



Freshman RB Le'Veon Moss warms up on the field before the start of the Southwest Classic. Photo by Robert O'Brien Freshman WR Evan Stewart celebrates in the end zone with freshman WR Chris Marshall after Stewart scored the Aggies' first touchdown of the game and the first of his college career. Photo by Robert O'Brien Freshman linebacker Martrell Harris, Jr. lines up against Arkansas at the Southwest Classic. Photo by Megan Williams



# Drink Doink

## Aggies retake Southwest Classic Trophy in humiliating fashion

Story by Zoe May

A 63-yard run. A quarterback keep. A dash up the middle. Third-and-4. The Razorback crowd begins to yell. Timeout, Texas A&M. Towels spinning. Junior quarterback Max Johnson takes the snap. He passes to freshman wide receiver Evan Stewart. Touchdown.

That was the play that kickstarted everything for the Aggies.

In a game filled with highs and lows, No. 23 A&M defeated No. 10 Arkansas.

Playing at AT&T Stadium, a stadium usually filled with silver and blue, A&M made its first decision of the game by deferring on the coin toss, placing its faith in its defense which has held teams to 26 points so far in the 2022 season. However, bad omens arrived when the Aggies missed the first sack of the game that allowed for a 10-yard completion. In Arkansas' second drive of the game, the A&M defense allowed a 26-yard quarterback keeper from redshirt junior K.J. Jefferson that was quickly followed by a 32-yard screen to sophomore wide receiver Ketron Jackson Jr. for a touchdown. The struggles continued as an absent maroon and white secondary allowed a 56-yard touchdown pass to redshirt senior wide receiver Warren Thompson on the succeeding drive.

The Aggies' offense fared no better with a bad snap forcing Johnson to fight his way back to the line of scrimmage, and an illegal shift penalty canceled out a first down for A&M. Overall, the first quarter featured no-huddle, shotgun gun plays from the Razorbacks that left the Aggie defense stumbling after them and an incohesive offense that struggled to put together a clean drive, leaving Johnson 2-for-5 on completion attempts and 0-for-4 on third downs.

"We have to execute [coach Jimbo Fisher's calls] at a higher level," Johnson said. "He made some great calls and there's some things that we missed that we're definitely going to work on this next week. But we're going to take what the defense gives us. If the shot plays are there, we'll throw them. If they're not, we'll check them down. If we have to run the ball, we will as well."

The second quarter of play saw the resurgence of the maroon and white, beginning with the touchdown pass to Stewart. It looked slim for the Aggies after sophomore defensive lineman Fadil Diggs went down on the field and Jefferson slipped multiple tackles to gain a first down and put Arkansas in scoring position.

However, senior linebacker Chris Russell Jr. forced a Razorback fumble at the 2-yard line that landed in the hands of sophomore defensive back Tyreek Chappell who ran a 16-yard return, and before he could be tackled, Russell passed it off to senior defensive back Demani Richardson who ran it back for a touchdown. On defense, A&M managed a three-and-out with the help of a 7-yard loss on a sack by Russell. The Aggies became their own worst enemies in the final moments of the second quarter when two first downs were negated by penalties on the maroon and white.

"I didn't know what was going on," junior defensive back Antonio Johnson said about the fumble recovery. "I saw the tackle, and then I heard the crowd going crazy, so I knew it was either one of two things: Either they scored or something crazy happened, and I looked up and I [saw][Tyreek] Chappell running, and I'm like, 'Oh, we got the ball.' And then I seen him get tackled ... But then out of nowhere, Demani [Richardson] took off running. I'm like, 'This dude here is crazy.' I love him. He's a ballplayer. He just makes plays."

Momentum continued into the third quarter for the Aggies. In the opening drive of the second half, A&M moved it 75 yards down the field for junior running back Devon Achane to run it in for a touchdown and give the maroon and white the lead.

The A&M defense returned to the field with another quick three-and-out sequence to give the ball back to the Fightin' Farmers. In a highlight of his running ability, Johnson used his legs to garner the Aggies 33 yards and a first down. However, penalties pushed A&M farther back from its end zone, and Johnson was sacked with a fumble that was recovered by A&M. But, a 32-yard catch and run by senior wide receiver Aini-as Smith brought the Aggies within 15 yards. Another penalty pushed the maroon and white out, and they settled for a 31-yard field goal from sophomore kicker Randy Bond.

"We hit things [in the second half]," Fisher said. "In the first half, we had the penalties. We had a wide-open post route just miss. We just didn't make the play on it. We had that one for another 60 or 70 yards. We had a rail route. We had a couple things there. We'll get better on it and just keep grinding."

Nearing the end of the third quarter, the Aggie defense met their next challenge: containing Razorback sophomore running back Raheim Sanders. By the fourth play of the drive, that's exactly what A&M did, forcing Razorback freshman punter Max Fletcher to punt it away. The air became tense in the sea of maroon as Smith went down with an injury with a minute left in the third quarter. One star receiver short, A&M ran the ball on third down and ultimately let star junior punter Nik Constantinou kick it away.

The maroon and white defense took the field first at the start of the fourth quarter, and emotions were high for both sides which led to missed tackles, risky plays and risky behavior on both sides of the ball. A&M forced a fourth-and-1, but another quarterback keep from Jefferson kept the drive moving down the field. Quickly, the Razorbacks found themselves in scoring position, and Jefferson rushed it in for the touchdown.

A&M's offense returned to the field with the weight of the game on its shoulders. The weight got heavier as Johnson was sacked on the first play of the drive — heavier as Achane barely stepped out on a catch. And then, the weight was gone as freshman tight end Donovan Green caught a pass for a first down and Achane ran it 24 yards into Arkansas territory, breathing life into the Aggies. But, the resuscitation was not for the offense who left the field after a missed field goal, rather for the defense who managed to stop the Razorbacks from retaking the lead by forcing a field goal attempt that knocked off the post.

With 1:30 left on the clock, the Aggies took their victory lap, running one run play with Achane and then kneeling out the rest of the game. As the final second ticked away, the maroon sideline rejoiced and 12th Man towels swung once more. The results: a stark contrast to the 2021 season's 20-10 defeat and A&M's second win over a top-15 team this season.

"You can learn some valuable lessons [in these moments]," Fisher said. "This week, last week, all the things that happened. Three weeks ago, we didn't make those plays. We had plays to make, had a kick to make, could have made it. We could have been sitting here undefeated and be top five in the country and still be the same football team. You know what I'm saying? We learn to gut it out."