ROLL TEARS ROLL

Aggies defeat No. 1 Crimson Tide 41-38 in instant classic

By Jennifer Streeter

Senior defensive back Leon O’Neal Jr. recovered the ball fumbled by Alabama at the end of the first quarter. O’Neal returned the ball to Alabama’s 41-yard line allowing A&M to score a touchdown in the following drive.

Leon O’Neal Jr. Senior defensive back

The Aggies’ 41-38 victory over the Crimson Tide was the result of months of hard work put forth by the A&M football team. By Jennifer Streeter

On Saturday was an upset nobody expected.

Texas A&M football defeated then-No. 1 University of Alabama in front of a sold-out Kyle Field on Saturday, Oct. 9 with 106,815 fans in attendance. The last time A&M defeated the Crimson Tide was in the 2012 upset in Bryant-Denny Stadium. Alabama head coach Nick Saban’s previous record against his former assistant coaches was 24-0, with Texas A&M head coach Jimbo Fisher recording the first-ever victory over his former boss.

While the win was great, Fisher said he will not be fully satisfied until he sees how his team performs throughout the rest of the season.

“We can be special. Our football team is learning to play against other great football teams and have success. That’s what matters to me.” Fisher said. “It shows a lot of character, and it shows a lot of belief in themselves.”

As halftime, Alabama went into the locker room trailing on the scoreboard for the first time since Oct. 17, 2020, when the Tide took on Georgia in an eventual 41-24 victory over the Bulldogs. For the Aggies, it all came down to the fourth quarter, with A&M only leading by one touchdown, 31-24.

Redshirt sophomore quarterback Zach Calzada found his groove. With the 12th Man behind him, the signal caller led the Aggies to score in all three possessions during the first quarter. Additionally, Calzada was 10 for 10 before throwing an interception in the middle of the second quarter.

“There is not a harder position in sports to play than quarterback,” Fisher said. “[Zach] is very proud of Zach. He’s a high-character young man. He cares, and it matters to him.”

From Jimbo, with love

FISHER ON PG. 3

Jimbo Fisher celebrates 56th birthday with win over former boss Nick Saban

By Ryan Faulkner (@ryanfau03)

Over five months ago, Texas A&M head coach Jimbo Fisher made a bold promise.

“We’re going to beat his ass.”

On the surface, this claim lacked substance, with many left wondering why Fisher would single out one specific coach — Alabama’s Nick Saban.

After all, Fisher had already accomplished almost everything there is to do in college football — two national championships, three conference titles, nine bowl wins and a College Coach of the Year award.

But beating Saban, his former boss, in head-to-head competition had significance of its own.

“I have the utmost respect for Nick Saban. I always have, I always will and I consider us friends,” Fisher said. “But we’re competitors. That’s the ball, and I respect him for that.”

Starting in 2010, Fisher worked under Saban as the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach for Louisiana State University.

The two won a national championship together with LSU in 2015, but after Saban left for the Miami Dolphins, the duo’s path split. Even apart, the two men’s coaching styles remain similar, something Fisher attributes to the pair’s similar upbringing from the “same neck of the woods” in West Virginia.

Nearly a decade later, Saban went on yet another streak of success as a college football coach. Starting in 2010, Fisher began tampering with his former assistants who had since taken over their own programs as head coaches.

With 24 straight wins and an undefeated record against his earlier pupils, including four wins over Fisher, Saban’s dominance threatened to continue with no end in sight; beating the seven-time national champion seemed to be a fate unto some of those who, at one point, worked under the man.

Even so, in Fisher’s words, Saban’s downfall “was inevitable” because “someone was going to do it, in time.”

And though he didn’t necessarily expect it, Fisher became the grand champion whose arrival had been foretold in his own prophesy.

On Saturday, Oct. 9 the unranked Aggies upset the undefeated No. 1 Crimson Tide on front of 106,815 fans at Kyle Field. Not only did the win put A&M back on track after two consecutive losses to open in SEC campaign, but it also gave Fisher another win of his own — proof that could do what was thought to be impossible and take down his former boss, mentor and colleague.

Saban had said he had no choice but to praise his former assistant, impressed with A&M’s ability to stop Alabama’s 19-game winning streak.

“I have great respect for [Fisher]. I always say that. He’s one of the few who ever did,” Saban said on the postgame CBS broadcast. “I learned a lot when I coached with him, and we had a lot of good times.”

By finally defeating Saban, Fisher said he had no choice but to praise his former assistant, impressed with A&M’s ability to stop Alabama’s 19-game winning streak.

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Explosive offense, lockdown defense among game highlights in Aggies’ latest victory over Crimson Tide since 2012, first at Kyle Field in program history

By Michael Horton
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1 The 12th Man made a difference

The A&M student body showed up for the game in historic fashion, squeezing 106,815 attendees into Kyle Field. This game marked the second-largest crowd in the stadium’s history, surpassed only by the Aggies’ 2014 meeting with Ole Miss with 110,633 fans.

2 Another birthday game win

With two seconds left on the clock and the score locked at 38, place-kicker Seth Small was tasked with a 29-yard field goal to break the tie and give the Aggies a historic victory. Small’s kick veered to the left but curved through the uprights to give A&M the winning points. This marks the second straight year Small has made a kick at Fish’s birthday, when the kicker drilled a 26-yarder to upset the No. 4 Florida Gators in 2020, also by a score of 41-38.

3 Stiffling the Tide’s offense

In the game’s opening stages, the Aggies made big plays on defense to keep the Tide from building an early lead. In the first quarter, a botched snap led to a fumble by senior running back Brian Robinson Jr. and was recovered by A&M senior safety Leon O’Neal Jr. In the same quarter, A&M junior defensive lineman P.J. Johnson also picked off sophomore quarterback Bryce Young at the A&M 1-yard line to stop Alabama from drawing blood. The Aggies also held Alabama to three field goals in the red zone throughout the evening.

4 Special teams’ plays sway game

Moments after the clutch field goal, Small said the team wanted to get Fisher a victory on his special day. He also said he ranks this kick among the best moments of his life. “The team tried to get him a good birthday present,” Small said. “I didn’t know what to get him, so we thought, as a team, that we’d like to get him a win over Alabama. It was probably the third best moment of my life after I accepted Jesus into my heart as my true Lord and Savior and after getting married to my wife last summer. I rank (this game) three.”

5 Calzada’s best game of his life

During the Aggies’ two-game losing streak, redshirt sophomore quarterback Zach Calzada received much criticism for his play. On Saturday, the Hutto native delivered a performance on his own Kyle Field. The Georgia native went 21 for 31 with 285 yards, three touchdowns and one pick. Throughout the Aggies’ game-winning drive, “Calzada charted the stands of Kyle Field. After the game, Fisher said he was proud of the performance by his young signal caller, especially given the context of the game and the injuries the team has faced. “Playing quarterback is the hardest position to play in sports, period,” Fisher said. “The situations he is in, the things that are happening, without a full team around him, it’s hard to go in there.”

Junior wide receiver Ainias Smith posted two receiving touchdowns against Alabama en route to his total 109 offensive yards of the night.

Takeaways from A&M-Alabama

Robert O’Brien — THE BATTALION

Explosive offense, lockdown defense among game highlights in Aggies’ latest victory over Crimson Tide since 2012, first at Kyle Field in program history

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The Battalion | 10.12.21
The Saturday, Oct. 9 win over Alabama marked a historic night in Kyle Field. Players, coaches, fans and birds alike celebrated on the field after A&M’s upset of the Crimson Tide.

Robert O’Brien — THE BATTALION

The Aggies’ defense shined just as bright as their offense. Senior safety Donaven Richest recorded an endzone interception in the first quarter. Junior linebacker Jameson Johnson became the most sacked quarterback in the SEC, getting sacked a total of four times.

Further marking their lockdown prowess, the Aggies held the Crimson Tide to a field goal in the fourth quarter.

Senior defensive lineman Tyree Johnson said the defense put a priority on physicality in this week’s game plan.

“We wanted to make an emphasis on being physical,” Johnson said. “We wanted to do the best we could to out-physical them. It wasn’t an easy challenge; we just had to keep going for four quarters.”

In May, Fisher promised he was going to “beat [Saban’s] ass.” Now that he has, Fisher said he still maintains the utmost respect for him.

Saturday’s game also marked the first time the Aggies have ever defeated Alabama in Kyle Field. The last time the Tide was rolled in Texas was during the Tide’s Paul “Bear” Bryant era in 1968 at the Cotton Bowl.

Alabama took its second lead of the game in the fourth quarter, scoring a 7-yard touchdown reception with just over five minutes remaining in the fourth quarter. The Tide made the decision to go for a successful 2-point conversion, making it a 38-31 game.

In the following drive, A&M scored a touchdown, with senior place-kicker Seth Small notching the extra point. Following the play, Calzada went down, but returned shortly after for the offensive drive. The spirit of the 12th Man lifted the signal caller’s energy and allowed him to tough out the injury, coming in for the following offensive drive, Fisher said.

“That atmosphere and environment tonight, if you don’t want to play in that, there’s something wrong with you,” Fisher said. “That right there, the recruits and the people and the love, that’s as good of an atmosphere as there is in college football, bar none.”

The drive was worth it and allowed Small to get into range and kick the winning 28-yard field goal, cementing the Aggies’ 41-38 upset over the No. 14 Tide in celebration.

Small said he loved seeing the 12th Man storm the field following his field goal.

“It felt like 100,000 were on the field all night,” Small said. “The 12th Man was with us all night. We have the best fans in the nation, and that’s what makes it so special to play at Kyle Field.”

The Aggies are now ranked No. 21 in the AP Poll and No. 18 in the Coaches’ Poll. A&M’s next opponent is Missouri, with the 11 a.m. face-off set for Oct. 16.

One thing that has amazed me about coach Fisher is his ability to gauge where his team is at and the message that they need to hear,” Small said. “Every week, he does a great job of getting that message across.”

A&M’s win was further reinforced by the date on which the game was played — Fisher’s birthday, Oct. 9. Though senior defensive lineman Tyree Johnson had no idea it was Fisher’s “big day,” the whole team was playing for Fisher by the fourth quarter, Johnson said.

“Fisher celebrated his birthday by fulfilling his promise to ‘beat [Saban’s] ass.’ The win, likely to go down in history books, was just another day in the life of a college football coach, Fisher said.

“That was the competitor in me coming out,” Fisher said. “When somebody says you can’t do something, I have a bad habit of proving them wrong.”
Calzada heard them and went in for the final drive in to put the Aggies in field goal range for Small, allowing the place-kicker to complete the game-winning, 28-yard field goal. As soon as Calzada stepped back onto the field following the injury, Kyle Field erupted in support. Smith said it was amazing to hear the 12th Man cheering for Calzada, boosting the signal-callers confidence from a low point in the fourth quarter, on a 25-yard touchdown pass to junior wide receiver Ainias Smith, the signal-caller took a hard hit. Two assistants came to help him off the field, with the quarterback and Fisher going to the medical tent.

The 12th Man immediately supported him, chasing his name to oppose Fisher in midst-o Calzada back for the final offensive drive. Junior running back Fletcher Smith said he appreciates what A&M fans help the team achieve. "The 12th Man played a huge role," Smith said. "I'm thankful for them coming out in support of us and believing in us … [I] thank the 12th Man."}

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"We needed [the 12th Man], and they pulled their weight," Johnson said. A&M's next home game will be a 6:30 p.m. kickoff against South Carolina on Oct. 23, with the 12th Man expected to show up in high numbers following the last home game in high numbers following the last home game.

Standing on the sidelines, Spiller said the Aggies needed the sold-out crowd on that day. "The 12th Man is always giving us a little endearment, Calzada led a calculated, steady offense, "Spiller said. "The 12th Man played a huge role," Smith said. "I'm thankful for them coming out in support of us and believing in us … [I] thank the 12th Man."

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