

100 YEARS OF THE 12TH MAN

12thMan

2022 | VOLUME 27, NO. 1

FUNDING SCHOLARSHIPS, PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES
IN SUPPORT OF CHAMPIONSHIP ATHLETICS





REFER A FRIEND & EARN PRIORITY POINTS

**Current 12th Man Foundation donors are eligible
to receive 10 priority points for each new
membership established from their referrals**

WWW.12THMANFOUNDATION.COM/REFER



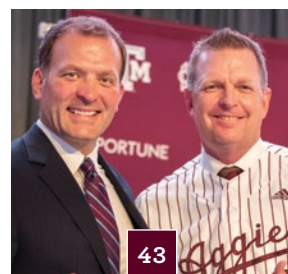
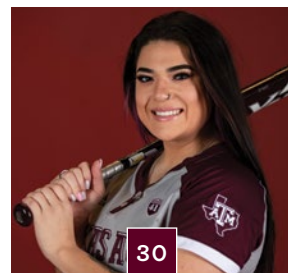
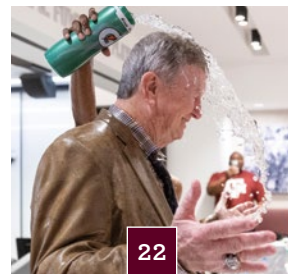


FEATURE STORY

100 Years of the 12th Man | Page 12

Ingrained in the Aggie spirit, the iconic tradition serves as the identity of Texas A&M

BY WILL JOHNSON '01



12TH MAN FOUNDATION

5 Foundation Update

6 Major Gifts Update

Staff members eager to support the 12th Man Foundation's mission in new roles

BY ADAM QUISENBERRY

10 2022 Board of Trustees

11 Q&A with Chris Cooper '89

A conversation with the chair of the 2022 12th Man Foundation Board of Trustees

15 Finding the Perfect Name

The Aggie Club embodied A&M's revered tradition to become the 12th Man Foundation

BY HALEY STANGLE

26 Honoring a Legacy

A&M's core value of selfless service shines bright in the naming of Gary Blair Court

BY BRIAN DAVIS '01

33 Making a Connection

Unexpected bond with a young admirer leaves a lasting impact on Texas A&M student-athlete

BY HALEY STANGLE

46 Staff Spotlight: Sylvia Fecht

Beloved ticketing staff member retires following 22 years of dedicated service

BY KATELYN BUYS '14

IMPACTFUL DONORS

20 Ann & Bob Berger '60

Loyal supporters paying it forward with their generous investment in Aggie student-athletes

BY SAMANTHA ATCHLEY '17

34 Abbey '15 & Michael '15 Pickel

A calling to help others leads generous couple to make their impact on A&M student-athletes

BY SAMANTHA ATCHLEY '17

38 Kim & Eric Foss

Generous couple proudly supports student-athletes like Julia Black through the 1922 Fund

TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS

8 Aggie Accolades

22 Farewell to Gary Blair

Retirement of A&M's winningest basketball coach marks the end of an extraordinary era

BY CHAREAN WILLIAMS '86

36 Senior Administration

Talented group of leaders help make Texas A&M's athletics department elite

BY ADAM QUISENBERRY

43 A New Era for Aggie Baseball

Head coach Jim Schlossnagle focused on building a championship program at A&M

BY CHAREAN WILLIAMS '86

POWER OF A SCHOLARSHIP

17 Joseph "Red" Bryant '07

Former A&M defensive lineman's relentless work ethic opened the door for a life-changing opportunity

BY WILL JOHNSON '01

30 Haley Lee '22

Star softball student-athlete's unexpected opportunity has made an indelible impact on her future

BY MATT SIMON '98

40 Andre Gordon '23

Basketball student-athlete overcame adversity through sports and is pursuing a better future in Aggieland

BY OLIN BUCHANAN

COVER PAINTING BY WILLIAM ROSE
E. KING GILL '24: THE ORIGINAL 12TH MAN

12th Man

2022 | VOLUME 27, NO. 1

MAGAZINE STAFF

Brian Davis '01
Samantha Atchley '17
Katelyn Buys '14
Adam Quisenberry
Haley Stangle

MAGAZINE CONTRIBUTORS

Craig Bisacre, *Photographer*
Olin Buchanan, *Writer*
Will Johnson '01, *Writer*
Michael Kellett, *Photographer*
Kate Luffman, *Photographer*
Bailey Orr, *Photographer*
Matt Simon '98, *Writer*
Charean Williams '86, *Writer*

2022 BOARD OF TRUSTEES

CHAIR

Chris Cooper '89, Chatham, New Jersey

CHAIR-ELECT

Kevin McDonald '89, Houston

IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR

Robert Dennis '83, Tyler

Jack Lafield '72, Dallas
Wayne Roberts '85, Austin
Joe Wright '82, Midland
David Coolidge '87, Houston
George "Trey" Henderson '80, Lufkin
Michelle Hickox '89, Plano
Mayphous Collins '94, Houston
Josh Davis '94, Houston
Jeffrey Miller '85, Fort Worth
Dennis Clark '68, Grapevine
Brian Miller '80, Dallas
Kendall Miller '88, Houston

DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS

Ross Bjork, College Station
Ex Officio

PRESIDENT/CEO

Travis Dabney '96, College Station
Ex Officio

12th Man Magazine (ISSN 1091-000X)
Copyright © 2022 is published 3 times per year by the 12th Man Foundation, 756 Houston Street, College Station, TX 77843.

Call 888-992-4443 or email customersupport@12thmanfoundation.com to update your contact information or subscribe. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to 12th Man Foundation, P.O. Box 2800, College Station, TX 77841-2800.

Subscription rate for 12th Man Magazine is a gift of \$150 or more per year to the 12th Man Foundation. For foreign addresses, contact the 12th Man Foundation at 888-992-4443.

Reproduction or use of editorial or graphic content in any manner without written permission is prohibited.



ADMINISTRATION

Travis Dabney '96 979-260-7579
President & CEO
Katelyn Buys '14 979-260-2391
Vice President of Administration
Jacob Green '80 979-260-2399
Vice President of Principal Gifts
Camryn Garner '21 979-260-7970
Administrative Assistant
Taryn Milton '20
12th Man Foundation Intern

ANNUAL FUND & DONOR SERVICES

Michael Solomon '04 979-260-2395
Senior Vice President of Annual Fund & Donor Services
Justin Morgan 979-260-7594
Senior Director of Ticket Sales & Development
Christina Webster 979-260-2397
Senior Director of Development

ANNUAL FUND

Callie Boenigk '14 979-260-2394
Manager of Annual Fund

DONOR SERVICES

Adrienne Pace 979-260-7963
Manager of Donor Services
Melissa Chavarria 979-260-7965
Assistant Manager of Donor Services
Kaitlyn Garcia '19 979-260-7964
Donor Service Coordinator
Nicholas Pellegrino '20 979-260-7948
Donor Service Coordinator
Spencer Pepper '19 979-260-7937
Donor Service Coordinator
Aubrey Rotello 979-260-7966
Donor Service Coordinator

PREMIUM SERVICES

Rebecca McCaulley 979-260-7582
Senior Manager of Premium Seating

TICKET SALES & DEVELOPMENT

RaShaun Brown 979-260-7586
Senior Account Executive of Ticket Sales & Development
John Hendricks 979-260-2392
Account Executive of Ticket Sales & Development
Jax Kendrick '21 979-260-7946
Account Executive of Group Ticket Sales
J.T. Payne '21 979-260-7572
Account Executive of Ticket Sales & Development

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE & TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

Amy Joyce '96 979-260-7593
Vice President of Business Intelligence & Technology Services
Marinath Jeevanatham 979-260-7596
Director of Reporting & Data Analytics
Phil LeFevre 979-260-7945
Director of Business Intelligence
Matt McQuillan 979-260-7573
Director of Information Technology

EVENTS & TRAVEL

Shelley Nemec '89 979-260-7588
Director of Events & Travel
Anthony Salazar 979-260-7587
Coordinator of Events & Travel

FINANCE

Kathleen Curnutt '12 979-260-7936
Senior Vice President of Finance
Terri McKee 979-260-7580
Senior Director of Accounting
Toni McDowell 979-260-7577
Director of Gifts Processing
Lindey Haney 979-260-7592
Manager of Human Resources
Morgan Taylor '21
Finance Intern

MAJOR GIFTS

Brady Bullard '95 979-260-7585
Senior Vice President of Major Gifts
Brian Bishop '91 979-260-7943
Vice President of Major Gifts
Mike Smith 979-260-7584
Assistant Vice President of Major Gifts
Lauren Hickey 979-260-7595
Director of Development
Brendan Quinn '15 979-260-7932
Manager of Campaign & Development Services
Kelsey Young '17 979-260-7952
Manager of Donor Relations

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Adam Quisenberry 979-260-7598
Vice President of Marketing & Communications
Brian Davis '01 979-260-7590
Senior Director of Communications & Creative Services, Editor of 12th Man Magazine
Samantha Atchley '17 979-260-2396
Director of Marketing & Communications
Haley Stangle
Marketing & Communications Intern

TICKETING

Lacey Williams 979-260-7589
Vice President of Ticketing
Tracy Treps 979-260-7987
Vice President of Priority Ticketing
Greg Rosenthal 979-260-7576
Director of Ticket Systems & Data Analytics
Ashlee Shidler '15 979-260-7934
Director of Ticket Operations
Kathleen Smith 979-260-7597
Director of Ticket Systems
Amy Janac 979-260-7980
Senior Manager of Ticket Operations & Events
Chris Carson '90 979-260-7985
Manager of Ticket Events & Internal Sales
Bryce Shelton 979-260-7574
Coordinator of Ticket Operations
Carole Dollins 979-260-7986
Special Event Ticketing

12TH MAN FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 2800 | College Station, TX 77841-2800
Main Office Line: 979-846-8892 | 888-TAM-12TH
Ticket Center: 979-845-2311 | 888-99-AGGIE



12thmanfoundation.com



12thMF



12thmanfoundation



12thManFndtn

Funding scholarships, programs and facilities in support of championship athletics



TO OUR DONORS,

When E. King Gill came down from the press box at the 1922 Dixie Classic, he ignited a spirit that became the identity of Texas A&M University.

One hundred years later, that spirit of standing ready to help when called upon is exemplified throughout the 12th Man Foundation.

It is evident within the dedicated staff who routinely step up to provide an extraordinary level of service to our donors and ticket buyers. They represent this organization with pride, and I am deeply appreciative of their commitment to its mission.

A perfect example of a staff member who embodies the spirit of the 12th Man is Sylvia Fecht. Featured on page 46 of this issue, Sylvia recently retired following 22 years of dedicated service to Texas A&M Athletics in the Ticket Office.

Through numerous changes within college athletics during that time frame, Sylvia remained resolute and set the bar for providing excellent service to donors and ticket buyers. Her sincere desire to help others was contagious, and receiving feedback from donors recognizing Sylvia for going above and beyond became customary.

Thank you to Sylvia for being an inspiration just as Gill inspired us all. And thank you to our donors and staff whose shared spirit makes me proud to be a part of this organization and proud to be an Aggie.

Gig 'em!

Travis Dabney '96
President & CEO

STAFF UPDATES

THE 12TH MAN FOUNDATION IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONS TO OUR DEDICATED STAFF:



Lindey Haney
Manager of Human Resources



Marinath Jeevanatham
Director of Reporting & Data Analytics



Jax Kendrick '21
Account Executive of Group Ticket Sales



Nicholas Pellegrino '20
Donor Service Coordinator



Greg Rosenthal
Director of Ticket Systems & Data Analytics



Anthony Salazar
Coordinator of Events & Travel



Kelsey Young '17
Manager of Donor Relations



ROBYN '89 AND ALAN ROBERTS '78 HONORED WITH E. KING GILL AWARD

The 12th Man Foundation honored Robyn '89 and Alan Roberts '78 as the 2021 recipients of the prestigious E. King Gill Award during halftime of the Texas A&M-South Carolina game at Kyle Field on Oct. 23, 2021. Loyal supporters of Texas A&M University dating back to their time on campus as students, the Roberts have cultivated a selfless tradition of giving back which has paved the way for Aggie student-athletes to enjoy success in competition and beyond. The Roberts will also be featured in an upcoming issue of *12th Man Magazine*.

MAJOR GIFTS UPDATE

Staff members eager to support the 12th Man Foundation's mission in new roles

BY ADAM QUISENBERRY



Lauren Hickey-Garcia, Brendan Quinn and Kelsey Young have embraced their new roles in the Major Gifts department.

THE MAJOR GIFTS STAFF PLAYS MANY ESSENTIAL ROLES at the 12th Man Foundation, foremost among them is stewarding some of Texas A&M's most loyal supporters who make transformative investments which are vital to the sustained success of Aggie Athletics.

Rising to the ever-growing demands associated with supporting one of the nation's premier athletics departments, the Major Gifts team entered 2022 by welcoming a pair of newcomers while also seeing a current staffer embrace the opportunity of a new role. Each has an important part to play toward the 12th Man Foundation's mission and the ambitious goals that lay ahead for the Major Gifts team.

As the daughter of parents who both built careers in collegiate sports and a women's basketball student-athlete herself at San Antonio's Trinity University, Lauren Hickey-Garcia has seen athletics from

many different angles. Now building on the relationships made during her first three years at the 12th Man Foundation, Hickey-Garcia has advanced into the role of a full-time fundraiser as director of development for Major Gifts.

Drawing upon her insights into the many aspects of the lives of student-athletes and feeding off the passion that donors have for Aggie Athletics, Hickey-Garcia is energized by her new opportunity.

"Having been a student-athlete and grown up in the world of college athletics, to now be on the side of things that is the driving force that makes all those experiences possible – it's really incredible," Hickey-Garcia said. "Support from donors really is what makes the success of our student-athletes a reality."

Stepping into the role vacated by Hickey-Garcia is Kelsey Young '17. A native of Beaumont, Young brings both collegiate athletics and development experience to the manager of donor relations position and will be a great asset as she oversees the department's stewardship programs.

After earning her bachelor's degree at Lamar University where she was a member of the Cardinal track and field team, Young ventured to Aggieland to achieve a master's degree in sport management. Her professional career includes development experience from both the Cardinal Club and Lamar University Foundation.

"Kelsey is a great addition to our Major Gifts team, and our donors are really going to enjoy getting to know and work with her," said Brady Bullard '95, senior vice president of major giving programs. "She brings a unique perspective of being both a student-athlete and working with the donors who help make the student-athlete experience possible."

Another new face on the Major Gifts staff is no

stranger to the 12th Man Foundation and has been providing outstanding service to donors and ticket buyers since starting as a student worker in May of 2012. Brendan Quinn '15 has shifted over to the Major Gifts team after being an integral part of ticket operations, including a significant role in overseeing the ticketing efforts for the men's basketball program.

In his new position as manager of campaign and development services, Quinn directly supports the overall fundraising efforts of the department while playing a significant role in the development and execution of upcoming capital campaigns.

"Brendan has shown a passion for servicing our donors at a high-level," Bullard said. "He brings a wealth of experience and energy that will be a great asset to our organizational and fundraising efforts. We're excited to welcome him to Major Gifts.

Along with Hickey-Garcia and Young, Quinn is excited about supporting the 12th Man Foundation's mission in his new role. Central to the organization's purpose of funding championship athletics will be the Major Gifts team and their efforts to service the generous donors who give back to make it all possible. ■

“
HAVING BEEN A STUDENT-ATHLETE AND GROWN UP IN THE WORLD OF COLLEGE ATHLETICS, TO NOW BE ON THE SIDE OF THINGS THAT IS THE DRIVING FORCE THAT MAKES ALL THOSE EXPERIENCES POSSIBLE — IT'S REALLY INCREDIBLE.

— LAUREN HICKEY-GARCIA



THANK YOU TO THE 2021 BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Thank you to the members of the Board of Trustees for their service to the 12th Man Foundation and Texas A&M Athletics in 2021. Outgoing trustees honored at the annual service dinner in November included Don Meyer '78 (pictured on the left with his wife, Carol '78) and Jay Graham '92 (middle, with his wife, April) as well as Past Chair David D. Dunlap '83 (right, with his wife, Anne).

STUART STARNER RECEIVES OUTSTANDING 12TH MAN AWARD

Stuart Starner, pictured below with Jacob Green and Travis Dabney, was recently named a recipient of the Outstanding 12th Man Award, an honor given by the 12th Man Foundation to individuals who exemplify an exceptional level of service to Texas A&M. From 2005-13, Starner served the 12th Man Foundation in several fundraising and leadership positions and played an integral role in creating the organization's Major Gifts department which helped transform A&M's athletic facilities to become among the nation's elite. "What we saw and what we're still seeing is the result of a man who came in on a mission," said Sam Torn '70. "He created a team-oriented, committed-to-excellence organization that was characterized by transparency, integrity, accountability and collaboration."





AGGIE ACCOLADES

ATHING MU WINS THE RISING STAR AND BOWERMAN AWARDS

Texas A&M national champion and two-time Olympic gold medalist Athing Mu claimed two prestigious awards in December 2021. Mu was named the 2021 World Athletics Female Rising Star Award winner on Dec. 1, which shines the spotlight on the top under-20 athlete of the year in the world. Sixteen days later, Mu was named the female winner of The Bowerman, which is awarded annually to the nation's most outstanding male and female NCAA track and field athletes by the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association. The honors capped an unforgettable year for the Aggie star student-athlete who turned in one of the all-time best individual seasons as she rewrote the collegiate track and field record books. Most notably, she etched her name in history after finishing with Olympic gold medals in the 800m and 4x400m at the Tokyo Games. "I'm thankful for every experience, every meet I've ran in and every person that has come into my life the past two years," Mu said. "God has played a huge role in every single thing that has happened. I'm so blessed for it to happen to me. I'm thankful for my family and friends making me happy when I feel like I'm not, and Coach (Pat) Henry for giving me so many opportunities. A lot of athletes didn't have as smooth of a transition as I have had. I'm blessed."



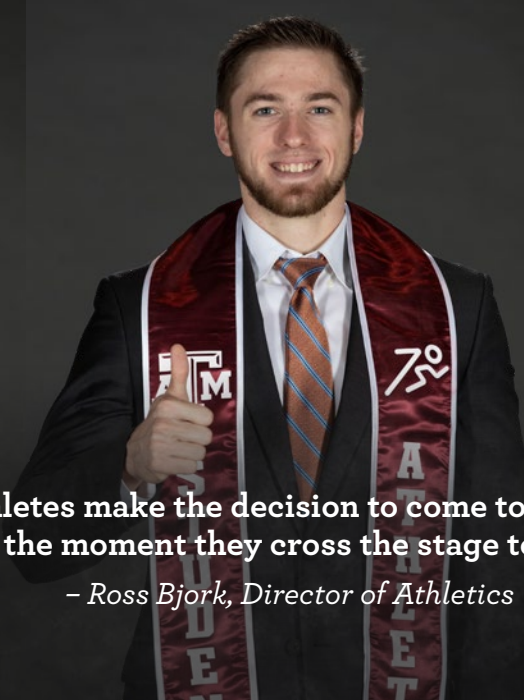


*Congratulations to
Texas A&M student-
athletes for their
continued success in
the classroom in 2021*

**84% GRADUATION
SUCCESS RATE**
(School Record)

**83 FALL SEC ACADEMIC
HONOR ROLL SELECTIONS**
(School Record)

**44 NEW GRADUATES FROM
12 SPORTS IN DECEMBER**
(Including Five Master's Degrees)



"When our student-athletes make the decision to come to Texas A&M, it is a 40-year decision that begins the moment they cross the stage to receive their degrees."

- Ross Bjork, Director of Athletics

2022 BOARD OF TRUSTEES



THE 12TH MAN FOUNDATION'S BYLAWS CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.12THMANFOUNDATION.COM

CHAIR

CHRIS COOPER '89

Chatham, NJ
Deloitte & Touche LLP

CHAIR-ELECT

KEVIN McDONALD '89

Houston, TX
NexTier Oilfield Solutions Inc.

IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR

ROBERT DENNIS '83

Tyler, TX
Orthopedic Surgeon

JACK LAFIELD '72

Dallas, TX
Calman Energy

WAYNE ROBERTS '85

Austin, TX
Abrigo

JOE WRIGHT '82

Midland, TX
Retired (Energy Industry)

DAVID COOLIDGE '87

Houston, TX
024 Family Office LLC

GEORGE "TREY" HENDERSON '80

Lufkin, TX
Henderson Mineral Inc.

MICHELLE HICKOX '89

Plano, TX
Independent Financial

MAYPHOUS COLLINS '94

Houston, TX
Imagine Technologies Corp.

JOSH DAVIS '94

Houston, TX
Stellus Capital Management

JEFFREY MILLER '85

Fort Worth, TX
Vortus Investments

DENNIS CLARK '68

Grapevine, TX
The Encore Companies

BRIAN MILLER '80

Dallas, TX
Tyler Technologies, Inc.

KENDALL MILLER '88

Houston, TX
Tanglewood Corporation

EX OFFICIO MEMBER

TRAVIS V. DABNEY '96

College Station, TX
12th Man Foundation President & CEO

EX OFFICIO MEMBER

ROSS BJORK

College Station, TX
Texas A&M Director of Athletics

CHRIS COOPER '89

A conversation with the chair of the 2022
12th Man Foundation Board of Trustees



» EARNED A BBA IN ACCOUNTING FROM TEXAS A&M IN 1989

» SENIOR PARTNER AT DELOITTE & TOUCHE LLP

» LONGTIME AGGIE FOOTBALL SEASON TICKET HOLDER AND GENEROUS 12TH MAN FOUNDATION DONOR

» RESIDES IN CHATHAM, N.J.

» HE AND HIS WIFE, TERRY, HAVE THREE SONS: TYLER, ANDREW AND JACK

How did Texas A&M become special to you and your family?

When I was growing up, I was first exposed to Texas A&M by Jerry Crowley '63 and his family of diehard Aggies. I believe they embody what it means to be an Aggie. They show effort and discipline, are kind, generous, respectful, loyal and are leaders. I'm thankful for their influence on my life!

My wife, Terry, is from Connecticut and her first exposure to A&M was Midnight Yell in New York prior to the 1998 Kickoff Classic. She expected a few dozen people to be there, but she was astounded by the thousands of Aggies celebrating their university. She's been bought in ever since!

Our three boys have grown up with a fanatical dad, and we make multiple family trips each year to A&M to experience gameday.

What led you to a career in finance, and what do you credit your success to?

It all started at Texas A&M in the classroom where I discovered that accounting and finance came naturally to me. I was the beneficiary of great resources and professors at Texas A&M, and they prepared me to hit the ground running when I began my career at Deloitte. I can't say enough good things about the accounting department and the leadership Dr. James Benjamin provided for many decades.

How did your time at Texas A&M prepare you for your career?

The education itself was obviously very important, but learning how to work in a team environment, collaborating and respecting others has been critical for my career. We are all in client service in some form, and being able to consider multiple perspectives has been invaluable.

How did you first become involved with the 12th Man Foundation?

Living so far away from Texas A&M I felt a need to reconnect, so I bought football season tickets in the late 1990s. We've had tickets ever since and enjoy our family trips to visit Aggieland. When the 12th Man Foundation developed the original Championship Vision campaign in the early 2000s, I realized how important our donors are to funding student-athlete scholarships and our athletics facilities. We participated in that capital campaign and most all subsequent facility campaigns.

What is your motivation to support Texas A&M Athletics through the 12th Man Foundation?

It was the realization that our student-athletes need our help to fund scholarships and ensure our facilities are the best. The athletics department does bring in substantial revenue through ticket sales, but the costs of scholarships as well as the building and maintenance of athletics facilities relies upon our generous donors, and we want to give back to the university we love so much.

How does the 12th Man Foundation Board of Trustees serve the organization's mission?

A board is a governance body and serves to make sure the long-term strategic vision of the organization is being executed. We are extremely fortunate that Travis Dabney and his entire team at the 12th Man Foundation are truly special and excel in the mission of supporting championship athletics through scholarships, programs and facilities. Because we have such a great team in place, I find providing guidance and support to be truly an enjoyable experience. ■

100 YEARS OF THE 12TH MAN

Ingrained in the Aggie spirit, the iconic tradition serves as the identity of Texas A&M

BY WILL JOHNSON '01

MOST AGGIES ARE AWARE OF WHAT TRANSPIRED, and began, a century ago at the 1922 Dixie Classic. However, understanding the events of that historic game in Dallas is a significant part of the story.

First, the Aggies were up against a real force. Centre College entered the Classic having won 15 games in a row, allowing only a whopping total of 12 points during the streak. In October of 1921, the Praying Colonels handed national power Harvard its first defeat in two and a half years with a 6-0 shutout of the Crimson.

The bruised and battered Aggies hung 22 on Centre in a monumental upset.

Of course, E. King Gill stood ready for his school,

beginning what is the greatest tradition in collegiate athletics. Summoned from the press box by head coach Dana X. Bible, Gill put on the uniform of an injured teammate and was prepared to enter if the banged-up Aggies needed him. The student body is still standing on seven Saturdays in Kyle Field to this day for the same reason – they are ready to do their part for Texas A&M.

Gill will always be known for starting the 12th Man tradition at Texas A&M, but his impact on the Aggie football program did not stop there. He contributed on the field and even proved to be a playmaker on Thanksgiving Day in 1922 in the season's biggest game.





A century after E. King Gill was summoned from the press box at the 1922 Dixie Classic, Aggies are still standing and ready to help when called upon.

“The untold story of E. King Gill, in no other place than Austin, Texas,” Aggie historian and author John Adams recounts, “is that he scored the first touchdown, then ran the ball down to the four-yard line to set up the second score.”

Gill almost singlehandedly beat the Texas Longhorns that season in the 14-7 win.

“Most Aggies have no idea,” said Adams.

The story is so fitting for an Aggie. Gill is not remembered most for the days he was a star. It was his supporting role that made him so revered. It was his selflessness, a quality that has embodied this university since its opening.

The students who stand today have no interest

in spectating when the Aggies play at Kyle Field. They are ready to be activated. They arrive through the gates only concerned with how they can help. The Fightin’ Texas Aggie Band has marched right alongside this tradition the entire way and stood with those students every Saturday.

“That’s just the symbol of the 12th Man,” said head drum major Will Toronjo. “If the coaching staff were to call down someone to play for the Aggie team, we’re all, in spirit, ready to do that.”

Jackie Sherrill made that call during his tenure as A&M’s head football coach.

After seeing the school’s spirit in his first season, Sherrill held tryouts for the inaugural 12th Man Kickoff Team in time for the 1983 season. Those passionate students in the stands now had a direct link to the field.

“They represented us. They were us,” said Charlean Williams, an Aggie student at the time who is now an A&M Distinguished Alumnus and in the NFL Hall of Fame as a journalist. “They were coming down from the stands to help A&M win a football game.”

“**IT’S THE GREATEST TRADITION IN COLLEGE FOOTBALL. WHAT OTHER SCHOOL CAN ONE GUY REPRESENT THE ENTIRE STUDENT BODY. AND PLAY FOR THEM. NOT HIMSELF.**”

— CULLEN GILLASPIA '18

“

THE RELATIONSHIPS AND FRIENDSHIPS I HAVE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE WITH THAT GROUP OF GUYS, I’LL CHERISH FOREVER.

— DAVID COOLIDGE ’87

No football stadium has since had a stronger fan-player connection than Kyle Field.

David Coolidge was a part of three consecutive Southwest Conference titles as a member of the all-walk-on 12th Man Kickoff Team from 1985-1987.

“It was such a great honor,” said Coolidge, a proud supporter of Aggie Athletics and current member of the 12th Man Foundation Board of Trustees. “The relationships and friendships I have for the rest of my life with that group of guys, I’ll cherish forever.”

While things have changed over time with one member of the team now representing the student body as the 12th Man, the spirit of the tradition remains. And in A&M’s 52-13 victory over NC State in the 2018 Gator Bowl, the iconic tradition reached new heights.

With less than 30 seconds remaining in the game, senior fullback Cullen Gillaspia lumbered 13 yards into the end zone and became the first 12th Man in history to record a touchdown.

When the Aggies opened the 2021 football season and launched the celebration of 100 years of the 12th Man tradition in September at Kyle Field, “Gilly” was introduced just before the team emerged from the tunnel.

“It’s different. It’s the greatest tradition in college football,” said Gilly, one of the most popular Aggies to ever don the No. 12 uniform. “What other school can one guy represent the entire student body. And play for them. Not himself.”

Gilly made several big plays as No. 12, and he made the 12th Man feel like they were a part of it, too. When he blocked a punt in 2017 for a safety against Alabama, so did the 12th Man in the stands.

When he found the end zone in the Gator Bowl, the 12th Man scored too.

The 12th Man has long been the identity of Texas A&M. In football. In athletics. As a university. An identity steeped in selfless acts.

Around here, Aggies often say, “Howdy,” then are likely to roll up their sleeves and ask, “How can I help you?”

It’s seen in the generosity of 12th Man Foundation donors. Their contributions change lives for generations of young men and women. It’s not about how giving back benefits themselves. It’s about, “What can I do to help you?”

Aggies are every bit as likely to extend a helping hand as they are a gig ’em.

For 100 years, this tradition has stood above all the rest because it is based on service to others. It places the greater good at the forefront.

It’s why the 12th Man will endure for centuries more, standing taller and taller with each passing year. ■

Members of the all-walk-on 12th Man Kickoff Team like David Coolidge and student-athletes who have donned the No. 12 jersey like Cullen Gillaspia have proudly represented Texas A&M’s student body on the football field.



FINDING THE PERFECT NAME

The Aggie Club embodied A&M's revered tradition to become the 12th Man Foundation

BY HALEY STANGLE

ON APRIL 2, 1950, SEVEN FORMER STUDENTS GATHERED to form a non-profit organization that would raise money for the athletics department at Texas A&M.

The idea initially started due to a promise from head football coach Homer Norton that any players leaving A&M to go serve in WWII would still have a scholarship when they returned. To be able to honor Norton's promise and afford to recruit new players out of high school, the athletics department needed more money. And thus, The Aggie Club was born with A.E. Foerster '24 serving as the inaugural president of the organization.

In its first year, The Aggie Club raised \$16,182 in annual donations. By the second year, annual giving nearly doubled with \$30,190.

The organization grew steadily over the next few decades in both members and donations and began to really flourish by the mid-1970s due to the tireless fundraising efforts of Harry Green '52. In 1977, annual donations passed \$1 million for the first time.

"I stayed on the road about 75 percent of the time, going to A&M clubs in one town to the next," said Green, who served as the organization's executive director from 1979-91. "We didn't have enough members, and there were only four of us in the office. We just had to be out moving and meeting people, shaking their hands and telling them about how important it was to donate."

Alongside A&M's athletics department, The Aggie Club continued to reach new heights in the 1980s, and at the 1986 Summer Meeting in Austin, the idea was suggested to change the organization's name. It was Harold Turner '52 who said he thought the name should include "12th Man."

Arno Krebs '64, a member of the Executive Committee from 1984-89, thought the name change was



a great idea. When Krebs became president of The Aggie Club in 1988, he started the ball rolling to make it happen.

There were meetings, marketing studies, focus groups and a special committee Krebs created dubbed the "Name Change Committee" to decide if the moniker truly needed to change.

Gerry Griffin '56, a member of the Executive Committee from 1988-93, served as chair of the Name Change Committee.

The consensus was that The Aggie Club was easily confused with other organizations and clubs at A&M, and people did not understand that the

Harry Green's ceaseless fundraising efforts led to substantial growth for the organization during his 17 years of service. By the time he retired in 1992, The Aggie Club had evolved into the 12th Man Foundation and the number of donors had increased from approximately 1,200 to 6,500.

organization supported athletics. There was also an impression that it was “just a booster club,” and corporations were wary to donate because they did not believe The Aggie Club was a legitimate 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

“Our goal was to raise a lot of money in the future,” says Krebs, “and we needed to be a more professional looking and sounding organization.”

After speaking with people from fundraising organizations at other universities, Green determined “foundation” should be in the new name.

“I looked at Clemson and I went to one of the Florida schools and then to North Carolina and they all had ‘educational foundation’ in their names,” Green recalled. “That’s when I got the word ‘foundation.’”

Different names were considered including The Aggie Foundation and Texas A&M Athletic Foundation. But the one name that kept coming up was the 12th Man Foundation.

“The new name, it clicked with all of us on the Name Change Committee,” said Griffin, who also served as the president of the 12th Man Foundation in 1992. “We’d go look at another word, but we kept coming back to the text saying ‘12th Man Foundation.’ It had that ring to it.”

The tradition of the 12th Man is about Aggies being ready and willing to step up when called upon, so it is only fitting that the organization that supports student-athletes and helps them be successful at A&M and beyond have 12th Man in its

“
**WE’D GO LOOK AT ANOTHER
WORD, BUT WE KEPT COMING
BACK TO THE TEXT SAYING
‘12TH MAN FOUNDATION.’
IT HAD THAT RING TO IT.**

— GERRY GRIFFIN '56



name. Donors to the 12th Man Foundation are the epitome of the 12th Man tradition.

As with any change, there was some resistance to the new name. However, the name change passed through a three-step process: the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors and the general membership (which totaled 4,000 members at that time).

On Nov. 19, 1988, The Aggie Club officially became the Texas A&M University 12th Man Foundation. The mission of the newly-named organization: providing scholarships to top tier student-athletes.

Thanks to the generosity of donors and forward-thinking leadership, the 12th Man Foundation has continued to grow year after year.

“I don’t think any Aggies who are our age, who graduated in the 50s and 60s, had any idea how the organization would grow,” Krebs said.

From a vision in the late 1940s to today, the 12th Man Foundation has become one of the most successful and well-respected fundraising organizations in collegiate athletics.

Most importantly, the funds generated by the 12th Man Foundation and its loyal donors over the past 72 years have positively impacted the lives of thousands of Aggie student-athletes and helped transform Texas A&M Athletics into an elite athletics department. ■

In January 2022, The Aggie Club shield was graciously returned to the 12th Man Foundation by Arno Krebs '64 and his son, Bret Dark '89, pictured above with Travis Dabney. A prominent feature of The Aggie Club office from 1973-88, the shield was gifted to Krebs by Harry Green '52 in appreciation for leading the organization through the official name change. Krebs gave it to Dark, and for the past 33 years, the shield has made its way across the country and was proudly displayed by him in homes, apartments and a few garages.

JOSEPH "RED" BRYANT '07

Former A&M defensive lineman's relentless work ethic opened the door for a life-changing opportunity

BY WILL JOHNSON '01

THE TALL PINES OF EAST TEXAS CAN CAST A SHADOW.

Coming out of Jasper, near the Louisiana border, Joseph "Red" Bryant may have felt a bit in the dark during the recruiting process.

Bryant was teammates with one of the most sought-after players in the country, Jorrie Adams.

A look back at the 2003 recruiting class shows Adams was the 19th ranked player in the nation according to 247sports.com. Bryant was 530th.

"Texas A&M used to hold a Nike Camp during the summertime," Bryant recalled. "Everybody wanted Jorrie to come and rightfully so, but I was able to tag along."

While Adams was the main attraction at the camp, Bryant's work ethic stood out to several in attendance including then-A&M head coach R.C. Slocum.

At one point, Slocum turned to his defensive line coach and asked, "Who is that guy?"

Bryant remembers what should have been an unremarkable drive back to East Texas. It was anything but.

“

FROM THE TIME I LEFT COLLEGE STATION TO THE TIME I MADE IT HOME, COACH SLOCUM HAD OFFERED ME A SCHOLARSHIP TO BECOME AN AGGIE. I WAS FULL OF PRIDE AND OVERJOYED. MY MOM HAD TO CALM ME DOWN.

— RED BRYANT '07



"From the time I left College Station to the time I made it home, Coach Slocum had offered me a scholarship to become an Aggie," Bryant said. "I was full of pride and overjoyed. My mom had to calm me down."

Out of the pines and thrust into the spotlight in front of the 12th Man at Kyle Field, Bryant became a leader in the locker room and a star on the field.

During Bryant's freshman season in 2004, wins over Clemson, a ranked Oklahoma State team and Texas Tech in overtime sent A&M to the Cotton Bowl. In his junior year, the Aggies went to the

Red and his wife, Janelle, are proud parents of one daughter, Jordyn (8), and three sons, Brooks (10), Jacob (6) and Jax (5).



Holiday Bowl, followed by the Alamo Bowl his senior season. Bryant and the Aggies topped Texas in both seasons, and his unforgettable blocked extra point in overtime against Oklahoma State in 2006 secured a 34-33 A&M win.

Bryant was successful at A&M for the same reason he earned his scholarship. He put his head down and went to work every single day.

"I believe I was a leader who tried to lead by example," Bryant said. "I wouldn't ask my teammates to do something I wouldn't do."

Stephen McGee was A&M's quarterback for three of Bryant's seasons in Aggieland.

"He earned the respect of his teammates with his play on the field and his work ethic off the field," McGee recalled. "Red was an emotional leader, but he always led first with his actions."

In very much an Aggie way, Bryant's leadership skills showed up when greatest required.

"When our team needed leadership the most through adversity," says McGee, "Red always stepped up to the plate and answered the call."

After A&M, Bryant spent eight seasons in the NFL, mostly in Seattle. On February 2, 2014, Bryant and the Seahawks won Super Bowl XLVIII over the Denver Broncos in East Rutherford, N.J.

His historic achievement with the Pacific Northwest's pro football franchise could not have been scripted any better.

Bryant is married to former A&M soccer student-athlete Janelle Green. Meeting Janelle is the most memorable moment of his time at A&M.

"She has been my strongest supporter and toughest critic when need be," he said.

Born in Seattle, Janelle is one of the daughters of Seahawk and Aggie legend and College Football Hall of Famer Jacob Green.

Now the vice president of principal gifts for the 12th Man Foundation, Green was one of the first great stars to play for the Seahawks. He helped lay the foundation, and Bryant, wearing the same No. 79 as his father-in-law, finished the job by helping the franchise win its first Super Bowl.

"Red is everything Texas A&M stands for," McGee said. "He's unselfish, team oriented, a leader on and off the field and the kind of human being that will be successful in whatever ventures he undertakes. I was privileged to call him a teammate."

From hidden among the pines, to the forefront on football's biggest stages. It all started when Bryant received that call from Slocum.

"My scholarship at Texas A&M allowed me to receive a great education at one of the best universities in the country," said Bryant, who was the first member of his family to graduate from college. "And I had the opportunity to play ball in front of

Born and raised in Jasper, Texas, Bryant was a team captain for both Texas A&M and Seattle during his remarkable football career and helped lead the Seahawks to a Super Bowl championship in 2014.





the best fans in all of college football, if not the world.”

Bryant also came to realize that A&M keeps giving, long after the pads and cleats are hung up.

“Once my time was up, and I had to transition back to the real world,” recalls Bryant, “there were Aggies there to hold my hand and help me find other things I could do that I had never thought about before.”

After football, he and Janelle have focused on investments, starting Red Station Properties in 2017. With four children heavily involved in sports just like mom and dad were, there’s not a lot of time to be a “retiree.” Red even does some coaching of his kids’ teams.

The Bryants are also proud supporters of Aggie Athletics and have contributed to multiple capital campaigns through the 12th Man Foundation in addition to creating the Hill Brooks Learning Specialist Endowment, which helps fund a position within A&M’s Center for Student-Athlete Services. The endowment is named for Coach Royce Hill and

Sue Brooks, two mentors who helped change Red’s life and were instrumental in him going to college and being successful.

“Coming to A&M was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made,” he said.

That decision that followed the offer of a scholarship has led him well.

Red Bryant is out of the shadows and is a light for those who surround him. ■

“

MY SCHOLARSHIP AT TEXAS A&M ALLOWED ME TO RECEIVE A GREAT EDUCATION AT ONE OF THE BEST UNIVERSITIES IN THE COUNTRY. AND I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY BALL IN FRONT OF THE BEST FANS IN ALL OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL, IF NOT THE WORLD.

— RED BRYANT '07

ANN & BOB BERGER '60

Loyal supporters paying it forward with their generous investment in Aggie student-athletes

BY SAMANTHA ATCHLEY '17

TO THE BERGER FAMILY, BEING A DONOR to the 12th Man Foundation means so much more than merely supporting an athletics program. Although their love for Texas A&M definitely runs deep, the Berger family's passion for influencing the lives of Aggies is even stronger.

Through 45 years as football season ticket holders, contributing to multiple facility renovations and supporting scholarship endowments through the 1922 Fund, Ann and her late husband Bob Berger '60 have built an incredible legacy through their support of Texas A&M Athletics.

Ann first met Bob shortly after his graduation from Texas A&M as a petroleum engineer in 1960. With Bob's first job coincidentally leading him to meet Ann's mother in Monahans, Texas, the two quickly established a strong friendship that later grew into something more. After a time of several career moves and transfers, the couple finally found themselves together in Midland where they were married on Valentine's Day in 1970.



Their award-winning family business, however, wasn't established until Bob's retirement from the petroleum industry led them back to his family farm in Wichita Falls – a property that has been in the family since 1898.

"I had never lived on a farm before, so it was an interesting experience for me," Ann said. "We called our little operation Berger Angus Farm."

Ann and Bob started raising registered Black Angus cattle in 1999 and built a dynasty together landing them into the Texas Angus Hall of Fame in 2013. According to Ann, Bob was very keen on "helping others after you have been helped." In response to their success, the couple decided to start giving back philanthropically in ways where they could make a difference.

“WHEN WE FIRST STARTED DONATING, BOB DID IT ANONYMOUSLY. HE JUST WANTED TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE HE HAD BEEN HELPED BECAUSE HE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GO TO SCHOOL WITHOUT THE SCHOLARSHIPS THAT HE RECEIVED.

— ANN BERGER

Ann and her daughter, Jana Smith '79, describe Bob as not only a hard-working businessman but also a passionate Aggie fan and a solid confidant for advice. Ann and Bob rarely missed a Texas A&M football game together unless the Aggies were playing in Austin. That was a venue Bob simply refused to step foot in out of pure loyalty to the maroon and white. But most importantly, Bob was a proud, first-generation Aggie with a deep appreciation for what his own scholarship provided for him.

"When we first started donating, Bob did it anonymously," Ann said. "He just wanted to help young people like he had been helped because he wouldn't have been able to go to school without the scholarships that he received."

Together, Ann and Bob contributed generously to the Blue Bell Park and Kyle Field redevelopment projects and have invested in multiple scholarship endowments through the 1922 Fund connecting with several Aggie baseball student-athletes including Jack Moss, Mason Ornelas and Christian Roa. After Bob's passing in 2016 at the age of 75, Ann continued to carry on their mission of supporting young men and women at A&M and has created many meaningful relationships along the way.

"Ann, much like the same spirit as her late husband Bob, has made a tremendous impact on students and student-athletes at Texas A&M for many years," said Brady Bullard, senior vice president of

“

I THINK I'M THE WINNER IN THIS WHOLE SITUATION. I GET MORE OUT OF THE SCHOLARSHIP THEN JUST GIVING BACK BECAUSE I HAVE MADE SOME REALLY SWEET FRIENDSHIPS WITH SOME OF THESE YOUNG PEOPLE.

— ANN BERGER

Longtime season ticket holders and supporters of Texas A&M Athletics, Ann and her late husband Bob raised registered Black Angus cattle on their family farm, and in 2013 were inducted into the Texas Angus Hall of Fame.



major gifts. "From sending her scholarship recipients homemade cookies to inviting them to her tailgate or simply sending them a hand-written note of encouragement, Ann truly makes it a part of her life and routine to provide help and encouragement to the many students she financially supports."

As many who know her can attest to, Ann is as genuine as they come. She not only believes in the importance of investing in Aggie student-athletes, but also makes a point to build connections with them that extend far beyond sports.

"Ann understands the pressures on student-athletes," says Bullard, "and she knows many times they just need someone to speak with about life."

According to Smith, it's the warmth about Ann that people are drawn to.

"It's like bees to honey," she said. "She's that way and my dad was the same way, so it doesn't surprise me that these young people flock to her."

As a longtime donor and passionate member of the Aggie family, Ann feels what she has gained the most through the experience is friendship.

"You know, I think I'm the winner in this whole situation," Ann said. "I get more out of the scholarship then just giving back because I have made some really sweet friendships with some of these young people. We don't do it for recognition, and I've continued doing it because it was something that Bob always wanted to do." ■



TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS

FAREWELL TO GARY BLAIR

Retirement of A&M's winningest basketball coach marks the end of an extraordinary era

BY CHAREAN WILLIAMS '86

GARY BLAIR DIDN'T OWN A ROCKING CHAIR until 21 days after he announced his retirement. Stephen F. Austin State University, where he coached from 1985-93, gave it to him as a going-away present. He does not use it, joking he needs to buy a seat cushion first.

Blair, though, is not about to rest after his laurels.

"What's next is what life brings," said Blair, "and you just adjust to it. There's no exit plan for me. There's no umbrella. There's none of that stuff. When I finish my last ball game, then we will sit here and reevaluate and see how I can best be used in this community, and if the university wants to

use me in any capacity besides coaching, I'll listen to everything. I want to do a lot of things, and it's time to give back."

Blair's legendary coaching career officially came to an end at the 2022 SEC Tournament on March 2, after 19 seasons at Texas A&M. As he walked off the court for the final time, Blair left behind no unfinished business. The ring on his right hand is the cherry on top of a Hall of Fame career, a symbol of the 2011 women's basketball national championship.

"I think the national championship is a testament to all the time and effort that he's put in over

the years,” said Sydney Carter, who starred on the 2011 team and now is the Aggies’ player development/assistant recruiting coordinator. “Winning a national championship is the biggest accomplishment you can have in college basketball. He has that, and not a lot of people can say that when they retire. It’s a symbol of how great of a job he’s done coaching in his 50-year career.”

In 2003, Blair arrived in College Station from Arkansas. The program was not a rebuild. It was a new build, lacking even a foundation, having endured seven consecutive losing seasons.

The Aggies went 71-123 in the first seven seasons of the Big 12 Conference, including 22-90 in league play, with two head coaches.

As Blair put on his hard hat and got to work at A&M, the trophy case and the stands began to fill. The Aggies won more than 70 percent of 629 games, and in his final season, Blair passed former men’s coach Shelby Metcalf as the winningest basketball coach in school history.

Blair, who finished with 444 victories at A&M, directed the Aggies to 16 straight 20-win seasons and 15 consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances. They claimed two regular-season conference championships, including the SEC title in 2020-21, and three postseason championship titles, including the SEC Championship in 2013. Eight times the Aggies made the Sweet 16, including one Final Four in 2011.

“

HIS IMPORTANCE IS FELT EVERYWHERE HE GOES AND EVERYWHERE HE’S BEEN. HE’S IN EVERY HALL OF FAME OF ANYBODY WHO HAS EVER COME IN CONTACT WITH HIM. THERE’S MORE TO COME.

— ARKANSAS COACH MIKE NEIGHBORS

Blair took A&M from “fixing to do something to doing it”...and done it.

“He took over a program that was essentially living on a box top under a bridge, and he took them to the penthouse in 2011,” said Steve Miller, who has served as a broadcaster for A&M women’s basketball road games for 25 seasons and has worked for the athletics department for 30 years. “There was no incentive for him to come to Texas A&M. This was among the worst programs in the country, and here comes Gary Blair, and the moment he walks in, we know it’s legit. He had just been to the Final Four six years earlier, and he had Texas roots, and he just hit the ground running.”

Not long after being hired, Blair went door to door giving away tickets. During his final season, 7,100 fans attended the team’s game against Texas at Reed Arena. A&M built trophy cases and moved banners to accommodate his success.

Blair has made an impact on countless young people through his nearly 50 years of coaching and countless others through his work in the community.





“
**YOU DON'T LAST 50 YEARS
 CHASING CHAMPIONSHIPS. YOU
 LAST 50 YEARS BY DEVELOPING
 AND INVESTING IN YOUNG
 PEOPLE. ALL THOSE LIVES HE
 IMPACTED — I KNOW THAT WILL
 MEAN THE MOST TO HIM.**

— COACH KELLY BOND-WHITE



Blair made an impact at every stop, and not only on the scoreboard. He went 239-18 in seven seasons at South Oak Cliff High School in his first job coaching basketball, winning three state titles. It earned him induction into the Texas High School Basketball Hall of Fame, the first of seven halls of fame to enshrine Blair.

He went 210-43 in eight seasons at SFA and 198-120 with a Final Four appearance in 10 seasons at Arkansas. Blair is one of only three Division I women's basketball coaches to lead two different teams to the NCAA Women's Final Four and one of 12 coaches to take three different teams to the NCAA Tournament.

“His importance is felt everywhere he goes and everywhere he's been,” Arkansas coach Mike Neighbors said. “He's in every Hall of Fame of anybody who has ever come in contact with him. There's more to come. That speaks to his impact. I don't know that there are as many people like that around as there used to be, and our game needs people like that.

“But the level at which he's maintained it is, to me, the most impressive thing. He's adapted. Don't think he's the same cat that was here (at Arkansas). That speaks to his ability to adapt but not change. He's stayed true to who he is.”

Neighbors is one of six current head coaches who are part of Blair's coaching tree, which, as Neighbors said, “has many branches and roots and leaves and fruits and any other analogy you want to use.” Texas coach Vic Schaefer, Georgia Tech coach Nell Fortner, Lamar coach A'Quonesia Franklin, Auburn coach Johnnie Harris and LSU coach Kim Mulkey are among the 60 former players, assistant coaches or support staff members who have had successful coaching careers after grooming under Blair.



Known for tossing candy to fans prior to games at Reed Arena, Blair won 852 games in his Hall of Fame career including 444 at Texas A&M, reaching the pinnacle of his profession by leading the Aggie women's basketball program to the 2011 national championship.

"When you walk around the halls here, you see the word 'family,'" said A&M co-associate head coach Kelly Bond-White, who has spent 21 years with Blair. "To me, that's what separates him and what made him a Hall of Famer. The 800 and however many wins and the diamond on his finger, yeah, that's special. Those all-time great coaches, they're competitive as all get out, but they're not doing it just for those wins and just for those championships. You don't last 50 years chasing championships. You last 50 years by developing and investing in young people. All those lives he impacted – I know that will mean the most to him."

A conversation with R.C. Slocum convinced Blair it was time to do something else. As the two Aggie legends sat on Slocum's porch this summer, A&M's all-time winningest football coach relayed how he decided the time was right. It helped seal Blair's decision.

"I tried to live like every game was my last game

this last year or two," said Blair, who won 852 games in his storied career. "When I finally had to make that decision, it was tough. I got remarried on Nov. 5, 2020, to a wonderful woman, Kyla, and we wanted to have a life. But I also wanted to be one of the few – few – coaches in any sport to leave before they tell you to leave, because the posse is always over your right shoulder. Change is going to happen. I wanted to go out at the highest level I can."

Ross Bjork calls Blair a legend who has impacted Aggieland far beyond his coaching ability.

"His involvement in our community and his good-natured personality have been an asset for the university in so many ways," said Bjork, A&M's director of athletics. "Whether it is passing out candy before games to children, playing golf with his friends or attending his Rotary Club, his leadership impact will be felt for years to come. We owe a great amount of gratitude to Coach Blair for all that he has done." 🍷

HONORING A LEGACY

A&M's core value of selfless service shines bright
in the naming of Gary Blair Court

BY BRIAN DAVIS '01

On Feb. 17, the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents voted to name Reed Arena's court in honor of Gary Blair. The recognition was made possible by a generous gift from Wayne Roberts '85, pictured to the right with A&M's Hall of Fame women's basketball coach during the unveiling of the court naming at Blair's home.



WAYNE ROBERTS HAD ONLY ONE REQUEST when he suggested that Gary Blair be honored as the namesake of the court at Reed Arena. He wanted to be in the room when Texas A&M's Hall of Fame coach found out about it.

A devoted supporter of Texas A&M Athletics, the Mays Business School and Texas A&M University overall, it was Roberts' transformative investment in Aggie basketball that led to Reed Arena's floor

officially becoming "Gary Blair Court" on Feb. 24, 2022. However, it was his extraordinarily selfless action that made the historic moment possible.

"It is very important to me to live life in a way that honors the core values of Texas A&M," said Roberts, an Austin native who earned a business administration degree from A&M in 1985 and an MBA in 1986. "The Aggie core value that resonates with me the most is selfless service. I try to think

about how to give back in everything I do.”

Roberts’ selfless gift is one that honors a legendary coach who poured his heart and soul into building a championship program that all Aggies could be proud of.

“Having my name on that beautiful floor is a humbling experience,” said Blair, a member of seven halls of fame. “It will be a symbol of all those that helped build this program and all the Aggies that battle on that court, not just in women’s basketball, but in men’s basketball and volleyball as well.”

The winningest basketball coach in school history, Blair led the Aggies to unprecedented heights in his 19 seasons including winning 83 percent of the games on the court that is now named for him.

“My former players, assistants and staff members deserve all the credit,” added Blair, who is just the third women’s basketball coach to currently have a court named after them. “We dedicated our lives to this program and Texas A&M and built it on doing things the right way, the Aggie way.”

Over the past five years, Roberts has helped fund several transformative projects for Aggie basketball. As the program’s most significant donor in that time frame, Roberts had earned his choice for naming rights. However, that type of recognition did not feel right to Roberts, and he believed an Aggie legend should be honored. When Blair announced his retirement last fall, Roberts asked that the coach’s name go on the court instead.

Once it was approved by Texas A&M, Roberts knew the decision to use his naming rights to honor Blair was a slam dunk.

“

**I CAN THINK OF NO FINER
EXAMPLE TO HONOR
THAN GARY BLAIR. HE IS
EVERYTHING THAT WE
WOULD ALL ASPIRE TO BE.
HE LIVES OUR VALUES, AND
HE IS ONE OF THE FINEST
PEOPLE I’VE EVER HAD THE
PLEASURE OF KNOWING.**

— WAYNE ROBERTS ’85



“

TO ME, THE VALUE OF THE GIFT IS THE EXAMPLE OF SELFLESS GIVING IT SETS. DOING SOMETHING NICE FOR SOMEONE LIKE GARY — IT WAS A BUCKET LIST MOMENT FOR ME AND IS SOMETHING I WILL NEVER FORGET.

— WAYNE ROBERTS '85

“I can think of no finer example to honor than Gary Blair,” said Roberts, who currently serves on the 12th Man Foundation Board of Trustees. “He is everything that we would all aspire to be. He lives our values, and he is one of the finest people I’ve ever had the pleasure of knowing.”

For Roberts, the decision was a moment of truth.

“I want to give because it’s needed, it can make a difference and it can leave a legacy – not for what I get out of it,” Roberts said. “Are my actions going

to match my words or not?”

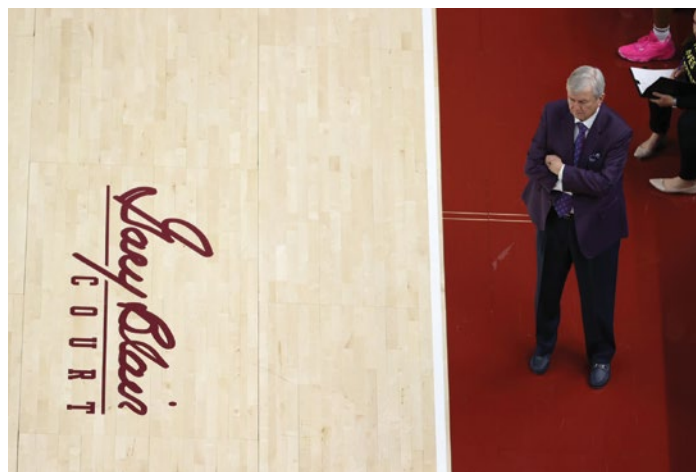
In honoring Blair, Roberts put his words into action.

“Wayne’s commitment to Texas A&M Athletics and the recognition that he has made possible for Gary Blair is appreciated by Aggies everywhere including those of us at the 12th Man Foundation,” said President and CEO Travis Dabney ’96.

Roberts has planned several other significant gifts that will impact Aggie Athletics, Mays and Texas A&M in the near future. He hopes that his example of selfless service will motivate others just as Amy ’84 and Tim Leach ’82 inspired him.

With their lead gift for the construction of E.B. Cushing Stadium in 2019, the Leaches opted to use their naming rights on the Aggies’ beautiful new outdoor track and field facility to honor Cushing, a former chairman of the Board of Regents who helped save A&M from consolidation with the University of Texas in 1912 by personally bankrolling the young college.

“Hearing about their selflessness and doing that





Gary Blair Court was officially unveiled prior to the legendary coach's final game at Reed Arena on Feb. 24. With the historic recognition, Blair became one of only three women's basketball coaches to currently have a court named after them.

lead gift with E.B. Cushing's name was inspiring to me," Roberts said. "Hopefully, someone down the road says the same thing about me and that I was able to make a difference. I want my time on earth to have mattered."

For Blair, with 15 consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances including eight Sweet Sixteens, three Elite Eights, five conference titles, one Final Four and a treasured national championship in addition to countless lives impacted, his legacy is firmly ingrained – and now engraved – in Aggieland.

"He and his staff built this program from the ground up," Roberts said. "A lot of people don't remember the significant struggles our women's basketball program was facing when he took over.

He was out in the community, promoting the program and doing whatever he could to get people to come to women's basketball. We were rewarded with a national championship, conference championships, tremendous postseason success and the winningest coach in the history of Texas A&M basketball."

Roberts knew the moment would be special. It was the only thing he wanted – to be in the room when it happened.

"Being able to share that moment with Gary and Kyla – that meant everything to me," Roberts said. "To me, the value of the gift is the example of selfless giving it sets. Doing something nice for someone like Gary – it was a bucket list moment for me and is something I will never forget." ■



POWER OF A SCHOLARSHIP

HALEY LEE '22

Star softball student-athlete's unexpected opportunity has made an indelible impact on her future

BY MATT SIMON '98

ON DEC. 17, 2021, HALEY LEE WALKED the Reed Arena stage, accepted her diploma and became the first in her family to graduate from college.

If not for a strange twist of fate just days before signing day in Nov. 2017, that moment may have never happened. At least not at Texas A&M.

It's doubtful that Aggie softball fans can imagine the team these past few years without the outgoing, energetic, fun-loving, home run-smashing Lee leading the way from behind the plate, delivering big hit after big hit and helping lift the program up in the nation's toughest conference.

Some might say that Lee and Aggieland were meant to be.

From nearby Kingwood, Texas, Lee was set to sign her National Letter of Intent with Sun Belt power Louisiana-Lafayette until an unexpected coaching change occurred just days before her signing date. Lee quickly reopened her recruitment, and A&M head coach Jo Evans jumped at the opportunity to talk to her.

"We'd been recruiting some kids on her travel ball

team, so I'd watched her play a ton of games," Evans said. "I knew she could play. I loved her personality and how outgoing she was. When I had a chance to talk to her, I knew that, yeah, this is someone I'd love to coach."

Evans reached out and told Lee about Davis Diamond, the Aggie traditions and all Texas A&M had to offer her. That's all it took.

"After talking on the phone with Coach Evans for about 30 minutes," says Lee, "it really just sold me on A&M with just that phone call."

About a week after reopening her recruitment at the last minute, Lee was an Aggie – despite having never stepped foot on campus.

"I'd never been to an A&M game or anything like that," Lee said. "I came to visit the week after I signed."

Lee's freshman year in Aggieland did not go as she had planned. After putting up big power numbers in high school and travel ball, she had the fifth-best average on the team and managed just two home runs and 15 RBIs.

Haley Lee walked the stage at Reed Arena to receive her bachelor's degree in sport management on Dec. 17, 2021, and became the first in her family to graduate from college.

Evans felt that Lee's unorthodox path to the program may have had something to do with her on-field performance.

"Remember, she didn't have a chance to come in and go through the whole recruiting process, making friends, et cetera," Evans said. "She wasn't as familiar with us and the program. She actually was kind of introverted a bit, which surprised me."

Evans challenged Lee to let her personality shine, and she took that and ran with it.

"To see her now, personality 'plus,' willing to be a leader, so much more responsible and all of that... I've been especially pleased with her," Evans said. "It's really cool to see."

Watching Lee now, it's easy to see she's having fun on the field. All the time. Dancing, laughing and joking with umpires and teammates. And with that came the power threat she always thought she could be at the plate.

"It became easier after my freshman year," Lee said. "I got used to creating a schedule and learned how to manage my time. That opened up more opportunities to jump in the batting cages."

“

I AM THE FIRST IN MY FAMILY TO GRADUATE COLLEGE, AND BEING AT A UNIVERSITY LIKE TEXAS A&M, THAT'S A BIG ACCOMPLISHMENT. I HONESTLY WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO IT WITHOUT MY SCHOLARSHIP. IT'S SUCH A BLESSING TO HAVE.

— HALEY LEE '22

The changes were immediately obvious when she took the field in the eventually ill-fated 2020 campaign.

On what would turn out to be the Aggies' final trip of the season before the pandemic shut down sports, Lee exploded onto the scene in a nationally-televised series at 10th-ranked Kentucky by crushing three home runs against the Wildcats.

Amazingly, after waiting 347 days to take the field again in 2021, Lee picked up right where she left off, hitting four home runs and driving in eight in the season-opening doubleheader at Davis Diamond.

She felt right away that the year had a chance to be special.

"I just felt more comfortable with myself and my approach," Lee said. "My biggest thing was just to not hold on to previous at bats, whether successful or not. You can't let it affect your next plate appearance."

Lee's free-spirited attitude and style of play helped her produce big hit after big hit in 2021, even when teams worked to pitch around her. She would draw 36 walks, one of the highest totals in the league.

While A&M's season ultimately came to an end in the NCAA Norman Regional, Lee finished with a bang, hitting three home runs in two games on the season's final day – the last one giving her 25 for the year.

That 25th blast set a school record. Lee's name now sits atop the school's single-season home run chart.

"As a coaching staff, you always pencil in who the kid is who you will not let beat you," Evans said. "For her to still be able to beat teams is really impressive. It shows how smart she is and how



“

I DON'T KNOW IF OUR DONORS REALIZE THE ENORMOUS IMPACT THEY HAVE ON THESE YOUNG WOMEN'S LIVES.

— COACH JO EVANS

patient she's become. She knows what she can and can't hit.”

Lee was named a finalist for USA Softball Collegiate Player of the Year and was tabbed the country's most improved player by Softball America.

And on June 2, she found out that she was named an All-American for the first time in her career.

“It was a special moment,” Lee said. “I called my mom, and she said she already knew. She was just waiting for me to call.

“I called her in tears. I was so excited.”

The program hangs a banner of every All-American in program history in the indoor hitting cages down the third-base line at Davis Diamond. Lee's banner now hangs proudly alongside Aggie legends like Shawn Andaya-Pulliam, Lori Stoll, Josie Carter, Amanda Scarborough and Megan Gibson.

“The day that banner showed up, it was really cool to have her walk in and see that,” Evans said. “She definitely got choked up. I know that means everything to her.”

The senior has two years of eligibility left, including her “COVID year.” She's been accepted into the

master's program in sport management and will work to pursue that degree while still donning the maroon and white.

“She's shown loyalty to our program,” Evans said. “Seeing where we are and where we're headed, I really appreciate that about her. She's so happy. She's the happiest I've seen her.”

Following her time in Aggieland, Lee wants to pursue a professional softball career and then eventually travel the country, evaluating talent as a scout for a Major League Baseball franchise.

Lee's unexpected journey is the perfect example of how a scholarship can change the life of the young person who earns it.

“I am the first in my family to graduate college, and being at a university like Texas A&M, that's a big accomplishment,” Lee said. “I honestly wouldn't have been able to do it without my scholarship. It's such a blessing to have.”

Evans says her responsibility as a coach is to impact young women's lives and set them up for their future, and that's exactly what donors are doing through their support of the 12th Man Foundation.

“I don't know if our donors realize the enormous impact they have on these young women's lives,” Evans said. “Sometimes they don't know the student-athletes personally, so there's not as much recognition of that. But that's what they do. They give Haley Lee, a kid who no one in her family has graduated from college, a chance to earn that degree and set herself up for success.” ■

Lee excelled during the 2021 season, earning All-American honors for the first time in her career. A finalist for USA Softball Collegiate Player of the Year, Lee also set a single-season school record with 25 home runs.



MAKING A CONNECTION

Unexpected bond with a young admirer leaves a lasting impact on Texas A&M student-athlete

BY HALEY STANGLE

WHEN JULIA BLACK ARRIVED IN COLORADO for the 12th Man Foundation Summer Meeting last June, she had no idea the impact one encounter would have on her life and the life of a young runner.

A senior on the Texas A&M cross country team, Black was walking through the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort with her fellow Aggie student-athletes when a 12th Man Foundation donor came up to her and asked, “Are you Julia Black? You run cross country?”

For a moment, Black was speechless. She had watched some of the more well-known student-athletes interact with donors who knew their familiar faces, but it never crossed Black’s mind that anyone would recognize her since cross country is not the most followed sport.

After the initial shock wore off, Black began talking with the donor and his daughter, a young runner starting high school in the fall. The teen had been following Black on Instagram for some time and was delighted at the opportunity to meet her. Black was equally starstruck that someone acknowledged her for her accomplishments.

“I was freaking out because somebody recognized me,” Black admitted. “I’m a cross country athlete. I don’t have a jersey number. Nobody’s going to really know who I am. But they knew my name, knew my sport...everything.”

The donor thanked her for taking the time to speak to and connect with his daughter, but Black felt as though she should be thanking them.

“I don’t think they really ever understood that I wasn’t talking to her just to be nice or because I felt like I had to,” Black said. “It was honestly a super cool experience for me because somebody cares.

They made my whole weekend – my whole year.”

As the Summer Meeting went on, Black continued to engage with her young admirer. During the final event of the weekend, Black and the young runner posed together in a photo booth.

“She wanted me to sign the photo,” Black recalled. “I said, ‘Well, I need a photo of us, and I need you to sign it because what if you become some big runner? I need your autograph.’

“I still have it in my room.”

Michael Solomon says Black’s experience is an extraordinary example of the many positive benefits of connecting donors with student-athletes.

“When we are able to host events that bring our donors and student-athletes together, it’s as if a light bulb goes off for both parties,” said Solomon, senior vice president of annual fund and donor services. “The donor has been giving for years while supporting student-athletes in competition, but actually getting to shake a student-athlete’s hand, sit with them at a table and hear their stories – it transforms the impact that donors feel when they are making their gifts.

“For student-athletes, when they meet with donors, it sharpens the focus on their understanding of the support that is behind them and what the 12th Man is really all about.”

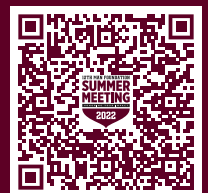
Following the Summer Meeting, Black has stayed in touch with the young runner’s mom via Instagram. Black checks in to see how she is doing in meets, and the mom congratulates Black on her accolades.

No matter where the young runner’s path takes her, it is likely she will never forget the Aggie student-athlete who asked for her autograph. ■

MAKE PLANS TO ATTEND THE 2022 SUMMER MEETING

Connect with Aggie student-athletes, coaches, staff and fellow donors during this year’s 12th Man Foundation Summer Meeting taking place June 23-26 at the JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa.

Active donors at the MVP level (\$750) and higher will receive an invitation this spring to attend the convention-style event filled with Aggie camaraderie.



Scan for information or to become an MVP donor.

ABBEY '15 & MICHAEL '15 PICKEL

A calling to help others leads generous Aggie couple to make their impact on Texas A&M student-athletes

BY SAMANTHA ATCHLEY '17

COMING TO TEXAS A&M AS FIRST-GENERATION AGGIES, Abbey and Michael Pickel never imagined the kind of impact one university could make on their futures. Now as recent graduates, the couple could not imagine their lives without it.

Grateful for the opportunities A&M provided for them, the Pickels are paying it forward to current and future Aggies through their generous commitment to the 12th Man Foundation.

Crediting Aggieland for their connection, Abbey and Michael first met during their sophomore year serving as counselors at Impact – a camp for incoming students to connect with peers, local churches and ministries that provide a source of lasting

community and fellowship in the Bryan-College Station area. However, it was not until graduation that the power of the Aggie community brought the two together.

“In my last semester of college, I realized I didn’t want to go to nursing school and decided I wanted to get into sales,” Michael said. “Literally the only reason I got a job was because of the Aggie network, and that’s also the only reason Abbey and I reconnected. If I didn’t have that first job where I was traveling, we wouldn’t have crossed paths again.”

Shortly thereafter in July of 2017, Abbey and Michael were married and returned to the Austin area where Michael applied his newfound passion





Both 2015 graduates of Texas A&M and diehard supporters of Aggie Athletics, Abbey and Michael are the proud parents of two daughters, Lillian (2) and Kennedy Jo (7 months).

and sales experience into a position at Texas Traditions Roofing. Today, the couple are proud parents of two daughters, Lillian (2) and Kennedy Jo (7 months), and have established successful careers – Michael as the president of Texas Traditions Roofing and Abbey as a pre-K teacher at Georgetown ISD.

“My entire career to this point and my trajectory post-college was completely shaped by A&M,” says Michael, “because it would be completely different had I not been hired by an Aggie.”

As MVP donors, the Pickels recognize the difference they can potentially make as recent Aggie graduates. Given their passion for Texas A&M, Aggie Athletics and their calling to help others, Abbey and Michael have begun to generously contribute to the 12th Man Foundation.

“We were super blessed that we did not have to pay for our college or have student loans taken out for our education,” says Abbey, “so I get comforted in knowing that we’re helping Aggies alleviate the finances that we didn’t have to face.”

In addition to making an impact on the Aggie student-athlete experience, the Pickels are also

passionate about supporting the upward trajectory of Texas A&M. They believe Aggie Athletics plays a significant role in that development.

“Abbey and I wouldn’t be in the position we’re in today without A&M,” Michael said. “We know what the Aggie network can do, and we know what Texas A&M Athletics can do. Being able to contribute to that – and hopefully being able to do it for a long time – is just really rewarding.”

Thus far, the Pickels have found great reward in their experience as 12th Man Foundation donors. Attending events and interacting with fellow donors, Michael says everyone’s intentions are consistent. They donate because Aggies take care of Aggies – a message Abbey and Michael can confidently stand behind.

“Aggie Athletics is a huge first impression on future generations of Aggies,” Michael said. “Being fortunate enough to give back is incredible to be a part of and to think about the long-term impact we can make on somebody’s life.”

While they certainly enjoy the tangible benefits of their 12th Man Foundation membership, the Pickels are most passionate about the magnitude of what their contributions can make possible. When visualizing the opportunities their continuous giving can make, the decision to start now was a no-brainer.

“The best time to start making an impact on Aggie Athletics was yesterday,” says Michael, “and the second-best time is today.”

“If you’re waiting to make an impact until tomorrow, five years from now, when you’re 30, when you’re 40 – you’ve missed the whole opportunity of the last however many years to do exactly what Aggies are called to do, which is selfless service. And that’s a big part of what the 12th Man Foundation really is.” ■

“
**THE BEST TIME TO START
MAKING AN IMPACT ON
AGGIE ATHLETICS WAS
YESTERDAY, AND THE
SECOND-BEST TIME IS
TODAY.**

— MICHAEL PICKEL '15

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION

Talented and forward-thinking group of leaders help make Texas A&M's athletics department elite

BY ADAM QUISENBERRY



Ross Bjork

ROSS BJORK WAS NAMED TEXAS A&M'S director of athletics on July 8, 2019. His tenure in Aggieland has been marked by many achievements in both competition and the classroom, but also coincided with significant challenges brought on by a uniquely transformative time in collegiate athletics.

While Bjork has become a well-known figure to many, in this issue of *12th Man Magazine* we profile the senior administrative staff who assist in the leadership of Aggie Athletics' 20 sport programs and supporting personnel.

Note: Texas A&M is currently recruiting a new senior associate athletics director for athletics compliance.



Kristen Brown

KRISTEN BROWN

*Deputy Athletics Director
Student-Athlete Experience/Senior Woman
Administrator/Chief Diversity Officer*

Kristen Brown joined Texas A&M Athletics in March 2020 from the University of Maryland where she was serving as an associate athletics director.

Her duties at Texas A&M include providing leadership for the department on all matters related to student-athlete engagement including academics, life skills and career development. Additionally, Brown leads the athletics department's diversity and inclusion efforts and serves as liaison with the Texas A&M Title IX office.

A former women's basketball student-athlete at Northern Illinois University, Brown works directly with coaches and student-athletes as the sport administrator for the Aggie women's basketball, soccer, volleyball, swimming and diving and tennis programs.



Justin Moore '03

JUSTIN MOORE '03

*Deputy Athletics Director
Administration*

A former Texas A&M student-athlete who played baseball under head coach Mark Johnson, Moore returned to Aggieland as associate athletics director for football in 2012.

In his current role as deputy athletics director for administration, Moore manages the strategic direction of athletics department initiatives including oversight of all student-athlete wellness and performance through sports medicine, sports performance, nutrition, sports science and psychology.

Moore also oversees key contract negotiations and relationships with several major partners including Adidas, Gatorade and Teamworks. He supervises and coordinates the department's private aviation program, oversees equipment operations for all sports and handles football non-conference scheduling.

Moore serves as the sport administrator for football and men's basketball.

MICHAEL THOMPSON

*Deputy Athletics Director
External Relations and Business Development*

After serving alongside Ross Bjork during a nine-year tenure in athletics administration at Ole Miss, Thompson joined Texas A&M Athletics in 2019.

As deputy athletics director for external relations and business development, Thompson oversees the external units of Texas A&M Athletics including 12th Man Productions, communications, information technology and marketing staff with the goal of maximizing revenue potential, expanding the brand both nationally and globally and further



Michael Thompson

enhancing opportunities for engagement.

Thompson collaborates with multiple external entities regarding ticketing strategies, licensing and merchandising and multimedia rights. Beyond his role at Texas A&M, Thomson is an active member of several national organizations and recently served as vice president for the National Association of Collegiate Marketing Administrators.

JOE FIELDS

Senior Associate Athletics Director

Student-Athlete Services and Administration

Joe Fields is Texas A&M Athletics' senior associate athletics director of student-athlete services & administration and has been with the department since 2017.

Fields has oversight of the Center for Student-Athlete Services (CSAS) which houses academic services, the learning center and student-athlete engagement units. Additionally, Fields serves as a sport administrator for the cross country and track and field programs.

Working with a team of talented student-athlete support professionals, Fields has restructured the CSAS, implemented several marquee student-athlete development programs and redefined the A&M student-athlete first-year experience while setting the stage for Aggie student-athletes to post numerous academic records during his tenure.

Fields is a native of Houston, Texas, and was a football student-athlete at Syracuse who also played professionally for the Carolina Panthers.

KEVIN HURLEY '01

Senior Associate Athletics Director

Capital Projects and Sport Administrator

A veteran of Texas A&M Athletics, Kevin Hurley is in his 22nd year with the department and currently serves as senior associate athletics director for capital projects.

In his role, Hurley oversees all facility construction for Aggie Athletics. He has played a key role during the construction of a long list of award-winning facilities, including the massive Kyle Field redevelopment.

Hurley serves as the sport administrator for the Aggie baseball and equestrian programs.

JEFF TOOLE '80

Senior Associate Athletics Director

Chief Financial Officer

Jeff Toole has been with Texas A&M Athletics since 2009 and serves as senior associate athletics director and chief financial officer.

Toole oversees the finance and human resources departments while working closely with administrators, coaches and staff on the budgeting efforts of A&M's 20 varsity sport programs and supporting units. He also serves as sport administrator for the Aggie softball program as well as the men's and women's golf teams.

A former 12th Man Foundation trustee and long-time supporter of Aggie Athletics, Toole is a 1980 A&M graduate and enjoyed a successful career in private business before returning to his alma mater.

REBEKAH PARKHILL '17

Director of Administration

Rebekah Parkhill joined Texas A&M's athletics department in 2017 and currently serves as the director of administration.

In her role, Parkhill manages the day-to-day operations of the Athletics Administration Office and provides oversight and strategy of all administrative operations for Bjork.

PAUL BATISTA

Faculty Athletics Representative

Paul J. Batista, J.D., is a key member of A&M's senior staff. He was appointed Faculty Athletics Representative by Presidents Young and Banks.

Batista is the athletics department's primary liaison to the administration and faculty of Texas A&M University as well as to the NCAA and Southeastern Conference. He also serves on the Faculty Athletics Council and the A&M Pro Sports Panel which advises student-athletes contemplating a career as a professional athlete.

On campus, Batista is an associate professor in the Sport Management Division of the newly-formed Department of Kinesiology and Sport Management within the College of Education and Human Development, serving as division chair and associate department head from 2010-2014 and 2019-2020. ■



Joe Fields



Kevin Hurley '01



Jeff Toole '80



Rebekah Parkhill '17



Paul Batista



“

My scholarship means that the discipline and all the work I put in since I was a little kid has paid off.

Someone saw all that work and wanted me here, and donors who worked hard for all of their success see something in student-athletes at A&M and want to help us reach the best level of competition we can.

My family and I are very grateful for the opportunity for me to be a student-athlete at A&M. To also have a scholarship and be connected with 1922 Fund donors, it just shows that somebody outside of myself and my family believes in me and what I'm capable of.

JULIA BLACK '22

CROSS COUNTRY/TRACK & FIELD

Julia, who is currently pursuing a master's degree in business and is looking to work on the hospitality side of hotel and resort management once her athletic career comes to an end, is connected with donors Kim and Eric Foss through their support of the 1922 Fund. Call the Major Gifts office at 979-260-7595 for more information on the 1922 Fund.





“

Giving to the 1922 Fund to benefit Aggie student-athletes is an honor and a privilege.

The Texas A&M community is something rare and very special. You cannot beat the character and spirit of the Aggie family.

KIM & ERIC FOSS
1922 FUND DONORS

The Foss family (Eric and Aggie daughters Laura '11, Kathryn '17 and Elizabeth '13 pictured below) is connected with cross country and track and field student-athlete Julia Black 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

ANDRE GORDON '23

Basketball student-athlete overcame adversity through sports and is pursuing a better future in Aggieland

BY OLIN BUCHANAN

ANDRE GORDON LOOKED FOR AN OPPORTUNITY. Seeing a chance, he proceeded without hesitation.

The path to the goal was blocked, but he didn't give up. He re-routed. He pivoted. He faked. He converted his shot.

That sequence described Gordon's game-winning last-second jumper in Texas A&M's 68-66 victory over Auburn last season.

It's also a fitting description for Gordon's unlikely journey from Sidney, Ohio, to Aggieland.

For years, Gordon was focused on his goal to earn an athletic scholarship and be the first in his family to earn a college education.

He only needed an opportunity, but sometimes his path appeared blocked.

So, he re-routed and pivoted. He's now taking his best shot – a shot that is changing his life.

"I was the first person in my family to go to college," said Gordon, a tough-minded junior guard with a nice jump shot and a baritone voice. "That's a huge accomplishment for me and my family. I think it's really big time – showing others in my town you can do it.

"Being able to just go through the process here and get a degree eventually from A&M is really big time. A lot of opportunities come out of here."

The first in his family to attend college, Gordon has transformed from an angry, misguided kid in Sidney, Ohio, to a leader in the Texas A&M men's basketball program.

KATIE LUFFMAN/TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS (THIS PAGE); CRAIG BISACRE AND BAILEY ORR/TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS (FACING PAGE)



“
**I WAS THE FIRST PERSON
IN MY FAMILY TO GO TO
COLLEGE. THAT’S A HUGE
ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR
ME AND MY FAMILY.**

— ANDRE GORDON '23

Coach Buzz Williams gave Gordon the opportunity to come to A&M. In reality, though, the course to College Station was set many years before Gordon met Williams.

“He has been amazing,” Williams said. “I tell him all the time, ‘I have so much respect for your story.’”

The story begins with a stubborn, angry youth in Sidney, a blue-collar town of about 21,000 located approximately 36 miles north of Dayton.

Gordon is the youngest of four children of Tracy Williams, a single mother doing the best she could.

She couldn’t be everywhere all the time, so young Andre veered toward trouble. He wasn’t a bad kid, he just was misguided.

“I was in a lot of trouble when I was younger,” Gordon recalled. “I had anger issues from elementary all the way up until eighth grade. Kicked out of school. Stealing. I was always getting in fights.

“At 13, I was doing things kids that age should not be doing.”

Then, Gordon had an opportunity to change direction.

He was invited to move in with the family of his best friend, Cam Perry. Gordon and Perry played sports together all the way back to pee wee football in the fifth grade.

Gordon often spent the night at Perry’s house. Before long, he began spending weekends there. He might even stay over a couple of days during the week. Eventually, he was spending more time at Perry’s home than his own.

Cam’s parents, Johnny and Nicole Perry, liked Andre and could see he was a good kid. They also could see vast potential in him and were aware his mother could not afford all the costs of being on a traveling AAU basketball team.

So, the Perrys made an offer. They gave him a room with a futon and a television. They would also pay for his AAU fees and his travel, food and hotel stays for out-of-state tournaments.



An emotional leader on the court, Gordon is pursuing his degree in sport management and wants to become a basketball coach when his playing days are over.



There was a catch, though.

“Johnny wanted to give me an opportunity,” Gordon recalled. “He said to get good grades, be a good kid and I’ll help you out.”

Seeing a chance, Gordon proceeded without hesitation.

“Sports changed me,” Gordon said. “I knew that I could not play sports if I was being a bad kid or not getting good grades. Johnny put that in my head.”

Gordon did his part. He avoided trouble and made good grades. He excelled in football at quarterback and basketball at guard. He received a football scholarship offer from Iowa State when he was just a freshman.

“I just knew once I got that offer, I was going to college,” Gordon said. “I called my mom right after and let her know I got an offer. She was screaming and excited.”

Gordon preferred basketball, though. He even transferred to play at a prep school in Huntington, W.V., though he would ultimately transfer back to Sidney.

It was in Huntington when then-Virginia Tech assistant basketball coach Jamie McNeilly attended a game and saw Gordon diving for loose balls, taking charges and generally hustling all over the court.

“

I JUST KNEW ONCE I GOT THAT OFFER, I WAS GOING TO COLLEGE. I CALLED MY MOM RIGHT AFTER AND LET HER KNOW I GOT AN OFFER. SHE WAS SCREAMING AND EXCITED.

— ANDRE GORDON '23

A couple of days later, Buzz Williams went to meet with Gordon and was immediately sold on him.

“He was raised on hard work values,” Williams said. “Tell the truth values. Say ‘yes sir’ and ‘no sir’ values. Look at a person in their eyes when they’re speaking values. He has a respect for authority.

“I love him. I think he’s a good player, and I think he’ll keep getting better. But I always love the grit and the tenacity and the ‘why’ with which he competes.”

Gordon brought the same grit, tenacity and “why” to the classroom. He’s working toward a degree in sport management and wants to earn his Aggie Ring. He’s hoping to become a basketball coach.

“I feel like I’ll have opportunities coming out of here,” Gordon said. “One, playing basketball. Two, being an Aggie. Three, I’ve got work ethic. I listen. I try to be the best at everything I do.”

His mother said that’s how Gordon always was. However, she’s noticed a difference in him, too.

“I’ve seen a lot of growth in him,” Tracy Williams said. “He just seems to be more of a man. I feel like he’s definitely grown since he’s been there.”

Buzz Williams has noticed that growth, too.

“I think this experience will change his life.”

Gordon said it already has. He loves the Texas weather. He loves Torchy’s Tacos. He loves playing basketball for Texas A&M.

And he loves that his athletics scholarship has provided a chance to reach his goal of a better future.

“The opportunity...that’s all I needed,” Gordon said. “That’s all I wanted. I just took full advantage of it. I’m still taking advantage of it.” ■



TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS

A NEW ERA FOR AGGIE BASEBALL

Head coach Jim Schlossnagle focused on building a championship program at Texas A&M

BY CHAREAN WILLIAMS '86

WHEN JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE WAS NAMED the new head baseball coach at Texas A&M in June 2021, it was a dream come true.

Schlossnagle, TCU's head coach for 18 seasons, could have stayed in Fort Worth forever. It was home. He was comfortable. He had a secure job that paid him well. His two children, Jackson and Kati, are TCU students. The school might have built a statue of him or named the stadium after him if he had retired as a Horned Frog.

He turned down other opportunities to leave in the past.

"I adored TCU and would have been incredibly honored to have finished my career there," Schlossnagle said. "I gave 18 years to that town and to that school, and they gave a lot to me."

But A&M's unrivaled support and commitment to excellence along with the challenge of playing in the best division in the best conference made it the right job at the right time for Schlossnagle.

"To be at a place that is this committed to college athletics and developing young people has been a dream of mine for a long time," he said.

Schlossnagle has found only one negative about

leaving TCU for A&M. His closet was full of purple, which doesn't fit in Aggieland.

"I have spent a lot of money on a new wardrobe," he joked.

At TCU, Schlossnagle enjoyed more postseason success in his 18 seasons than the Aggies have had in their entire history. A&M has two victories in the College World Series since 1947. Schlossnagle has 11 wins in Omaha.

"Coach Schlossnagle is a natural-born leader and winner," said Ross Bjork, Texas A&M's director of athletics. "I guess we were done with his teams

“
**TO BE AT A PLACE THAT IS
THIS COMMITTED TO COLLEGE
ATHLETICS AND DEVELOPING
YOUNG PEOPLE HAS BEEN A
DREAM OF MINE FOR A LONG TIME.**

— JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE

SPEAKER SERIES
COACH JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE



A proud father of his son, Jackson, and daughter, Kati, Schlossnagle has fully embraced Texas A&M since accepting the head baseball coaching position in June, speaking at 12th Man Foundation donor events like the MVP Speaker Series and building his first team that will represent the university this spring.

beating Texas A&M, so we decided we needed to bring him to Aggieland."

Schlossnagle is 9-7 when facing A&M, including 6-2 in the postseason with his teams eliminating the Aggies three times in the NCAA Tournament.

"From the moment we sat down and started talking about the opportunities here at Texas A&M, you could see his passion for our program and his ability to maximize our full potential," Bjork added. "I know I join fellow Aggies in saying we cannot wait to see what unfolds at Blue Bell Park and see how far Coach can take our program."

At A&M, Schlossnagle has a new staff and a new team. He is taking the steps to build a championship program.

"It's not like I'm coming to a place that hasn't had success," Schlossnagle said. "The program has been really good, but I do believe there's room for growth. The university believes that, and Ross Bjork believes that. That's the exciting part."

Schlossnagle has assembled one of the best staffs

in the country with Nate Yeskie as associate head coach, Michael Earley and Nolan Cain as assistant coaches, Jason Hutchins as director of baseball operations, Chuck Box as director of player and program development, Jeremy McMillan as sports performance coach and Will Fox as director of video and analytics.

"Coach (Rob) Childress did a wonderful job guiding this program for the time that he did it," said Yeskie, who spent the past three seasons as associate head coach at Arizona. "You get to a point where sometimes change can be difficult, but it can also be what's needed at that time. We're certainly up for the challenge that's out ahead of us."

"At the same time, we understand there's a process to it, and it's not going to happen overnight. There are some things that we're going to have to get in place as we continue to work through this. As competitors, we want to get that done as soon as possible."

The Aggies added eight transfers during the



“

IT'S COOL TO BE NEXT. IT'S EVEN COOLER TO BE FIRST. TO WIN THE NEXT NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP SOMEWHERE IS REALLY NICE, BUT TO WIN THE FIRST ONE, THAT'S WHAT DRIVES ME.

— JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE

offseason, with Baseball America rating them the nation's best transfer class for 2021. Utility player Jack Moss, an Arizona State transfer, catcher Troy Claunch, an Oregon State graduate transfer, and pitcher Micah Dallas, a Texas Tech transfer, are expected to play big roles during the first season of the Schlossnagle era.

“I genuinely think that the number of new guys we have is going to be beneficial for us,” said Claunch, a career .290 hitter. “Yeah, sometimes transfers can disrupt the mojo, but because everything is so new here, it's new for everybody. Everybody's out to prove themselves. It's kind of been a rallying cry. It's a fresh start, and we're all kind of bonding around that.

“Having us older guys transfer is really helping, because a lot of us have been there. We've done that. We know what it's supposed to look like, and we know what needs to be done to get to that point. I think it's been amazing.”

When Schlossnagle cleaned out his closet, he gave all the purple clothes to his kids, though they also now own plenty of maroon. He's learned the words to the Aggie War Hymn and has gotten better at using “Howdy!” in greeting.

Now his focus is on bringing a national championship trophy home to Blue Bell Park.

“The goal is a national title – that's it,” he said. “There will never be a day when the goal is anything less than that.”

It's the only thing missing on Schlossnagle's resume, and something the rabid fan base in Aggieland has longed for.

“It's cool to be next,” he said. “It's even cooler to be first. To win the next national championship somewhere is really nice, but to win the first one, that's what drives me.”



SYLVIA FECHT

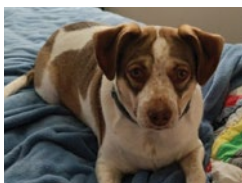
Beloved ticketing staff member retires following 22 years of dedicated service to Texas A&M

BY KATELYN BUYS '14



ABOUT SYLVIA

- » STARTED WORKING FOR A&M ATHLETICS TICKETING IN 1999
- » DEVOTED CHICAGO CUBS FAN
- » RETIRED AT THE END OF 2021 AFTER 22 YEARS OF SERVICE
- » PLANS TO TRAVEL WITH HER DOG, WRIGLEY



The ticketing staff, with Sylvia as the West Virginia Mountaineer, famously dressed up as “the new Big 12” for the 12th Man Foundation’s office Halloween party in 2013.



IT IS HARD TO THINK ABOUT SYLVIA FECHT WITHOUT thinking of a delicious, warm scoop of queso. While this might seem like an odd coupling to most, I am sure I am not alone in this association when it comes to my coworkers.

A few times a year, Sylvia, without being asked, gathered all the ingredients to make her famous queso for the staff. Once the email from Sylvia appeared in your inbox indicating an afternoon pick-me-up was waiting for you in the break room, your day was instantly better and you were smiling in line with your fellow staff members waiting, not so patiently, for a treat you did not even know you needed.

However, Sylvia was not in the break room seeking appreciation. She was back in her office, diligently working on her next task which likely included going above and beyond to help a donor or ticket holder. This scenario was not uncommon for Sylvia, and it illustrates how she approaches life. She anticipates the needs of others, serves them well and never expects praise in return.

Sylvia began her career with Texas A&M’s Athletics Ticket Office in 1999. In 2003, the 12th Man Foundation assumed all ticketing responsibilities for Aggie Athletics, and with that change, Sylvia joined the staff of the 12th Man

“

SYLVIA IS ONE OF A KIND, AND SHE WILL BE MISSED DEEPLY BY ALL WHO CAME TO KNOW HER AT TEXAS A&M.

— TRAVIS DABNEY '96

Foundation. Carole Dollins, Sylvia’s supervisor for more than a decade, recalled her eagerness to serve the donors of the organization.

“Fortunately, that continued to be her greatest asset,” said Carole, vice president of special event ticketing. “It has always been her priority to meet our customers’ needs.”

Tracy Treps, vice president of priority ticketing, notes that Sylvia’s innate sense to care for others will be her lasting legacy at the 12th Man Foundation.

“While most may not see Sylvia as a leader,” adds Tracy, “once you observed her in action with donors and fellow staff members, she was an incredible leader – a servant leader.”

Even in retirement, Sylvia plans on spending her time helping others, specifically her parents.

“I plan on spending time with my family and taking care of those who I can,” she said of retirement. “I will travel a bit and enjoy a break.”

Sylvia’s dog, Wrigley, will be her travel companion.

“I think he is looking forward to my retirement more than me,” Sylvia said.

President and CEO Travis Dabney says that replacing an employee like Sylvia is a tall task.

“Sylvia is one of a kind,” adds Dabney, “and she will be missed deeply by all who came to know her at Texas A&M.”

Indeed, every office would be lucky to have a coworker like Sylvia. ▀



**Know a current
Texas A&M student?**

**SHARE WITH THEM THE BENEFITS OF
BECOMING A 12TH MAN FOUNDATION**

STUDENT MEMBER

- ✓ *Get an Inside Look at
Texas A&M Athletics*
- ✓ *Make an Impact on
Aggie Student-Athletes*
- ✓ *Receive Awesome
Benefits and More!*



EXCLUSIVE PHOTO OPPS

Members only access
for special events



PRIORITY POINTS

The key to great seats
down the road



EXCLUSIVE T-SHIRT

The perfect game
day attire



MEMBERSHIP CARD+DECAL

Show your pride as a
Student Member



JOIN FOR ONLY \$25!

Call 888-99-AGGIE or visit

www.12thmanfoundation.com/12thmanstudent

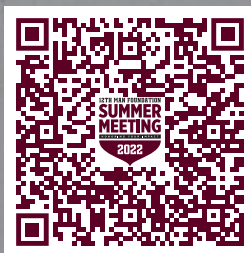


FUNDING SCHOLARSHIPS, PROGRAMS
AND FACILITIES IN SUPPORT OF
CHAMPIONSHIP ATHLETICS

12TH MAN FOUNDATION
**SUMMER
MEETING**
HONORING YOUR IMPACT
2022

JUNE 23-26, 2022

JW MARRIOTT SAN ANTONIO HILL COUNTRY RESORT & SPA



WWW.12THMANFOUNDATION.COM/SUMMERMEETING