

“I was not an A&M fan growing up on the border of Louisiana,” Sezer admits. “Most of what I knew was LSU. I took my visit to A&M and fell in love. I haven’t looked back since that day.”

There were tough days ahead, though. His playing career didn’t immediately unfold as he’d hoped. Frustrated, Sezer telephoned his mother, Maranda, to let off steam. She handed the phone to her husband, Alex, Sr. He calmly interjected.

“Alex. You’re exactly where you want to be.”

“

**THE PEOPLE I MET AND THE THINGS I LEARNED — OBVIOUSLY, TIED TO MY SCHOLARSHIP AT TEXAS A&M — CHANGED MY LIFE. THE POSITION I’M IN IS ALL THROUGH TEXAS A&M AND THE PEOPLE INVOLVED WITH THE UNIVERSITY.**

— ALEX SEZER '16

Sezer and his wife, Dayja (Arnold), were married in 2018. Both Texas A&M graduates, Alex earned a bachelor’s degree in industrial distribution in 2016, while Dayja earned her bachelor’s in biology in 2018.





Sezer, pictured with Doug and Cheryl Pederson (middle), accepted an offer to join Doug at Twin City Properties where he currently serves as the company's president.

As usual, father knew best. Sezer lettered from 2013-16. He was a team captain. He was winner of the Aggie Heart Award as a senior.

His father's wisdom became even clearer soon after Alex had the opportunity to go fishing on Pederson's private lake in College Station.

As the day of fishing neared an end, Sezer thanked Pederson for the hospitality. He complimented Pederson's house. He asked questions. Lots and lots of questions.

In 2016, Sezer graduated magna cum laude from A&M, earning a B.S. in industrial engineering. He worked a year for Opportune, a Houston-based oil and gas exploration company. He was involved in \$4 billion of private equity purchases.

He had a bright future with Opportune. Yet, Sezer went a different direction.

He returned to College Station, accepted an offer from Pederson and settled down with his wife, Dayja, an eighth-grade science teacher who also attended A&M.

"My role has changed a lot," Sezer said. "I'm more strategic and visionary. That's a change for me because I was used to the immediate impact whether on the field or in business. I'll lease a property and I might not see the results of what I'm



“  
**THE OPPORTUNITY TO COME TO TEXAS A&M HAS MEANT THE WORLD TO ME. I CAN TESTIFY THAT IT'S NOT SOMETHING THAT'S JUST FOR FOUR YEARS. AGGIES TAKE CARE OF AGGIES. MY LIFE IS A TESTAMENT TO THAT.**

— ALEX SEZER '16





A three-year letterman with the Aggie football team, Sezer served as team captain during the 2016 season and earned football's Aggie Heart Award. In 2017, Sezer was named the winner of Texas A&M's Distinguished Letterman Award.

doing for two, five or 10 years. There are different ways I can grow this business.”

He’s also trying to help other Aggies grow. Sezer speaks to incoming freshmen each year. Sometimes, he’ll put on an A&M polo and jeans and address the entire team. His message is simple and direct.

“You have to take advantage of the opportunity while it lasts,” Sezer said. “You’ll be judged by what you did with the opportunity when you had it. Develop relationships with donors. Form bonds with them. Utilize those relationships.”

Sezer certainly did. He learned. He developed relationships with donors. He formed bonds and utilized those relationships.

He recognized that power of a scholarship and put it to work.

“The opportunity to come to Texas A&M has meant the world to me,” Sezer said. “I can testify that it’s not something that’s just for four years. Aggies take care of Aggies. My life is a testament to that.”



# STACY '81 & TOM '81 LIGHT

Through Jenny's Assist, generous Aggie couple sheds light on critical student-athlete resources at A&M

BY SAMANTHA ATCHLEY '17



Loyal supporters of Texas A&M Athletics and the 12th Man Foundation, Stacy and Tom Light are diehard Aggies who both graduated from A&M in 1981.

**WHEN A CRITICAL NEED AND A COMMON GOAL** collided, Stacy and Tom Light found a reimagined purpose for giving to the 12th Man Foundation.

While the two 1981 graduates of Texas A&M University are longtime, loyal supporters of Aggie Athletics, Stacy and Tom are also dedicated advocates for disordered eating awareness. The Lights have firsthand experience and a personal connection to how impactful issues like this can be on a young person's life.

“

**WE WANTED TO HONOR JENNY AND THE STRUGGLES WHICH HAVE IMPACTED HER SPORTS GOALS AND LIFE CONSIDERABLY.**

— STACY LIGHT '81

“Our eldest daughter, Jenny, was a gifted athlete in high school and probably could have competed at a collegiate level,” Stacy said. “However, Jenny has suffered from an eating disorder for many years. Athletes often set a very high bar for themselves, which can drive restricting nutrition and overtraining.”

When it came time to renew their Champions Council membership with the 12th Man Foundation, the Lights shared a vision of funding student-athlete programming, counseling and training in the area of disordered eating and body image for Aggie student-athletes.

“We realized how important it is for student-athletes and staff to have the knowledge to identify issues before they get out of hand,” Tom said. “It is much easier to prevent disordered eating and compulsive exercise than it is to treat it once it becomes too ingrained and a mental health issue.”

Their vision was met with resounding support, and the Lights combined their passions into a gift that will make a lasting impact for Aggie Athletics.

“We wanted to honor Jenny and the struggles which have impacted her sports goals and life considerably,” Stacy said. “We wanted to help keep this



The Lights' desire to fund programming, counseling and training in the area of disordered eating and body image for Aggie student-athletes stems from their daughter Jenny's struggles with an eating disorder.

from happening to anyone else's son or daughter and provide hope and healing wherever possible."

The Lights collaborated with 12th Man Foundation and Texas A&M Athletics staff to establish Jenny's Assist. According to Dr. Ryan Pittsinger, the magnitude of what Jenny's Assist will mean to Aggie student-athletes is difficult to put into words.

"I can't even begin to describe how beneficial it is," said Dr. Pittsinger, who serves as Assistant Athletics Director, Director of Counseling and Sport Psychology at Texas A&M. "A lot of people, including student-athletes, experience disordered eating, whether that's body image concerns, underfueling, overfueling; and especially a lot of student-athletes feel pressure to be perfect, to perform or to meet or exceed expectations. I think Jenny's Assist will really shine a light on this topic and allow people to receive support and services around this that they need."

Coming from a family full of A&M grads, Stacy and Tom are thrilled to be able to provide hope, healing and much-needed assistance to fellow Aggies.

Close relatives and fellow Champions Council members Tricia and Donal Antill have eagerly joined in to help the cause as well. As Tom's sister Tricia says, "If Jenny's Assist can help at least one student-athlete, our contribution will be worth it."

"I think we already knew we wanted to be a part of Champions Council," added Donal, "but when Stacy and Tom brought up the idea of directing

our donation toward nutritional wellness and eating disorders, it really provided an opportunity to be even more targeted in our giving than we were before. And after hearing Dr. Pittsinger's whole mindset and thought process of where he can take Jenny's Assist in the future, it really solidified where we wanted to place our focus."

The future for Jenny's Assist is certainly bright. According to Dr. Pittsinger's plans, funds donated to this endowed program will create an opportunity for the athletics department to increase education efforts, broaden outreach and expand the range of resources available in order to effectively address

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**WE REALIZED HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES AND STAFF TO HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE TO IDENTIFY ISSUES BEFORE THEY GET OUT OF HAND. IT IS MUCH EASIER TO PREVENT DISORDERED EATING AND COMPULSIVE EXERCISE THAN IT IS TO TREAT IT ONCE IT BECOMES TOO INGRAINED AND A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE.**

— TOM LIGHT '81

Residents of Dallas and proud parents of daughters Jenny and Erin (Lechêne) '13, the Lights are members of Champions Council and are longtime Texas A&M football and baseball season ticket holders. Tom's sister Tricia Antill and her husband Donal, pictured below left with their Aggie children, Matthew and Mary Grace, joined in the cause to support Jenny's Assist as fellow Champions Council members.



If you are interested in making a gift to support student-athletes with programs like Jenny's Assist, contact the Major Gifts office at 979-260-7595.

“**SUPPORTING THINGS LIKE MENTAL HEALTH EFFORTS AND STUDENT-ATHLETE ENGAGEMENT IS WHAT ALLOWS THE STUDENT-ATHLETE TO BE A STUDENT-ATHLETE. IT ALLOWS THEM TO PERFORM WELL ACADEMICALLY, ATHLETICALLY, SOCIALLY, INDIVIDUALLY AND TO REALLY BE THE BEST VERSION OF THEMSELVES.**

— DR. RYAN PITTSINGER

individual needs and incorporate preemptive measures for a proactive approach. With the financial and personal investments being made, the possibilities for student-athletes are monumental.

“The Lights have a personal connection to the topic, and they really want to impact the student-athletes on a personal level,” Dr. Pittsinger said of Jenny's Assist. “By them being able to share their stories, share their experiences and communicate that they care goes a long way with our student-athletes and just people in general. People want to feel cared about.”

To the Lights and their family, Jenny's Assist is truly about the lives of Aggie student-athletes and how they can make an impact beyond competition.

“We all have a passion for Aggie Athletics,” said

COURTESY OF THE LIGHT FAMILY

“

**WE ALL HAVE A PASSION FOR AGGIE ATHLETICS, BUT BEYOND THAT YOU'RE LOOKING AT INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE LIVES, HOPES, DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS. THEY'RE PEOPLE'S SONS AND DAUGHTERS, AND HAVING A DAUGHTER WHO HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACTED BY DISORDERED EATING REALLY DRIVES OUR PASSION.**

— TOM LIGHT '81

Tom, “but beyond that you’re looking at individuals who have lives, hopes, dreams and aspirations. They’re people’s sons and daughters, and having a daughter who has been significantly impacted by disordered eating really drives our passion. We are happy to see that A&M is aware of this and willing to focus funding and personnel toward preparing Aggies for life during and after sports.”

As Stacy and Tom have helped emphasize through Jenny’s Assist, donor support is making an impactful difference far past what is seen on gameday. The well-rounded effort to enhance all aspects of the student-athlete experience at Texas A&M is what separates Aggies from the rest.

“These contributions are a giant help, we’re extremely grateful and appreciative,” Dr. Pittsinger said. “Supporting things like mental health efforts and student-athlete engagement is what allows the student-athlete to be a student-athlete; it allows them to perform well academically, athletically, socially, individually, and to really be the best version of themselves.”

In Tom’s eyes, creating Jenny’s Assist was an answer to an important call from his childhood.

“When we were growing up,” Tom recalled, “the last thing my mother would say to us before leaving the house was, ‘Remember, you’re a Light.’ At the time, that meant, ‘Don’t get into trouble and remember your manners and Light family upbringing.’ As I got older, I realized what she really meant was, ‘Remember, you’re a light in the world and are called upon to live an active faith and help others as you’re able.’ If we can provide some small bit of hope and healing through this endowment, I think my mother’s lesson of long ago will be achieved.”

COURTESY OF THE LIGHT FAMILY

## ABOUT THE LIGHTS

### FORMER STUDENTS

Stacy and Tom Light both graduated from Texas A&M in 1981. Stacy earned a bachelor’s degree in petroleum engineering and is currently a petroleum engineering consultant. Tom earned his bachelor’s in industrial distribution and recently retired after 30 years with SKF USA.

### PROUD PARENTS

Stacy and Tom have two children. Jenny, their eldest daughter, is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma (bachelor’s) and the University of Denver (master’s). Their youngest daughter, Erin, earned her BBA in marketing from Texas A&M in 2013.

### DIEHARD AGGIES

The Lights have been Aggie football season ticket holders for nearly 40 years and still tailgate with their college friends every season: Laine '81 and Ted Totah '80, Chris '81 and DeWayne '81 Travelstead, Tricia and Donal Antill and Greg Light '79. Stacy and Tom are also Aggie baseball season ticket holders.

### MAROON BLOODED

There are 15 Texas A&M University degrees within the Light family including Stacy '81, Tom '81 and Erin '13, as well as the Antills' children Mary Grace '19, '20 and Matthew '20. Three generations of Aggie Rings pictured below include Stacy, Tom and Erin with Stacy’s late father, Jay McElroy '50.



# TWIN TRAILBLAZERS

Aggie track and field All-Americans Ellen and Evelyn Smith created a legacy for the sport and school they both love

BY CHAREAN WILLIAMS '86

**THE STORY OF ELLEN AND EVELYN SMITH BEGINS** with a fish tale. It was fishing, of all things, that made the identical twins start running, and in turn led them to Aggieland as the first Black women signed by Texas A&M's track and field program.

Almost 40 years after their graduations from A&M, the sport keeps Ellen and Evelyn returning to College Station regularly to serve as track and field officials.

"That tells a story about how much they care about Texas A&M and how much they care about track and field," former Aggie track and field coach Ted Nelson said. "It's not an easy job. In fact, it's a whole lot of work for very little pay. But they're dedicated."

Ellen and Evelyn, the youngest of 10 children, grew up in Fort Worth. They spent every holiday

and almost every weekend on the creek fishing with their parents and siblings.

"My dad drove a '63 two-door Chevrolet Impala," Evelyn Smith Golden '82 said. "He loved driving it and always insisted we all ride together (regardless to who was going). The fishing poles would be sticking backwards out the windows on both sides, the tackle boxes and bait were in the trunk and everybody was piled inside the car.

"After fishing for hours, when it was time for us to leave, Ellen and I would say, 'Daddy, I bet we can beat you to the main gate.' He'd say, 'OK, let's see how fast y'all are today.' So, daddy would get in the car, Ellen would stand on one side, and I'd stand on the other side. He'd put it in neutral and gun the engine. Vroom! Vroom! Ellen and I would look at each other, and we'd just take off running as if it

In 1978, Ellen and Evelyn Smith became two of the first three Black freshmen ever on the A&M women's track and field team. More than 40 years later, the twins still return to College Station regularly for Aggie sporting events and to serve as track and field officials for A&M meets.



was a dog after us.”

The twins burst into laughter thinking back to those moments.

“We beat him,” said Evelyn, “and in our minds, if we could beat a car, we could beat people. He instilled in us, ‘You can run. You’re fast. Go for it.’”

Ellen and Evelyn then began a daily ritual of waiting for their father to arrive from work, so they could race him home.

“When we saw him coming off that hill, we’d take off running and try to beat him to the house because we lived in the middle of the block,” Ellen Smith Robinson ’83 said. “That was considered having fun in our day.”

The twins started the girls track program at Fort Worth’s Green B. Trimble Technical High School. They recruited several friends and the school won four consecutive Class 4A state championships from 1976-79, including the twins’ final three high school years.

“After beating all the kids in races in middle school, we got to high school and realized there wasn’t a track team for girls,” Ellen said, “so we asked the principal if we could have a track program. He said, ‘Well, there’s not a coach.’ We said, ‘If we find one, can we run?’ He gave us approval, so we talked to the homemaking teacher. We told Mrs. Vanette Medlen, ‘We just need you to come out. Please. Just be there. Just a body. We just want to run.’”

“We gave her three straight state rings.”

Ellen and Evelyn were recruited by several college



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**ELLEN AND I BROUGHT IT FROM HIGH SCHOOL, AND WE JUST STEPPED IT UP SEVERAL NOTCHES AT A&M. PEOPLE STARTED RECOGNIZING, ‘OH, A&M HAS A WOMEN’S TRACK AND FIELD PROGRAM NOW.’ I THINK WE WERE THE TRAILBLAZERS FOR THAT. I REALLY DO.**

— EVELYN SMITH GOLDEN ’82





Ellen and Evelyn recently visited their old high school in Fort Worth. The sisters started the track program at their alma mater in 1975, and the school won state championships in each of the twins' final three years.

programs. Their first choice was the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, but their parents vetoed that because of the distance from Fort Worth. Their second choice was Prairie View A&M, but there was only one scholarship available that the twins would have to split.

“That meant our parents would have to pay all remaining costs,” Evelyn said. “Unfortunately, being the youngest of 10 kids, this was not a possibility.”

Then, Texas A&M called offering both Ellen and Evelyn full scholarships.

“It was a no-brainer,” Evelyn said. “We were four hours away from home, number one. Then, mom

and dad didn’t have the funds, and A&M paid for everything from the moment we walked into the door until the day we left.”

In 1978, the twins, along with Early Douglas, from Mart, became the first Black freshmen ever on the A&M women’s track and field team. Their story doesn’t end there, though. The twins are recognized for lettering all four seasons and earning degrees. Ellen became a three-time All-American and Evelyn a two-time All-American.

“It’s just the recognition of putting A&M women’s track and field on the map,” Evelyn said. “Ellen and I brought it from high school, and we just stepped it up several notches at A&M. People started recognizing, ‘Oh, A&M has a women’s track and field program now.’ I think we were the trailblazers for that. I really do.”

Evelyn earned All-America honors in the 400-meter relay and the 1,600-meter relay in 1982. Ellen earned All-America honors in the 400-meter hurdles, finishing third in the nation in 1981, and was on the same relay teams with Evelyn that earned All-America honors in 1982.

Ellen’s career-best time of 58.75 in the 400 hurdles from 1981 still ranks ninth in program history.

“They were really good athletes,” Nelson said. “They were coachable, and they really wanted to be

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**MY LIFE AFTER TEXAS A&M HAS GIVEN ME THE DRIVING FORCE FROM WITHIN TO BE SUCCESSFUL AT WHATEVER CHALLENGES I FACE. WHAT AN HONOR AND PRIVILEGE IT IS TO SAY, KNOW AND GRADUATE FROM SUCH AN AMAZING UNIVERSITY.**

— ELLEN SMITH ROBINSON '83

COURTESY OF ELLEN AND EVELYN SMITH



good. They take pride in being the first All-Americans in the women's program. It means a lot to them."

Ellen and Evelyn now live in Houston, a few miles from each other. Ellen, who graduated with a degree in health and physical education, retired in 2017 after 32 years coaching track and field and cross country at the high school level. Evelyn, who graduated with a degree in educational curriculum and instruction, continues to teach online courses to corporations and as an adjunct professor.

The twins are certified USA Track and Field officials and travel around the country officiating meets including 13 years of service as officials at A&M. Ellen has worked as a clerk and as a marshal the past few years, while Evelyn also has worked as a clerk and as a marshal and has spent the past two years officiating the long and triple jumps. Evelyn also is the secretary and webmaster on the Texas A&M Track & Field Officials Association Board.

Evelyn recently was honored as a trailblazer by A&M and invited to speak at a Black History Month event. In 2019, the Texas A&M Track & Field Officials Association Board inducted her into its Hall of Fame.

"It's like it's in our blood," Evelyn said of track and

field. "The hardest part of being an official is not being able to tell the Aggies, 'Good job! That was good! We have to be neutral. We have to stay calm.'"

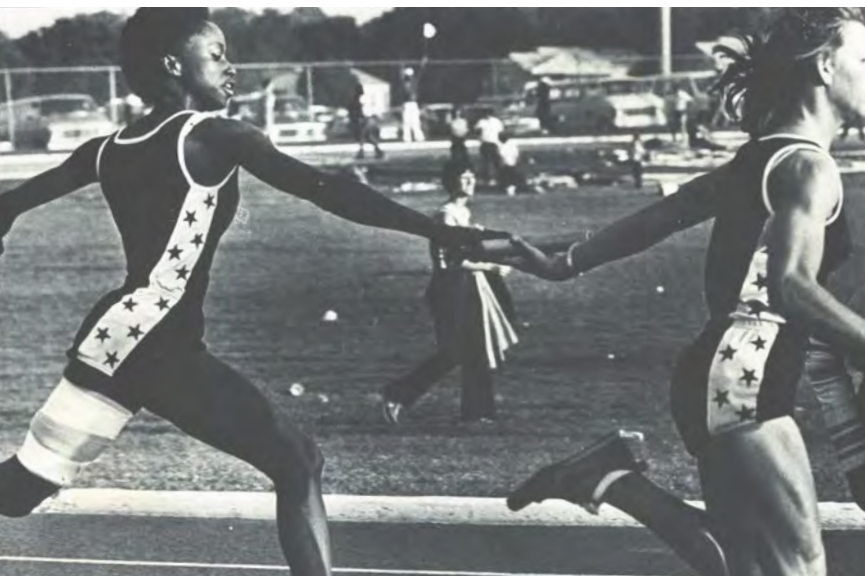
The twins are Aggies through and through, and they are thankful for their opportunities and experiences at A&M and beyond.

"The 4-year scholarship to Texas A&M University meant an opportunity for me to be successful both academically and athletically," Ellen said. "Our desire to run track was a family experience Evelyn and I shared with our parents. It allowed them to travel and see their daughters compete and run at various track meets. My life after Texas A&M has given me the driving force from within to be successful at whatever challenges I face. What an honor and privilege it is to say, know and graduate from such an amazing university."

For Evelyn, the opportunity to attain a full college scholarship was "phenomenal."

"I always knew I wanted to go to college, and the scholarship was the answer to my prayers," she said. "The fact that by simply running I could receive an 'all expenses paid' education, it was my ticket! In turn, I knew it would be extremely advantageous not only to me, but also my parents and family." ■

Ellen (below right) and Evelyn (bottom left) earned All-America honors on the same relay team in the 400-meter and 1,600-meter relays in 1982. Also an All-American hurdler, Ellen finished third in the nation in the 400-meter hurdles in 1981 and her career-best time of 58.75 still ranks ninth in A&M history.





**To be on the other side of the world getting to do what I love while being able to pursue an education is the biggest blessing anyone could give me.**

The scholarship and opportunity to represent this incredible institution mean the world to me and my family. There are not many opportunities like this provided to kids in Australia, especially where I grew up in Western Sydney.

I'd like to express my appreciation and gratitude toward Mr. and Mrs. Hickox for their generous donations. It is so special and very humbling to know that former students continue to pour into the lives of fellow Aggies and future generations to come.

**ELLA TOFAEONO '22**  
WOMEN'S BASKETBALL



*Ella, who plans to use her A&M degree to pursue her dream of becoming an athletics director, is connected with donors Michelle '89 and Rob Hickox '90 through their support of the 1922 Fund. Call the Major Gifts office at 979-260-7595 for more information on the 1922 Fund.*



**Our favorite part of our involvement with the 1922 Fund has been getting to know so many different student-athletes and learning about their life outside of sports.**

While we have always been Aggie football fans, the 1922 Fund and 12th Man Foundation events have helped us to learn about our other programs and get to know the student-athletes which, in turn, has encouraged us to follow them more closely and even buy season tickets for a few more sports.

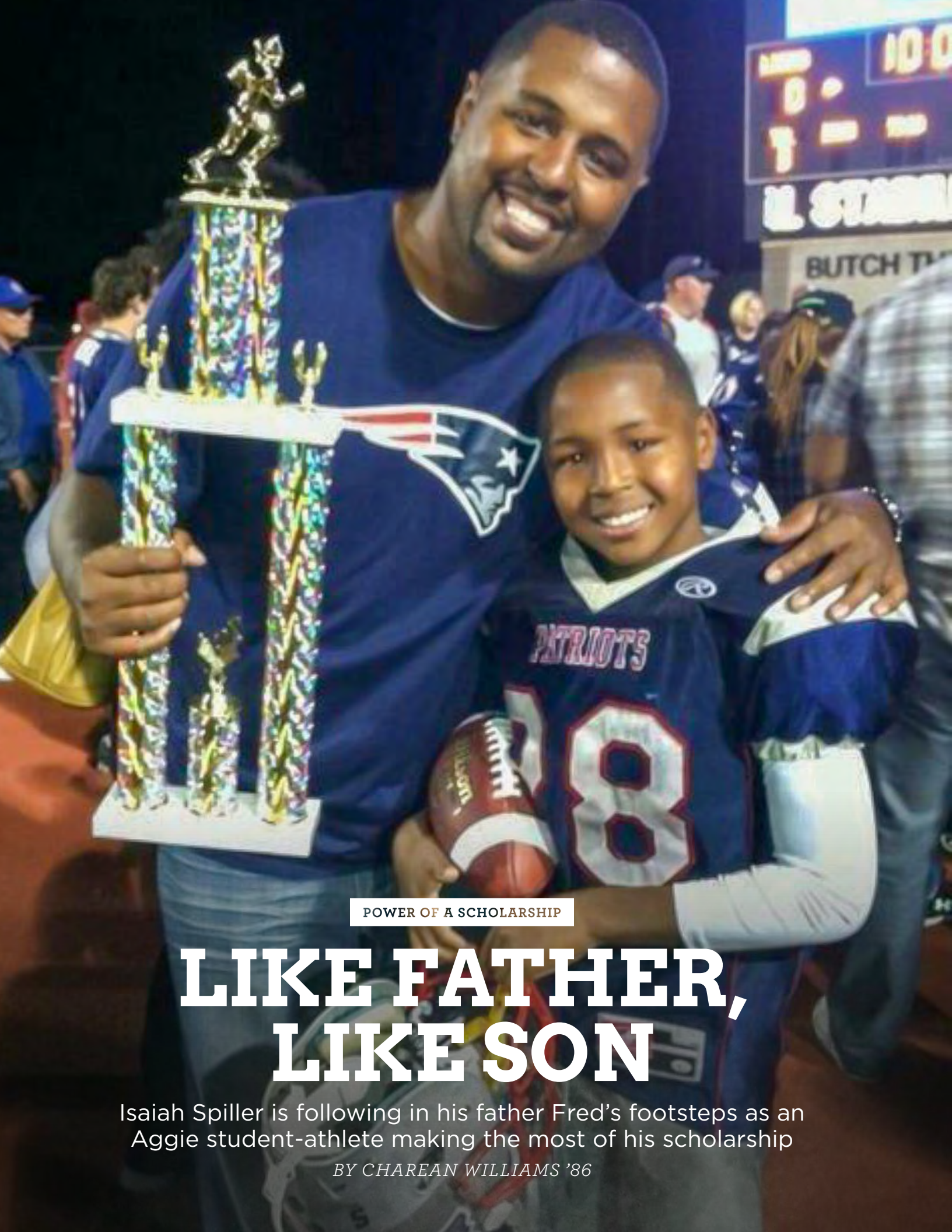
We are so excited to be connected with Ella and wish her success in her first season with Aggie women's basketball.

**MICHELLE '89 & ROB HICKOX '90**  
1922 FUND DONORS

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*Michelle and Rob are connected with women's basketball student-athlete Ella Tofaeono through their gift to the 1922 Fund. Call the Major Gifts office at 979-260-7595 to discover how you can be a part of the 1922 Fund and make a life-changing impact for Aggie student-athletes.*





POWER OF A SCHOLARSHIP

# LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Isaiah Spiller is following in his father Fred's footsteps as an Aggie student-athlete making the most of his scholarship

*BY CHAREAN WILLIAMS '86*

“

**I HAD TO REFOCUS MY ATTENTION ON BIGGER GOALS THAN JUST GOING TO THE NFL. I HAD TO FOCUS ON NOW GETTING MY DEGREE. WITH ISAIAH COMING, I HAD TO STOP THINKING JUST ABOUT MYSELF AND HOW IT WAS ABOUT HIM, AND REALLY CREATING A FUTURE FOR HIM AND MY WIFE.**

— FRED SPILLER '04

**FRED SPILLER WAS SUPPOSED TO BE** what his son, Isaiah, has become: A standout Texas A&M football player with a promising NFL outlook. Fred still remembers the day in 2001 when a back specialist told him his football career was finished.

“It was one morning I remember vividly,” said Fred, who played tight end. “I got out of the bed and I had sciatic pain down my leg.”

He could hardly walk.

“I told the trainer, this is something more than a bulging disc. They sent me in for an MRI, and when the results came back, the doctor said, ‘Listen, football is just a small part of your future and your life. If you continue to play, with the position that you play, it’s highly likely you could be paralyzed or have more severe injuries.’ As he was talking, I was crying, because I had put in so much work. It was like my whole world came crumbling down. Then, came Isaiah.”

Isaiah’s arrival in Aggieland in 2019 wasn’t the first time the running back called College Station home. As an infant, Isaiah lived in an apartment on Dartmouth Street with his parents as his dad finished his degree at A&M and his mom, Iesha, went to Blinn College before finishing at the University of Phoenix.

Fred poured everything he had into Isaiah, hoping to give his son what he didn’t have. He wanted

In 23 games at A&M, Isaiah has amassed nearly 2,400 all-purpose yards and 19 touchdowns while earning All-SEC honors as one of the elite conference’s premier running backs.



for Isaiah what an injury prevented him from having. Two college seasons and nearly 2,400 yards later, Isaiah is living out his – and his father’s – dream.

One NFL scout says Isaiah “looks the part of an NFL running back with good quickness for a guy that size.”

“He’s kind of living through me right now,” Isaiah said of his father. “Even when I was little, he always lifted me because he saw the potential in me. He’s really in my head all the time, making sure my head’s on straight, because he knows where I can go. Hopefully, I can get there one day.”

That could have been Fred.

As a senior at Aldine Nimitz, Fred had A&M as his third choice behind Miami and Michigan. But Fred, who calls himself an “inner-city kid,” ultimately decided A&M was the right fit because it would allow his single-parent mother to travel to games.

Fred redshirted as a true freshman in 1999 and played 10 games and earned a varsity letter as a

redshirt freshman in 2000, though he didn’t record a statistic. His football career ended there.

“We were very disappointed, because he was a big, athletic guy,” then-head coach R.C. Slocum said. “He had the same character as his son. He was a great guy to have on the team. I have no doubt he could have been an NFL tight end.”

Fred underwent surgery to repair a herniated disc, a result of the cumulative impact of football on his back. He had little time for self-pity.

“I had to refocus my attention on bigger goals than just going to the NFL,” Fred said. “I had to focus on now getting my degree. With Isaiah coming, I had to stop thinking just about myself and how it was about him, and really creating a future for him and my wife.”

Fred received his degree in agricultural development in 2004. He now is an ordained minister and a behavior specialist in the counseling department at Klein Collins, where Isaiah went to high school.

Church and school are important to Fred and Iesha, who formerly worked in the athletics

Fred, pictured below with his wife, Iesha, daughters, Arianna and Naomi, and his first-born, Isaiah, was a promising tight end for A&M in the early 2000s until a significant back injury prematurely ended his playing career. Today, Fred is an ordained minister, a behavior specialist at Klein Collins High School and a proud Aggie dad who credits much of his success to his A&M degree.



COURTESY OF THE SPILLER FAMILY



department at Klein Forest High School and now is in human resources at a recruiting firm. They have made it clear Isaiah will get his sport management degree even if that means completing it after he leaves for the NFL.

“If he has an opportunity to come out next year, we were going to talk to the staff in the offseason to see what he can do to speed up getting his degree or getting as close as possible to it when he leaves,” Fred said. “That’s very important. I’ve always taught Isaiah football is a vehicle to get you where you want to go, but it’s just a short portion of life. Education is forever.”

When he’s done playing football, Isaiah plans to run an athletic performance training center. But a decade into his football career, Isaiah, in some ways, is just getting started.

Isaiah was born to run. His first carry as an 8-year-old in youth football went for an 80-yard touchdown. By then, Isaiah already was working with Rischad Whitfield, known as “The Footwork King,” in Houston. Whitfield has trained NFL players, including Richard Sherman, Le’Veon Bell,

DeAndre Hopkins, Melvin Gordon, Xavien Howard and Odell Beckham.

Isaiah, though, is Whitfield’s star pupil, having already developed a jump cut to embarrass defensive backs.

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**THANK YOU TO ALL THE SUPPORTERS WHO HELP ME FURTHER MY EDUCATION AND FOOTBALL CAREER. I’M GRATEFUL AND REALLY DON’T KNOW WHERE I WOULD BE WITHOUT THIS OPPORTUNITY.**

—ISAIAH SPILLER '23



A star running back from Klein Collins High School, Isaiah grew up wearing maroon and white and is proudly continuing his father's legacy at A&M. The sport management major, pictured with 12th Man Foundation donors Stacy '81 and Tom '81 Light (middle), was named a semifinalist for the Earl Campbell Tyler Rose Award and Doak Walker Award for his sensational sophomore season in 2020 which culminated with the Aggies as Capital One Orange Bowl champions.



"He has a lot of Le'Veon Bell in him," Whitfield said. "That's the best comparison. He mimics his game a lot. He's a very patient runner, but he's also good as a receiver. Great instincts. He knows exactly where to go without even seeing it."

"I'm proud of him. Being an elite running back in the NFL is not about the speed. It's about if they give you the ball, can you make something happen, can you create? Isaiah has shown that ability to avoid tackles. He's strong. He runs with a violent temper, and he's a great kid mentally. I know I'm biased, but he's shown he's the best running back in college football this year, and he's earned that."

Adrian Peterson is Isaiah's favorite running back, and one of the reasons Isaiah initially committed to Oklahoma after gaining 3,587 yards from scrimmage and 53 total touchdowns at Klein Collins. But A&M, because of his father's connection, was Isaiah's favorite team.

When Jimbo Fisher replaced Kevin Sumlin, Isaiah changed his commitment to the Aggies.

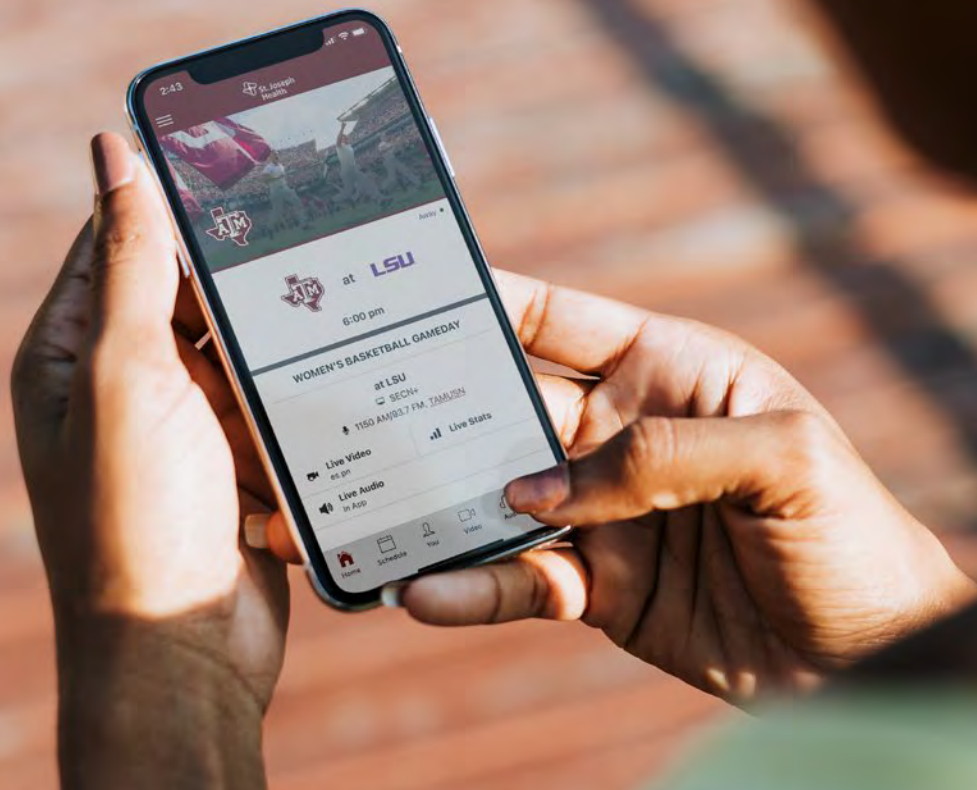
In two short years, Isaiah has won accolades and compliments far and wide. Nothing means more than the approval of his father.

"He's always been there from the beginning," Isaiah said. "He never pressured me into playing football. He introduced me to it, and I was intrigued. But he believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself."

"So, when he says I'm playing good and I'm doing good, that means a lot to me. It motivates me to go even harder and want it even more." 🍊







TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS

# DIGITAL & SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Making an investment in digital and social platforms has become an integral part of success in college athletics

BY ADAM QUISENBERRY

Relaunched in fall 2020, the 12th Man Mobile app represents one of the many ways Texas A&M Athletics is investing in digital and social engagement with Aggie supporters.

**IT'S BEEN SAID THAT 'CHANGE IS THE** only constant in life.' The saying is amplified in the ultracompetitive world of intercollegiate athletics where coaches seek out fresh innovations to give their teams an edge while administrators confront the challenges that accompany the ever-evolving business side of the industry.

"What does a 21st century athletics department look like, how do we serve customers, deliver content, grow our fanbase and avidity when there are so many other forces out there trying to get their attention?" asks Michael Thompson, Texas A&M's deputy athletics director for external relations and business development.

For Aggie Athletics and the 12th Man Foundation,

a part of that evolution means better engagement with their constituents by investing in the ever-expanding digital-side arena of sports.

As any longtime Aggie fan will testify, the ways they follow their teams have changed over the years. From the days of clambering for the morning newspaper to see last night's scoreline, we have arrived at a place where a person can stream hundreds of live events on their phone while simultaneously interacting with other fans worldwide on social networking apps.

It goes far beyond sports. People now have so many choices when it comes to how they spend their free time. The task is developing strategies to cut through the clutter and reach the right



12th Man Creative is constantly gathering and creating content to engage with fans and followers through each of the athletics department's digital and social channels.

audiences with the content they want.

"If we create that content and it doesn't reach our fans, then it's not worth anything," Thompson notes. "We have to get it in front of Aggies so they can view it. It sounds simple, but it's harder today than it was yesterday, and it will be even harder tomorrow."

To confront that challenge, A&M Athletics has reorganized its digital and creative staff into a singular unit that oversees brand management as well as content creation and distribution via digital channels.

Previously, while staff was devoted to graphic design, photography, social media and website

management, they were spread throughout various areas of the department. Through the formation of this new unit, dubbed 12th Man Creative, A&M Athletics recognized the need to consolidate a previously disjointed staff into a collaborative unit with shared goals and resources.

"It's evolved so much for our consumers that you have to approach it with certain strategies and goals that are specific to the digital, social and branding space," Thompson said. "It didn't used to be that important, but it is now."

In November 2020, Michael Green joined the department to lead that charge as assistant athletics director for branding, digital and social. A 2011 graduate of A&M, Green brings a cache of experience having spent time on campus with Texas A&M University's Marketing & Communications team in a variety of positions, including a significant role in the growth and strategies behind the school's successful digital platforms.

The College Station native hopes to bring a competitive edge to the athletics department's digital platforms as he sees no reason their growth and content should not be among the best in the country.

"It's important because we're fighting for people's attention," Green said. "We're fighting for their brand loyalty and affinity. Our social and digital platforms are a key way to do that now. Whether it's the creative we put out on those platforms, the

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**IF WE CREATE THAT CONTENT AND IT DOESN'T REACH OUR FANS, THEN IT'S NOT WORTH ANYTHING. WE HAVE TO GET IT IN FRONT OF AGGIES SO THEY CAN VIEW IT. IT SOUNDS SIMPLE, BUT IT'S HARDER TODAY THAN IT WAS YESTERDAY, AND IT WILL BE EVEN HARDER TOMORROW.**

— MICHAEL THOMPSON

voice and tone, or the one-on-one interactions we have with our fans, that is how we use these tools to engage on another level.”

It’s more than just an increase in followers on social media that the newly-minted digital team is after. It all goes back to not only growing the fanbase, but deepening the connection between teams, coaches and student-athletes and the supporters who make their success possible.

“To me, the biggest and most important metric is engagement,” Green said. “Followers can be somewhat of a vanity metric, but if we have high engagement numbers, that means our followers not only saw our content but took an action, whether it be liked, shared or commented. That’s what we’re looking for because it deepens that lasting connection with our fans.”

For the 12th Man Foundation, digital channels continue to be emphasized with the goal of delivering compelling content across a variety of platforms to engage with both current and potential donors and ticket buyers.

“Donors and season ticket holders are the engine that drives Texas A&M Athletics,” said 12th Man Foundation President and CEO Travis Dabney. “Deepening the bond between donors and the teams and student-athletes they generously support is a major point of emphasis for our organization. The ultimate goal is to grow that affinity

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**DEEPENING THE BOND BETWEEN DONORS AND THE TEAMS AND STUDENT-ATHLETES THEY GENEROUSLY SUPPORT IS A MAJOR POINT OF EMPHASIS FOR OUR ORGANIZATION. THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO GROW THAT AFFINITY AND DONOR BASE TO INCREASE OUR ABILITY TO SUPPORT CHAMPIONSHIP ATHLETICS.**

— TRAVIS DABNEY '96

and donor base to increase our ability to support championship athletics.”

Without a doubt for many, there was a renewed sense of optimism as the calendar flipped from 2020 to 2021. The volatility of the last year and its lingering effects is something no one soon wants to repeat. However, the challenges presented by recent events have brought the importance of digital platforms to the forefront and proven how vital a presence in that space has become for collegiate athletics departments.

Moving forward, both Texas A&M Athletics and the 12th Man Foundation plan to build upon those lessons as they continue to serve the best fanbase in the country. ■

Gamedays at Kyle Field are prime opportunities for Aggie supporters to interact and engage digitally with Texas A&M Athletics and the 12th Man Foundation.





**My scholarship means a great deal to my family and me. Growing up, I never thought I would ever be good enough to put on the maroon and white.**

Coach Childress proved me wrong by believing in me and giving me an opportunity. I had never been more proud in my life.

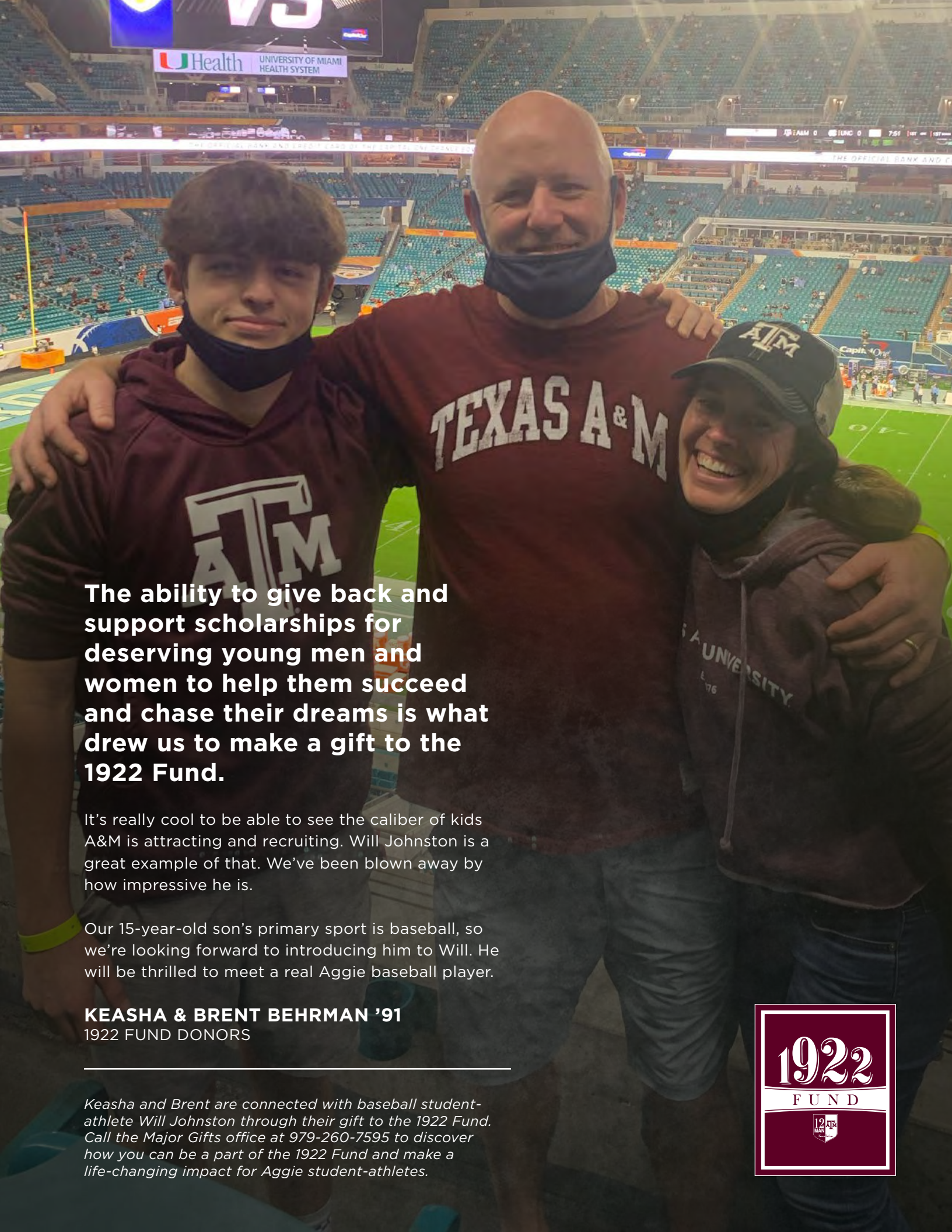
I really appreciate what the Behrmans and other donors have done for the athletics department. Brent is a great guy, and I love the opportunity I've had to get to know him and talk some baseball with him. It means a great deal that the former students care so much.

**WILL JOHNSTON '23**  
BASEBALL



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*Will, who hopes to start a real estate company once his baseball career is over, is connected with donors Keasha and Brent Behrman '91 through their support of the 1922 Fund. Call the Major Gifts office at 979-260-7595 for more information on the 1922 Fund.*



**The ability to give back and support scholarships for deserving young men and women to help them succeed and chase their dreams is what drew us to make a gift to the 1922 Fund.**

It's really cool to be able to see the caliber of kids A&M is attracting and recruiting. Will Johnston is a great example of that. We've been blown away by how impressive he is.

Our 15-year-old son's primary sport is baseball, so we're looking forward to introducing him to Will. He will be thrilled to meet a real Aggie baseball player.

**KEASHA & BRENT BEHRMAN '91**  
1922 FUND DONORS

*Keasha and Brent are connected with baseball student-athlete Will Johnston through their gift to the 1922 Fund. Call the Major Gifts office at 979-260-7595 to discover how you can be a part of the 1922 Fund and make a life-changing impact for Aggie student-athletes.*



# GAMEDAY IN A PANDEMIC

Student-athletes, staff and supporters come together during unique circumstances for an unforgettable football season

BY WILL JOHNSON '01

**FOOTBALL IS A WAY OF LIFE AT TEXAS A&M.** In the dead of winter, Aggies envision the next fall. In the spring, their optimism grows as the calendar advances. Through long, hot summers, the 12th Man's patience grows thin as anticipation escalates. When the college football season finally arrives in the fall, it's appreciated, celebrated and treasured.

In 2020, that appreciation may have peaked. Aggies almost went without a football season for the first time in the program's nearly 120-year history.

When the Big 10 Conference announced in August they were going to "postpone" their season until the spring, many thought it was the first step toward cancellation of the college football campaign as a whole.

"I was very concerned that momentum was going

to swallow the entirety of college football," said Travis Dabney, president and CEO of the 12th Man Foundation. "The collateral damage of no season would have lingered for years to come."

Fortunately, the SEC, and its 14 schools, held firm. Football is revered around the league, much like it is at A&M. The conference stayed patient, with a desire to forge ahead and play. That chance arrived in late July when the SEC presidents and chancellors approved a 10-game, conference-only football schedule that would kick off on Sept. 26.

Many proclaimed the decision was made strictly for money. While the revenue from football is the engine that drives collegiate athletics – football season ticket holders alone fund nearly half of A&M Athletics' operating budget – the dynamics of the



decision to play went far beyond dollars and cents.

“The student-athletes wanted to play,” said Director of Athletics Ross Bjork. “That’s all we kept hearing. ‘We want to play. Are we going to play? Give us that opportunity.’”

That’s been the goal all along. To provide the opportunity. The kind of opportunity that gives student-athletes a chance to succeed, and not just in athletics.

“12th Man Foundation donors make it possible for A&M student athletes to compete at the highest level,” said Dabney, “and more importantly, they provide the opportunity for success after the uniform has been hung up for the last time.”

“You can’t provide the opportunity without the resources,” Bjork added.

In going forward, A&M pulled off gameday in a pandemic. That achievement was anything but simple.

The Aggies’ conference-schedule was announced by the SEC on Aug. 17 and featured five games at Kyle Field including the Arkansas game, which was moved from AT&T Stadium in Arlington to Aggieland.

Then, on Aug. 19, A&M unveiled a reduced capacity, distanced seating plan designed to host fans at Kyle Field as safely as possible. Season ticket and student sports pass holders were then given the option to opt in or out of 2020 season tickets.

“**THE STUDENT-ATHLETES WANTED TO PLAY. THAT’S ALL WE KEPT HEARING. ‘WE WANT TO PLAY. ARE WE GOING TO PLAY? GIVE US THAT OPPORTUNITY.’**

— ROSS BJORK



Every season ticket holder who opted in was able to select a limited number of seats at reduced ticket and donation prices. However, the distanced seating plan meant reseating the entire 102,733-seat stadium at reduced capacity in an extremely short time frame.

“We had been planning for a number of scenarios in advance of the season,” said Carole Dollins, senior vice president of ticketing. “When the capacity decision was made, our entire staff hit the ground running and worked extremely hard to ensure our season ticket and sports pass holders were able to secure seats and receive their tickets and parking prior to the season opener. It was an unprecedented season, and I’m extremely proud of the way our staff and fans came together to make it possible.”

Signage and sanitizing stations were installed throughout Kyle Field to help keep fans as safe as possible during the season.



Thanks to personal contributions from the 12th Man Foundation Board of Trustees and the help of Aggie football letterman Chris Valletta '00, season ticket holders and many student sports pass holders received complimentary face coverings for the 2020 season.

The sights weren't the same. Only a quarter of the usual 100,000-plus Aggies were able to attend each game.

That sounds weren't the same. Those in attendance were magnificent, but there's nothing like a full, towel-waving Kyle Field affecting the outcome of a game.

There was less of scent in the air as well. Tailgating and smoky aromas from the grill weren't possible in its traditional form on campus.

It was different, and it was challenging.

Steve Miller says "being flexible" was key to the daily adaptations that were required for athletics department staff to be ready for gameday.

"SEC guidelines were in a state of flux sometimes daily leading to the first game," said Miller, A&M's assistant athletics director for events and external services.

Several protocols were put in place to keep fans as safe as possible. Aside from face masks, a noticeable addition to Kyle Field was plexiglass at several locations, including concession stands.

Touchless was much of the theme. A&M wanted

to create an environment that required minimal contact.

"The addition of digital ticketing for a large percentage of guests helped distribution on a tight timeline," said Miller, "while also achieving more

“**AGGIE FOOTBALL ISN'T JUST SOMETHING WE DO ON WEEKENDS. IT BRINGS FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND AGGIES TOGETHER. UNITED IN OUR DESIRE TO WIN AND CELEBRATE THE AGGIE SPIRIT.**

— TRAVIS DABNEY '96





The Florida football game was a turning point in A&M's exceptional season and proved that the 12th Man, even at 25 percent capacity, can make an impact on the outcome of a game.



contactless points at the stadium.”

With the cancellation of the Ole Miss game due to COVID-19, Kyle Field hosted only four games in 2020, with an average of 24,880 fans attending each contest. Although significantly less than normal, the 12th Man still stood ready and made an impact. When Florida came in ranked fourth nationally in October, Kyle Field rocked in similar fashion to years past. The Gators felt it.

“That crowd was a major factor in the game,” said Dan Mullen following A&M’s 41-38 win. “There must have been 50,000 people behind our bench going crazy.”

While the Gators’ head coach overshot the attendance figures, he was accurate in pinpointing the noise level it created. He then lobbied his own school to allow more fans into Ben Hill Griffin Stadium in Gainesville.

“We (need) 90,000 in The Swamp to give us that home field advantage that Texas A&M had today,” Mullen said.

A home field advantage indeed. The Aggies finished undefeated at Kyle Field for the first time since the 1999 season.

There’s hope that many of the pandemic protocols won’t be necessary for the 2021 season. Kyle Field at its finest is full of Aggies yelling at the top of their lungs and locking arms to saw horns.

After all, whether it’s old friends from college, extended families or the best student section in the country, Texas A&M football at Kyle Field unites Aggies from all walks of life who share the same pride and passion for their university.

“Aggie football isn’t just something we do on weekends,” Dabney said. “It brings families, friends and Aggies together. United in our desire to win and celebrate the Aggie spirit. Countless Aggies feel just as I do. We’re proud of our university, what it represents and the opportunities that it ultimately provides.”



# KATHLEEN CURNUTT '12

Vice President of Finance

BY BRIAN DAVIS '01

**KATHLEEN CURNUTT WAS BORN AN AGGIE.** The Sugar Land native grew up in an all-Aggie family and has been going to Texas A&M games for as long as she can remember.

“It’s always been in my blood,” said Kathleen, a 2013 graduate of A&M with a bachelor’s in accounting and master’s in marketing. “My brother, parents, grandparents and cousins are all Aggies. I applied to a few other schools, but I would have been devastated had I not been able to go to A&M. It’s where I always wanted to be.”

Prior to joining the 12th Man Foundation staff as vice president of finance in July 2019, Kathleen spent three years in business consulting with another A&M – Alvarez & Marsal – followed by three years leading the finance operations at Small Steps Nurturing Center, a non-profit organization that operates preschools for economically at-risk children of inner-city Houston.

“I really enjoyed my time there,” she said, “because I was able to blend my accounting degree with my passion for kids.”

However, the opportunity to return to Aggieland and support another lifelong passion – A&M Athletics – was too good to pass up.

“Being a part of an organization that supports student-athletes was very appealing to me,” said Kathleen, who followed in the footsteps of Randy Howard. “A&M Athletics has always been a big part of my life, and I have known Randy for a long time. To see his tenure here for 30 years I felt like this was such a great opportunity. I knew he would be a great resource, and I’m thankful to him and Terri McKee for helping me in this role.”

Happy to be in College Station with her husband, Dan, a physical therapist at Central Texas Sports Medicine, Kathleen continues to put her passion for kids into action through her mission work with orphans in Kenya. Through her work at Into Abba’s Arms, she’s been serving with an organization that provides Kenya’s orphans with a home, an education and a future since 2010.

“I was 19 when I went on my first trip,” said Kathleen, who now serves on the organization’s



board. “On my first trip, I developed a strong connection with a little girl who was 4 at the time and now she is 14. I’ve watched the children grow up and continue to go back each year to continue developing those relationships. A piece of my heart will always be there.”

Through much of her 18-month tenure at the 12th Man Foundation, Kathleen has been at the forefront of an unexpected challenge – navigating the significant financial impact from COVID-19.

“It’s been stressful from a finance perspective,” she said, “but it helped me become more involved at a leadership level and help with all the processes to do things right, do them well and to do right by our donors. I’m really proud of that.”

“We are very fortunate to have Kathleen at the 12th Man Foundation,” added Travis Dabney, “not only for her expertise in finance, but for the leadership she has provided during an extraordinary time. She has exceeded our lofty expectations and is an incredible asset for our organization and our donors.”

Kathleen’s all-Aggie family pictured above includes her husband, Dan Curnutt ’12, and her parents, Jim ’81 and Sharon ’81 Wilson, as well as her brother, Patrick Wilson ’10, and his wife, Stephanie ’10. When she was 19 years old, Kathleen began serving orphans in Kenya and has made an annual mission trip to the children’s home every year except 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions.



# MAXIMIZE YOUR IMPACT WITH A MATCHING GIFT

Many employers will match tax deductible gifts to the 12th Man Foundation, which can double your contribution in support of Texas A&M Athletics

While each company has its own procedure, typically the process includes these easy steps:

- 1** You request a matching gift form from your company's website or HR office
- 2** You complete the form and send it to the 12th Man Foundation with your gift
- 3** The 12th Man Foundation verifies the gift information and returns it to your employer
- 4** Your employer issues a matching gift contribution to the 12th Man Foundation

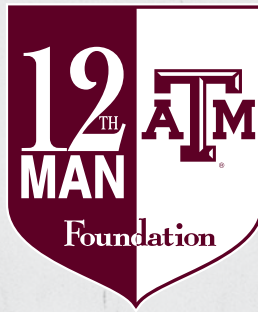
**Ask your employer if they offer a matching gift program to maximize your impact on Texas A&M student-athletes**

While annual seat contributions are no longer tax deductible, donations to the Annual Fund may be tax deductible since they are not tied to a ticket purchase

Consult your tax advisor to determine the deductibility of your gift



For more information about making a matching gift to the 12th Man Foundation, call Toni McDowell at 979-260-7577.



FUNDING SCHOLARSHIPS, PROGRAMS  
AND FACILITIES IN SUPPORT OF  
CHAMPIONSHIP ATHLETICS



**The mission of the 12th Man Foundation is to fund scholarships,  
programs and facilities in support of championship athletics  
and our donors are the lifeblood of that mission.**

Thank you to every donor for your loyal support  
and commitment to Texas A&M Athletics.