

12th Man

2024 | VOLUME 29, NO. 1

FUNDING SCHOLARSHIPS, PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES
IN SUPPORT OF CHAMPIONSHIP ATHLETICS

**BOLD VISION,
BRIGHT FUTURE**

YOUR SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL
FOR A CHAMPIONSHIP LEVEL
AGGIE FOOTBALL PROGRAM





TO OUR DONORS,

College athletics is in a constant state of flux, with its future direction remaining entirely uncertain. Headlines are dominated by conference realignment, name, image and likeness (NIL), coaching changes, the transfer

portal, revenue sharing and lawsuits, shifting focus from the simplicity of game scores, highlights and rankings we once followed.

Amidst the challenges, frustration and confusion, a deeper evaluation reveals a uniquely American perspective. In our country, we cherish freedom, self-determination and the principle of reaping the rewards of our hard work. We prioritize opportunity over bureaucracy. The antiquated system governing compensation for student-athletes has hindered rather than supported the American dream. Though controversial to some, these beliefs are quintessentially American and integral to our identity as Aggies. Today, student-athletes at Texas A&M have the chance to be paid for their talents while pursuing prestigious degrees.

As NIL continues to reshape college sports, Texas A&M is collectively dedicated to leading these changes, providing unparalleled opportunities for our student-athletes. Indelibly, our university has the support and infrastructure in place that attracts elite leaders who can create championship-level programs. To further enhance this incredible foundation, contributions through Texas Aggies United and the 12th Man Foundation's Annual Fund are critical to solidifying Aggie Athletics as a leader in NIL. The opportunities created by supporting either of these initiatives are incredibly positive. Embracing change is challenging, but adapting is essential.

Finally, as I reflect on the departure of Texas A&M's head baseball coach in late June, I am reminded that no individual is bigger than our university. Texas A&M stands as a strong, proud and unquestionably evolving world-class institution, guided by our distinctive core values of respect, excellence, leadership, loyalty, integrity and selfless service. Our pursuit of excellence was recently realized through Aggie Women's Tennis securing the 2024 NCAA DI women's tennis championship, Adela Cernousek '25 becoming the first Individual National Champion in Aggie Women's Golf history and Aggie Baseball advancing to the championship series at the 2024 Men's College World Series. This caliber of success is paving the way to an abundantly bright future for Texas A&M Athletics.

I am thankful for Texas A&M's core values and for our loyal donors and season ticket holders as we pioneer through the modern era of collegiate athletics. Rest assured, we are committed, and this is only the beginning.

Gig 'em!

Travis Dabney '96
President & CEO

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



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Ticket Operations



Jenna Wagner
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WELCOME TO AGGIELAND, TREV ALBERTS

In March, Texas A&M University President Mark A. Welsh III introduced Trev Alberts as the Aggies' new director of athletics. Alberts brings extensive knowledge and experience to Aggieland from 15 years of serving in AD roles at both the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Nebraska Omaha, where he transitioned the athletic program from Division II to Division I. Alberts earned first-team All-American honors as a football student-athlete at the University of Nebraska and continued his athletic career in the NFL after being drafted by the Indianapolis Colts in 1994.



WELCOME TO AGGIELAND, BLAIRE ANDERSON

In May, Texas A&M Athletics named Blaire Anderson the first director of Texas A&M Swimming & Diving to oversee the now combined men's and women's programs. Anderson spent the past seven seasons at Virginia as an associate head coach and helped guide the Cavaliers to four consecutive team national titles. At the international level, Anderson served as an assistant coach for Team USA at the 2023 World Championships in Fukuoka, Japan, and at the 2021 Short Course World Championships in Abu Dhabi.



CENTENNIAL CAMPAIGN

In January, the 12th Man Foundation proudly hosted an event to celebrate the opening of the R.A. “Murray” Fasken ’38 Indoor Track & Field and to recognize Amy ’84 and Tim Leach ’82 for their extraordinary support of Texas A&M Athletics. With their generous contribution toward the project, the Leaches chose to honor Fasken in the naming of the state-of-the-art facility. A 1938 graduate of Texas A&M, Fasken was one of the university’s earliest philanthropists who selflessly supported both academics and athletics. We commend the Leaches for their loyal commitment to excellence and the advancement of Aggie Athletics.



CONGRATULATIONS AND WELCOME BACK TO AGGIELAND, MICHAEL EARLEY

On June 30, Texas A&M Athletics named former Aggie Baseball hitting coach Michael Earley as the program’s 21st head baseball coach. Earley, who has served on the Texas A&M Baseball staff for the past three seasons, played a pivotal role in the team’s success, including two appearances in the Men’s College World Series and a national runner-up finish in the 2024 championship series. Under his guidance, Texas A&M set program records in 2024 with 136 home runs and led the nation with 422 walks. Prior to Texas A&M, Earley spent five seasons at Arizona State. His professional career includes six seasons with the Chicago White Sox organization, having been drafted in the 29th round of the 2010 MLB Draft.



LONGTIME 12TH MAN FOUNDATION LEADER RECEIVES OUTSTANDING 12TH MAN AWARD

W. Miles Marks ’79 was recently named a recipient of the Outstanding 12th Man Award, a recognition that is presented by the 12th Man Foundation to an individual who exemplifies extraordinary service to Texas A&M. Marks was hired as executive director of the 12th Man Foundation in 1998 and led the organization through 2012, helping advance it into the top-tier collegiate athletics fundraising organization it is today. During his tenure, Marks oversaw the launch of 12thmanfoundation.com, pioneered donor email communications, embraced the athletic ticket office acquisition and advocated for the creation of the Major Gifts department.



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Bold vision, bright future

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COVER PHOTO BY CRAIG BISACRE / TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS

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MARY STOIANA '25

Aggie Women's Tennis national champion serves up remarkable success in Aggieland and beyond

BY CHAREAN WILLIAMS '86

MARY STOIANA'S MANY TROPHIES, MEDALS AND plaques from her junior tennis days are neatly organized in a bedroom bookcase at her childhood home in Southbury, Connecticut. They tell the story of where she has come from.

The large silver cup added to Stoiana's desk at her apartment in College Station tells the story of how far she has come.

Stoiana became the first Texas A&M tennis player to win the ITA All-American Championship singles title. Second-seeded Stoiana beat third-seeded Alexa Noel of the University of Miami on Oct. 8, 2023.

"That was just an amazing accomplishment for Mary, and she is the first national champion for our program," said Mark Weaver, head coach of Aggie Women's Tennis. "It is not that surprising, but on the other hand, it is a remarkable achievement that does not come easy. It just speaks a lot for Mary, our program and our player development."

Stoiana celebrated her win by jumping in a van for a two-and-a-half-hour ride to an International Tennis Federation (ITF) pro tournament in South Carolina. It is part of her plan to become a professional tennis player, a dream Stoiana has pursued since she was seven years old.

The All-American earned points on tour by playing in select ITF professional tournaments, and she played the U.S. Open qualifying tournament in summer 2023.

"I have always said, 'I want to go pro. I want to play the U.S. Open. I want to win the U.S. Open.' It

has been something I have said forever, honestly," Stoiana said.

Stoiana's father, Val, who immigrated from Romania as a child, played college tennis at St. John's University and began a coaching career thereafter. Mary learned to play while watching her dad teach her brother, Nicolas, who is two-and-a-half years older.

"She was four or five, and you could see that she was athletic," Val said. "She would try to keep up with her brother and me, and pretty quickly she developed the fundamentals. Then she started playing tournaments against older kids and was competitive. So, early on, I kind of knew she was going to be good at it."

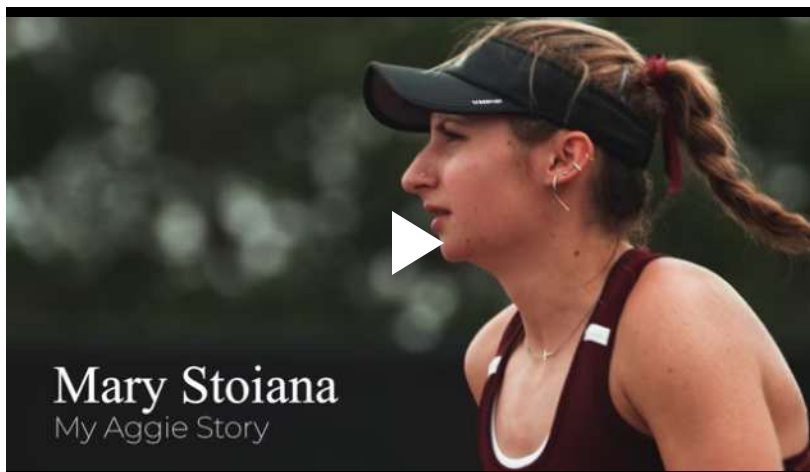
Stoiana quickly dominated the competition in New England, but because of finances, she did not travel to her first out-of-state tournament until the summer of 2019. At the USTA Girls' 18 Clay Court National Championships in South Carolina, Stoiana won eight of 10 matches, finished seventh in the 256-player draw and landed on Texas A&M's radar.

Stoiana's mother, Kathleen Morrone, put her career as an interior designer on hold to home-school Stoiana and accompany her daughter to tournaments.

The Aggies made an offer to Stoiana in June 2020, and three months later, the No. 16 junior player in the Class of 2021 committed despite never having a formal visit. Her only trip to College Station before she moved to town was for a tournament.

The size of the student body and the family





Stoiana made history in November 2023, becoming the very first women's tennis student-athlete at Texas A&M to achieve the No. 1 national ranking. Then, on May 19, she led the Texas A&M Women's Tennis program to its first ever national title.

atmosphere of the school surprised her, but nothing about Texas A&M has disappointed Stoiana.

"Texas A&M has given me the opportunity to further something in my life that I love doing," Stoiana said. "I am able to play tennis every single day with the support of the 12th Man and all the resources that come with that. It has really given me the opportunity to show myself what I am capable of."

"Growing up, I did not have all the resources in the world. I did not play all the high-level tournaments like the other junior kids did, so my path to getting myself a little more well-known was different than others. Coming here and getting all this support, I am super grateful."

After Stoiana accomplished her individual goal of winning the ITA, a team national championship was next on the to-do list. For three straight seasons, the Aggies won the SEC regular-season crown, fueling their desire to bring home a national title. On May 19, 2024, the Texas A&M Women's Tennis team achieved that goal and secured the program's first ever national championship upon defeating the Georgia Bulldogs, 4-1, in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

"The power of Aggieland and all the people in support of this welcoming community, obviously it is like no other," Stoiana said. "You cannot find it anywhere else. It felt so awesome being able to bring the national championship home for them and the rest of Aggieland."



“
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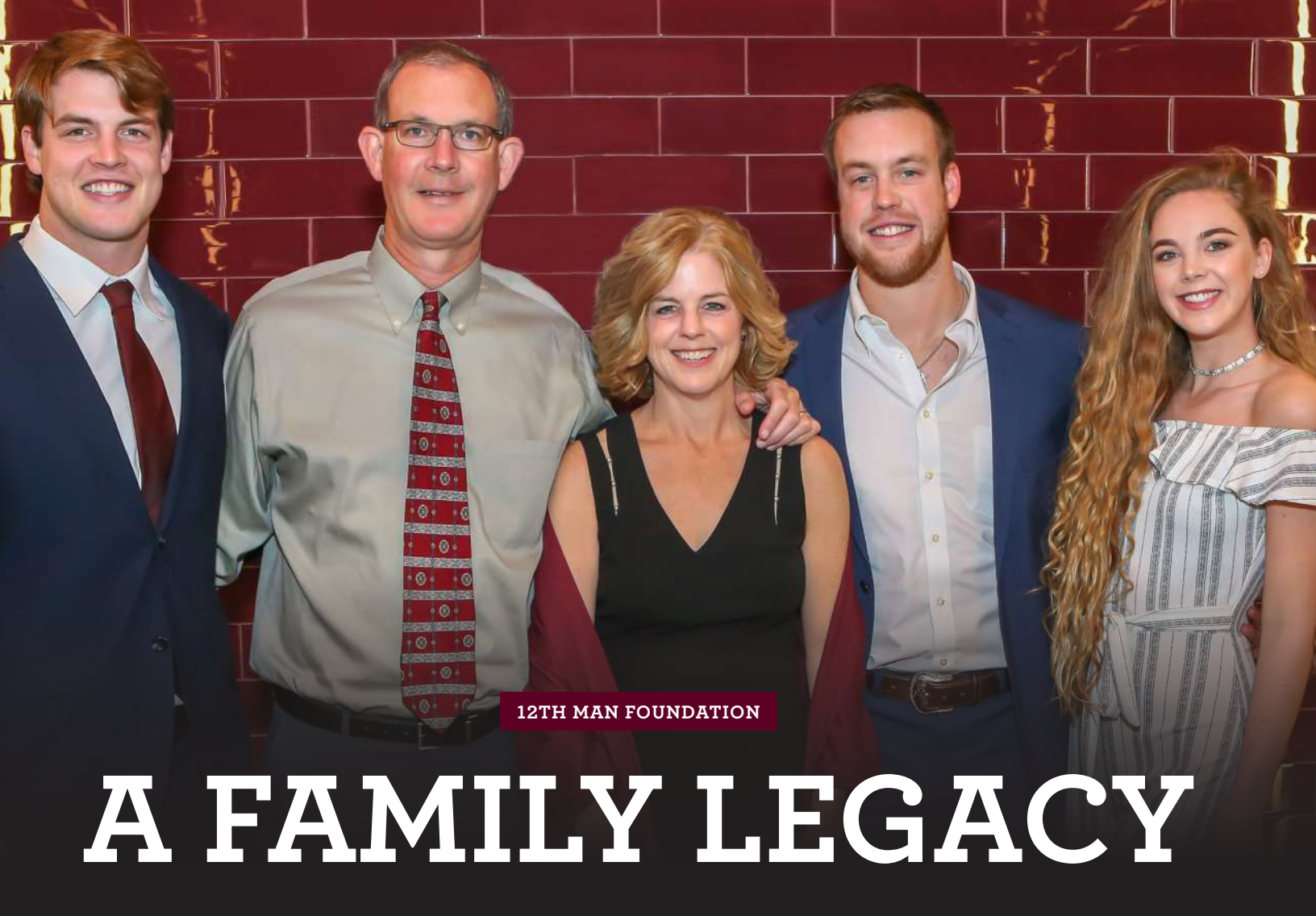
— MARY STOIANA '25



CONGRATULATIONS TEXAS A&M WOMEN'S TENNIS

On May 19, the Texas A&M Women's Tennis team secured the program's first ever national title upon defeating the No. 7 Georgia Bulldogs, 4-1, in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Under the leadership of head coach Mark Weaver '94, the maroon and white brought home Texas A&M's first national title since Men's Indoor Track & Field in 2017. The Aggie Women's Tennis team also claimed its third SEC regular season title in a row after sweeping No. 29 Alabama, 4-0, at the George P. Mitchell '40 Tennis Center in April.





12TH MAN FOUNDATION

A FAMILY LEGACY

One student-athlete scholarship ignites a multigenerational impact

BY CAMRYN GARNER '21

GROWING UP IN THE SMALL TOWN OF POTH, TEXAS, Mike McClure '66 was determined to pursue a college education. When an academic scholarship to Texas A&M turned into an athletic scholarship to play college baseball, Mike made the most of his time on the field, becoming a true Aggie legend.

Mike's achievements at Texas A&M speak volumes. He earned a spot on the 1965 1st Team American Association of College Baseball Coaches "All American Baseball Team" and was named Consensus All Southwest Conference (SWC) Third Base. In the same year, he was honored as the Most Valuable Player and clinched the 1965 SWC Batting Champion title. In 1966, he was inducted into the Texas A&M Athletics Hall of Fame.

Mike's exceptional talent caught the attention of the New York Mets, leading to his selection in

the 1965 MLB Draft. His journey from college to professional baseball began with a scholarship that opened doors to a world of opportunities previously unimaginable.

"I struggle to put it into words, but that scholarship meant everything," Mike said. "It was my opportunity to get started. Texas A&M provided excellent academics and coaching that prepared me for the next step in life."

After earning a degree in civil engineering, Mike established his own land surveying and civil engineering company, now known as McClure & Brown Engineering & Surveying, Inc. He planted his roots in the Bryan-College Station area, enjoying a fulfilling career and personal life alongside Micky, his loving wife of 57 years.

Mike's scholarship transformed his life and

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAMRYN GARNER

paved the way for his children and grandchildren to attend Texas A&M.

In 2015, his grandson, Riley Garner '19, followed in Mike's footsteps by accepting a full-ride scholarship to play football at Texas A&M. This scholarship not only shaped Riley's future but was a gift to his entire family.

"I remember when I received that call," Riley said. "I was in my high school weight room when my coach pulled me into his office with a secretive smile on his face and handed me the phone. It felt like I had won the lottery because it meant I could play the game I loved, earn an education and set the stage for my future."

Riley's journey, sparked by the support of 12th Man Foundation donors, extended far beyond the football field. At Texas A&M, he excelled academically and contributed selflessly as part of an Aggies for Haiti mission trip, where he met his future wife, Macie Kolb '22, an Aggie Soccer student-athlete.



Riley Garner '19 (left) with wife Macie (Kolb) Garner '22

“

**RECEIVING THAT SCHOLARSHIP
OPENED THE DOOR TO A WORLD
OF POSSIBILITIES. IT CHANGED
NOT JUST MY LIFE BUT OUR
ENTIRE FAMILY'S TRAJECTORY.**

- RILEY GARNER '19



Mike McClure '66 (left) and wife Micky McClure (right) with grandson, Riley Garner '19 (middle)



Following his football career, Riley remained in Aggieland to pursue a master's degree in human resource management. Today, he enjoys a successful career in human resources and thrives professionally alongside Macie.

Just as Mike's opportunity opened a door for his grandson, Riley's scholarship helped shape another family member's future.

As Riley's younger sister, his scholarship provided our parents with the financial freedom to support my aspirations for a college degree, a privilege I am endlessly grateful for. It alleviated my own financial burden and set the stage for my journey to where I am today.

Since graduating from Texas A&M in 2021, I have had the honor of serving on the 12th Man

A native of Poth, Texas, Mike McClure (pictured above) was named a member of the 1st Team American Association of College Baseball Coaches "All American Baseball Team" in 1965 and earned Consensus All Southwest Conference Third Base honors. McClure was also the 1965 SWC Batting Champion that same year.

“

OUR FAMILY’S STORY EXEMPLIFIES THE GENERATIONAL IMPACT OF AN ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIP. WHAT STARTED WITH OUR GRANDFATHER CONTINUES TO DEMONSTRATE HOW PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORT THROUGH THE 12TH MAN FOUNDATION CAN SHAPE ENTIRE FAMILY LEGACIES.

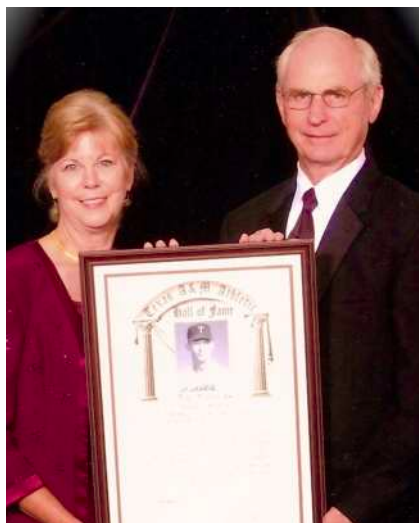
— CAMRYN GARNER '21

Foundation staff, where I continue to develop my career in marketing and communications.

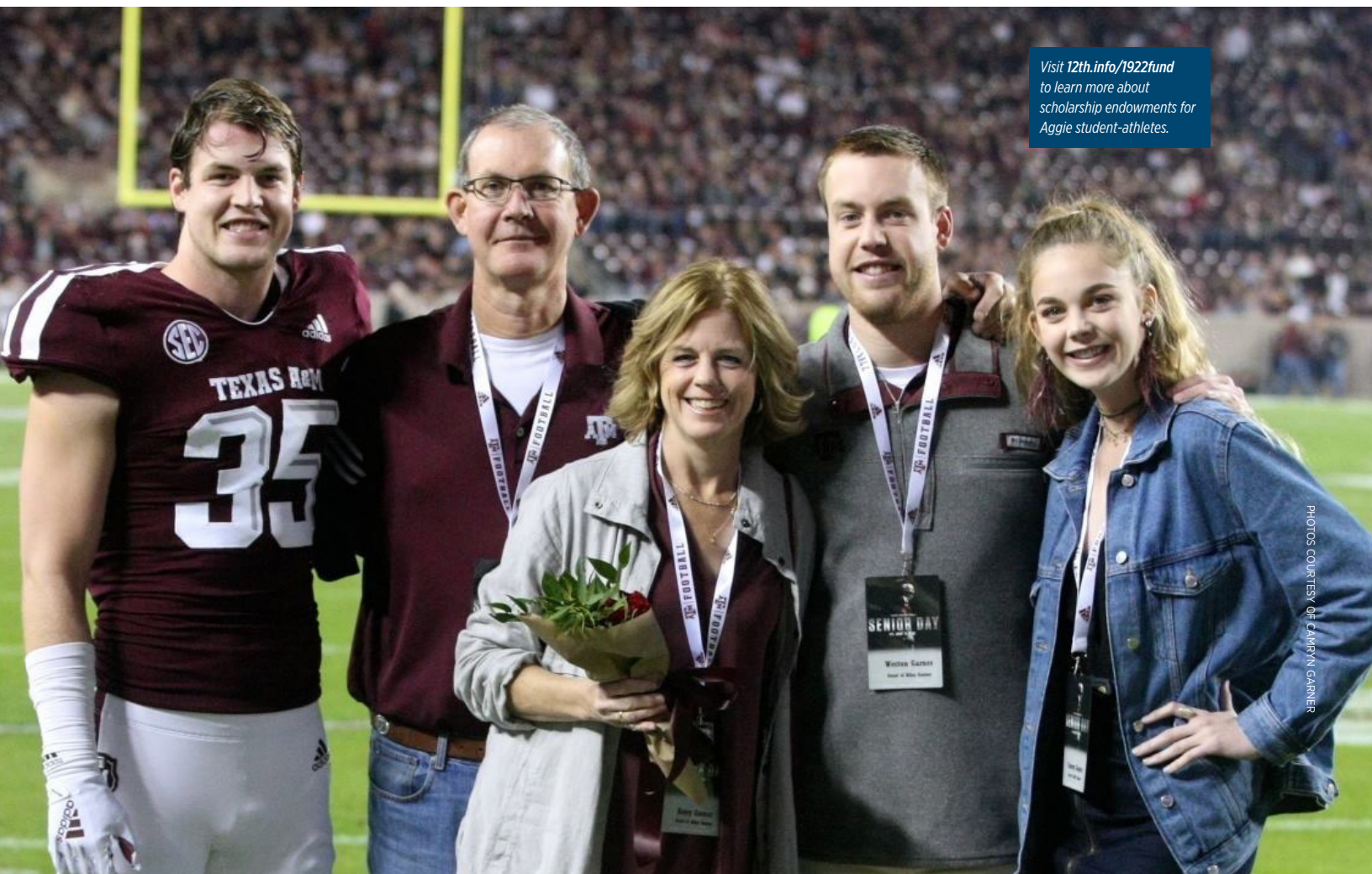
“Receiving that scholarship opened the door to a world of possibilities,” Riley said. “It changed not just my life but our entire family’s trajectory.”

Our family’s story exemplifies the generational impact of an athletic scholarship. What started with our grandfather continues to demonstrate how philanthropic support through the 12th Man Foundation can shape entire family legacies.

On behalf of our family to yours, thank you for your support and for everything you make possible for Texas A&M student-athletes.



The McClure-Garner family story is a testament to the widespread impact of an athletic scholarship. Through the generous support of 12th Man Foundation donors, charitable giving can positively affect generations.



Visit 12th.info/1922fund to learn more about scholarship endowments for Aggie student-athletes.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAMRYN GARNER

CONGRATULATIONS

ADELA CERNOUSEK '25

2024 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S GOLF CHAMPION



With a three-stroke victory on May 20, Texas A&M's Adela Cernousek became the first individual National Champion in Aggie Women's Golf program history. Cernousek, pictured with head coach Gerrod Chadwell, was also named a Women's Golf Coaches Association First Team All-American following her historic junior season.



MIKE ELKO

Bold vision, bright future

BY WILL JOHNSON '01

WHEN MIKE ELKO PLAYED SAFETY AT THE UNIVERSITY

of Pennsylvania, there was no certainty that his future would involve coaching.

In the early 1990s, Elko was managing life as a student-athlete in the Ivy League — the nation's most prestigious collection of academic institutions.

He had business aspirations when arriving on campus. At Penn, that did not mean your typical, everyday business. It meant the Wharton School — as in the world's oldest, and one of its most famed business schools.

"I took economics early in my academic career," Elko recalled with a grin. "Everything in the Wharton School was graded on a bell curve. I got my first mid-term back and I got an 88."

One might think that is quite impressive.

"It was a C," Elko said.

Some of the harsh realities of the Ivy League may have started to sink in.

"I remember thinking to myself two things," Elko said with a smile as visible as it was before. "One, Wharton is not for me. Two, I really do not need to be told I am not as smart as all these kids around me. I could have told you that myself. But thank you for the reminder that I am a little bit over my head at this place."

The Aggies' head football coach relayed the story with plenty of laughter. After all, he has a sense of humor and some self-awareness. But make no mistake — Elko earned his way to, and a degree from, the University of Pennsylvania.

Elko admits that his time as a student-athlete was "overwhelming."

"I did well in school and that is how I got to Penn," he said, "but certainly that is another level of academic caliber when you are in those classrooms."

A hard-nosed football player from New Jersey, Elko was more comfortable on the gridiron than





A native of South Brunswick, New Jersey, Elko's coaching career began at Stony Brook University, where he coached linebackers. He served as Aggie Football's defensive coordinator and safeties coach from 2018-21. During those four seasons, the Aggies never finished outside the top 35 nationally in total defense. In 2021, A&M ranked No. 14 in total defense and third in scoring defense.

in a lecture hall.

"It certainly was a challenge staying on top of your books and staying on top of your school," he recalled. "Especially for a kid who was probably more of a gym rat than a scholar."

Though the business school was not for him, coaching at the school known for the Wrecking Crew and 12th Man was a perfect match. In a very similar fashion to his student-athlete career, Elko worked his way up to that first opportunity in Aggieland.

His early stops as a coach included Stony Brook and a grad assistant role back at Penn. Then came a position that might make some pause when reading through his bio. In 2001, Elko became the defensive coordinator at the United States Merchant Marines Academy (USMMA).

"It is the first place my wife moved to with me," Elko said. "That was her first experience of coaching."

Michelle Elko is also a Penn graduate. The couple met there when she was a freshman.

Michelle worked as a pediatric nurse while Mike was leading the USMMA defense. She was every bit as busy as her husband in those days.

"I did not see him a whole lot," Michelle said. "He was working 12-hour days coaching, and I was

working 12-hour nights as a nurse. We were like two ships passing in the night."

The academy, located on Long Island, was indeed a long way from a place like Texas A&M.

"I was the breadwinner," Michelle said with a laugh. "I told the kids, 'Mom is making the money!'"

Their whirlwind together in the college football world had begun. For Mike, learning and earning his way up was still the mode of operation.

"I was thrust into that role at such a young age," he said. "I probably did not completely know what I was doing, but I tried to give those kids the very best I could."

Over the next seven years, Elko's coaching career included roles at Fordham, Richmond and Hofstra — all FCS schools. At that level, Elko notes that there is not always the big-time player who can erase a talent gap or scheme problem by getting 15 tackles a game. It is even more important to put players in the right position as a coach.

"It challenges your ability to think," Elko said. "When you coach at a place like that, the puzzle is a little more challenging to solve. I think it makes you look at the game a little bit differently."

What Elko picked up then, certainly helps him now.

"Coming up the way I did, I think I have learned

how to maximize people,” Elko said. “When you get up to the SEC at a place like Texas A&M, and you are dealing with kids who are supremely gifted, they can make things happen. You are coaching them through the finer points of it. Having the mindset of ‘how do I maximize him’ creates what we were able to create on defense the last time I was here.”

Before becoming defensive coordinator at A&M in 2018, Elko served in the same role for one season at Notre Dame. His time with the Aggies and the Fighting Irish are what he calls his introduction to “elite level” college football.

During his four seasons as a coordinator, the Aggies never finished outside the top 35 nationally in total defense. In 2021, A&M ranked No. 14 in total defense and third in scoring defense. That success led him to his first head coaching position at Duke University.

In Durham, North Carolina, Elko inherited a program that went 5-18 in the two seasons prior to his arrival. The Blue Devils improved to 16-9 in Elko’s two years as head coach.

Just like he has done during his entire football career, Elko earned his next opportunity — this time to lead the A&M program.

“When you are afar and you do not grow up in Texas, what you see is this big-time football program that has had success over the years and obviously has this tremendous fan base,” he said. “What you do not know until you get here is what the true passion is really like and what the tradition is really like.”

One of his earliest Aggie lessons came during his first year on campus in 2018.

“I can still remember to this day walking out to my first Midnight Yell the night before we played Clemson,” Elko said. “I was in complete amazement of what was happening in that stadium.”

Now back in Aggieland as head coach, he understands Texas A&M.



“
**COMING UP THE WAY I DID, I
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— MIKE ELKO

“

WE ARE GOING TO HAVE A LOT OF PASSION ABOUT HOW WE REPRESENT THIS UNIVERSITY. THEY ARE GOING TO SEE A TEAM THAT IS GOING TO GO OUT AND MAXIMIZE WHO THEY ARE. THAT IS WHAT THIS PROGRAM WILL BE ABOUT MOVING FORWARD.

— MIKE ELKO

Elko is married to the former Michelle Madison, and they have three children: Michael, Andrew and Kaitlyn. The couple met during Michelle's freshman year at the University of Pennsylvania, and they recently celebrated their 22nd wedding anniversary.

“It is the people that have an undying loyalty to this place,” he said.

Throughout their experiences in college football, the Elkos have always put family first and remained focused on the main things.

“People that know me know I only do two things — football and family,” Elko said. “I think I have maybe had one two-day guy trip in my whole life.”

Michelle confirms that is who her husband is.

“He is the same guy I met at Penn,” she said. “Neither of us came from much, and we do not forget that. We are still a sweatpants and hoodie family.”

The Elkos may have come from humble beginnings, but as two Ivy League graduates, they have achieved considerable success. The couple's return to Aggieland fills them with excitement, as their initial experience at A&M left a profound impact on their lives.

“We love all of it,” Michelle said. “From Midnight Yell to gameday. Every game, I would tear up just overwhelmed that my husband was coaching at a place like this.”

Now in charge of more than just defense, Mike Elko is ready to build Texas A&M much like he built his own career.

“I think Aggie fans need to get excited that they are going to have a team that represents who they are and who they want to be,” Elko said. “We are going to be a blue-collar group. We are going to have tremendous work ethic, tremendous toughness and tremendous grit about how we play the game of football.”

At a university that is not afraid to roll up its sleeves, Elko's plan will fit well with the Aggie values and standards.

“We are going to have a lot of passion about how we represent this university,” he said. “They are going to see a team that is going to go out and maximize who they are. That is what this program will be about moving forward.”

Aggies may very well like the journey that Elko leads them on as head football coach. They can certainly appreciate the path he took to get here.

After all, he certainly earned it.



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AGGIELAND'S NIL AGE

Understanding the numerous ways to support name, image and likeness opportunities for Texas A&M student-athletes

BY IVY ROBINSON '20



SUPPORTERS OF COLLEGE ATHLETICS PROGRAMS ARE BEING CALLED upon to help meet name, image and likeness (NIL) opportunity demand, while recognizing the influence NIL has on student-athlete success and competitive advantage.

In Aggieland, the infrastructure and support system are in place to cement Texas A&M as a leader within the NIL landscape. Today, there are three avenues for supporters to help achieve that goal.

TEXAS AGGIES UNITED

Supporters can help provide NIL opportunities for Aggie student-athletes through Texas Aggies United — the official NIL partner of Texas A&M Athletics. Powered by TexAgs, the organization unified the various Texas A&M NIL ventures to maximize opportunities for Texas A&M student-athletes while offering unique benefits and experiences for its supporters.

A familiar face at A&M — former head men's golf coach J.T. Higgins — is leading the charge as the organization's president.

"Texas Aggies United is committed to making a positive impact on our athletes and athletics department," Higgins said. "Just as we have done in upgrading facilities, moving to the best conference, hiring the best coaches and recruiting at the highest levels, I know we are up to this challenge. We will put together the absolute best

NIL program in the country."

Higgins has witnessed firsthand the success NIL opportunities create for Aggie student-athletes.

"One of the best things I have seen come out of NIL is for our student-athletes who have a partial scholarship or no scholarship at all," Higgins said. "The money from NIL helps cover the costs of their education, pay for room and board and relieves some of the financial pressure on their families.

"There are also many stories of athletes who go pro too early, do not make it and end up with little or no money and no college degree to fall back on. NIL gives them the opportunity to make decisions about their future that come from an informed, logical position rather than an impulsive, right now mindset."

Since its launch in September 2023, Texas Aggies United has partnered with more than 100 Aggie student-athletes across various sports.

Another well-known name in Aggieland and a former Texas A&M football standout Hunter Goodwin '96 is serving as an advisor of the Texas Aggies United Board of Directors.

"Texas Aggies United pursues our own sponsorship opportunities for all our licensed athletes, as well as partners with any marketing agency or direct sponsor who has interest in utilizing

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ONE OF THE BEST THINGS I HAVE SEEN COME OUT OF NIL IS FOR OUR STUDENT-ATHLETES WHO HAVE A PARTIAL SCHOLARSHIP OR NO SCHOLARSHIP AT ALL. THE MONEY FROM NIL HELPS COVER THE COSTS OF THEIR EDUCATION, PAY FOR ROOM AND BOARD AND RELIEVES SOME OF THE FINANCIAL PRESSURE ON THEIR FAMILIES.

— J.T. HIGGINS



As the world of college athletics continues to evolve, the infrastructure and support system are in place to cement Texas A&M as a leader within the NIL landscape. Today, there are three avenues for supporters to help achieve that goal: Texas Aggies United, AMPLIFY NIL and the 12th Man Foundation's Annual Fund.

the NIL of any of our athletes,” Goodwin said.

Goodwin’s experiences from five years as a college athlete, nine years in the NFL, three years as an active player union representative and post-NFL career involvement with the NFL Players Association, undeniably offers invaluable knowledge to the NIL conversation.

“I believe my wealth of relevant knowledge and experience allows me to bring a productive and contributory perspective to ongoing Texas Aggies United discussions as we do our best to effectively manage the current difficult, ever-changing and inefficient NIL landscape,” Goodwin said. “College sports are the front door to the Texas A&M University brand, and we need to ensure that front door remains intact, high-functioning and the best-in-class.”

Monthly and yearly contributions to Texas Aggies United can be directed to a specific sport, and membership benefits include exclusive student-athlete content, autograph sessions, meet and greets, exclusive gameday experiences and more. Businesses can also gain valuable marketing exposure by becoming a Texas Aggies United Corporate Partner.

AMPLIFY NIL

Texas A&M Athletics established the AMPLIFY NIL program to ensure Aggie student-athletes have an elite level of resources and support for navigating today’s NIL environment. Specifically designed to help student-athletes build and promote their personal brands, AMPLIFY NIL equips Texas A&M student-athletes with the necessary education, tools and training to help them successfully engage in and manage their personal NIL opportunities.

Additionally, supporters who desire to engage with student-athletes directly can do so through the AMPLIFY Local Exchange, a student-athlete NIL registry designed for businesses and individuals seeking to connect with specific Aggie student-athletes. The exchange allows registered individuals and businesses to initiate conversations with Texas A&M student-athletes for NIL deal discussions.

Through AMPLIFY NIL, student-athletes have access to training on topics like negotiation, digital content creation, financial literacy, networking, public speaking, social media etiquette, tax education and much more. The Adam C. Sinn ’00 Academic & Wellness Center at the Graham Athletic Complex, funded through



All three avenues of Texas A&M NIL support contribute to a common goal — to remain an elite competitor in collegiate athletics by providing unparalleled opportunities for Aggie student-athletes. To learn more and give today, visit 12th.info/supportNIL or scan the QR code below.



the Centennial Campaign, will contain offices, recording rooms and other interactive spaces dedicated to NIL initiatives.

12TH MAN FOUNDATION ANNUAL FUND

Supporters who want to help provide opportunities for Aggie student-athletes while receiving 12th Man Foundation membership benefits such as priority points and a tax receipt can do so by making a monthly, annual or one-time contribution to the 12th Man Foundation's Annual Fund.

These gifts are used to help provide Aggie student-athletes with a wide range of resources including academic support, athletic training, sports medicine and nutrition. They also fund the 12th Man Foundation's operating expenses including its marketing efforts to promote the charitable purposes of its mission.

Additional contributions allow the 12th Man Foundation to continue expanding its outreach through its engagement with marketing agencies. These partnerships coordinate the acquisition of current Aggie student-athlete talent to actively help the 12th Man Foundation further its reach, impact and mission via event appearances, promotional advertisements, title sponsorships and in-venue signage at athletic events.

Unrestricted Annual Fund contributions may not be directed to a specific area and have always supported the organization's marketing efforts.

"One of the Annual Fund's various uses is to help the 12th Man Foundation promote its mission to Aggies everywhere, and the best messengers for that mission are current Aggie student-athletes," said Michael Solomon '04, senior vice president of annual fund and donor services. "With the onset of NIL, and through our work with outside marketing agencies, we are now able to create NIL opportunities for student-athletes that help build our

membership base and support Texas A&M Athletics, so it is a win-win for everyone."

ONE COMMON GOAL

All avenues of Texas A&M NIL support contribute to a common goal — to remain an elite competitor in college athletics by providing unparalleled opportunities for Aggie student-athletes.

"Texas A&M has always provided the maximum opportunity for our student-athletes to succeed in the classroom and on the playing field," said Trev Alberts, director of athletics. "Name, image and likeness is the latest opportunity for us to provide maximum support for our student-athletes, and as we navigate the dynamic landscape with NIL, we are proud to work with our partners at Texas Aggies United and the 12th Man Foundation."

For Texas A&M to be a leader in NIL, the 12th Man is called upon to do what the 12th Man does best — unite, stand and loyally support Aggie student-athletes to help them reach their fullest potential.

"The student-athlete opportunities presented at Texas A&M are second to none," said Mike Elko, head coach of Aggie Football. "To remain competitive in today's dynamic world of college athletics, it is imperative we recognize the importance of name, image and likeness opportunities and support those initiatives for our current Aggie athletes."

"NIL stands as a critical component for competitive viability in major college athletics," said Travis Dabney '96, 12th Man Foundation president and CEO. "Embracing these changes is crucial to ensuring the continued success and advancement of Texas A&M's athletic programs."

Visit 12th.info/supportNIL to learn more and make your impact on NIL opportunities for Aggie student-athletes today.

PHIL LEFEVRE

12th Man Foundation's Director of Business Intelligence

BY MEGAN STEINBERG '25



ABOUT PHIL

- » FROM THE WOODLANDS
- » JOINED THE 12TH MAN FOUNDATION STAFF IN 2013
- » FAVORITE AGGIE SPORTS ARE FOOTBALL AND SOCCER
- » ENJOYS TAKING LONG HIKES WITH HIS DOG
- » HE AND HIS WIFE, MCKENSIE, RECENTLY BECAME FIRST-TIME PARENTS TO THEIR SON, LUKE

A DAY OF WORK AT THE 12TH MAN FOUNDATION LOOKS

different for everyone in the office, yet all staff members are united by diligence and loyalty to the organization's mission. Phil LeFevre is one of those hardworking individuals who upholds the 12th Man Foundation's core values.

A native of The Woodlands, Phil found his way to College Station in 2011 after a close friend encouraged him to make the move. The decision was pivotal, as it eventually led to his discovery of a part-time job with the 12th Man Foundation call center in 2013. Phil applied and was hired for the position — an opportunity that became the springboard to a successful career within the organization.

Following his time in the call center, Phil desired to expand his skill set and accepted an internship role within the annual programs department. The internship proved to be a good opportunity and led to a full-time role as manager of annual programs.

Today, he proudly serves as director of business intelligence with primary responsibilities including the management of the season ticket seat selection process and data analysis.

"Working with all of the data is like a puzzle to me," Phil said. "How we get X from Y — I love putting the puzzle pieces together and making it fit."

One of his favorite things about the job is being able to help donors resolve potential ticket scanning issues on Aggie Football gamedays.

"Knowing that I can actually solve the problem for them, and seeing the relief on their face afterward, is what I enjoy," Phil said.

"Phil's ability to connect with the donor experience ensures a customer-first mindset in approaching processes, making him an integral member of our organization," said Katelyn Buys '14, vice president of operations.

A step into Phil's office will reveal the immense pride he has for the 12th Man Foundation and Texas A&M Athletics. In fact, a concrete memento of a pre-redeveloped Kyle Field sits on his desk as a reminder of his favorite place to be in College Station.

On the very memorable night of Nov. 24, 2018, Phil made his way back to his office when it appeared to be a certain loss for Aggie Football

against LSU. Kellen Mond had just thrown an interception in an effort to tie the game with 53 yards to go and 30 seconds left on the clock. When Phil returned to his office, he turned on the television just in time to see the interception call had been reversed.

As fans poured out of Kyle Field, unaware of the reversed call, many passed by Phil's office window. Knowing that stadium re-entry is prohibited in the SEC, he jumped at the opportunity to help.

"I went down the entire hallway, turned on every office TV and opened the blinds so people could watch the game," Phil said. "There were about 300 people gathered around our office windows watching, and they were able to see the Aggies take home the seven-overtime victory that night."

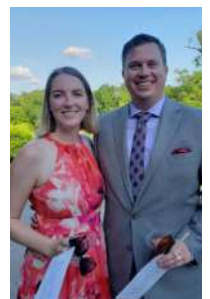
Phil's adaptable and roll-with-the-punches nature makes an impression on everyone he meets. This is best revealed by going along with his nickname "Lefty," coined by Travis Dabney '96, 12th Man Foundation president and CEO.

Dabney deemed the moniker because right-handed Phil resembles and shares a name with the left-handed professional golfer, Phil Mickelson.

"I embraced the nickname," Phil said with a laugh. "It just adds to the unique culture of working at the 12th Man Foundation."

"Since his very first day as a student worker, Phil has continued to be a catch-all contributor and an extremely dedicated employee," Dabney said. "He is a tremendous team member and valuable asset to our organization."

The next time season ticket renewals launch or seat selection begins, take a moment to appreciate the behind-the-scenes contributions of the one and only, Lefty.



DERRICK ROLAND '10

Former A&M Men's Basketball student-athlete overcomes harrowing injury to find abundant opportunity

BY WILL JOHNSON '01

DERRICK ROLAND'S DECISION TO COME TO TEXAS A&M was an easy one. He liked everything he saw in Aggieland during the recruiting process, and he knew the program was on the rise.

Roland definitely made the right call as he helped the Aggies reach unprecedented heights including four straight NCAA Tournament appearances from 2006 to 2010.

"It was a beautiful time," Roland recalled. "A bunch of tough guys. A bunch of disciplined guys. A bunch of guys we called 'no-nonsense guys.'"

His teammates included Acie Law IV '07, Dominique Kirk '08 and Donald Sloan '10, who Roland played with at Seagoville High School near Dallas before they attended A&M together.

Nights at Reed Arena became electric. The 12th Man experienced things they never had before, such as a Sweet Sixteen appearance in 2007 followed by a NIT Season Tip-Off championship in New York City the next season. Roland's Aggies never missed the Big Dance when March rolled around.

Roland smiled as he remembered "the NCAA appearances, the bus rides and the camaraderie with his teammates."

When Roland first arrived to Texas A&M, the Aggie Men's Basketball program was led by Billy Gillispie. He then played his final three years with Mark Turgeon at the helm.

"There was a huge transition," Roland said. "Billy

is a tough, no-nonsense type of guy. He demanded things a certain way. If he did not get those things, he would move forward with his plan with you or without you."

The success continued through the coaching change, but the Aggies achieved their goals in much different ways.

"Turgeon was a guy who allowed you to make more mistakes and learn on the fly," Roland said. "I think guys loved that about Mark."

Through the wins, the postseason competition and overall success, there is still a very unfortunate side to Roland's tenure as an Aggie Basketball player. It came just three days before Christmas in 2009 during Roland's senior season.

In a highly touted matchup of two power programs, A&M was in Seattle facing the Washington Huskies. The anticipation for this tilt could be felt throughout the arena, but the scene could only be described as "horrific" early in the second half when Roland suffered a broken leg after landing on the floor awkwardly.

It was the kind of injury that television cameras would not show — so gruesome that much of the crowd turned to face away from Roland as he lay in agonizing pain on the court.

Even before the play was whistled to stop on the other end, Turgeon had already sprinted on to the court to provide whatever comfort was possible.

In times like these, most would focus on the



“

A LOT OF UNEXPLAINABLE THINGS HAPPENED THAT NIGHT. THE THINGS I AM BLESSED WITH TODAY ARE ALL BECAUSE OF THAT NIGHT.

— DERRICK ROLAND '10

physical pain Roland had to deal with. But that was only the beginning. The mental toll would extend far beyond a single winter's night in Seattle.

“It was definitely the toughest time of my life,” he said.

Roland would spend Christmas Day and beyond in a hospital in the Pacific Northwest. Far from home, far from Aggieland and far from his teammates.

“It was tough getting to a day-to-day routine mentally,” Roland said. “The mental side of it, I was not prepared for. There were a lot of long nights where I could not sleep just constantly thinking about what was next.”

Despite being confined to a hospital bed 1,500 miles away from Aggieland, Roland received tremendous support from fellow Aggies who offered words of encouragement.

“He received so many e-mails they had to shut down the system,” Turgeon said.

As Roland's broken tibia and fibula healed, the uncertainty of his future still provided almost unbearable agony. Through it all, he planned to come back to Texas A&M to play the next season. Yet a hurdle had to be cleared.

The basketball program had asked the NCAA to grant Roland a medical redshirt. The problem being

at the time of the injury, he was playing in his 12th game of the season.

“I believe the rule was if you played 10 games, you did not qualify,” Roland said. “They denied me once and after that we appealed.”

To go through the physical and mental side of the injury and not be given another chance would be the real pain.

“The NCAA decision is something that played a role in my mental health, knowing that the organization had my career in its hands,” Roland said.

In the appeal, Texas A&M enlisted some conference foes to help give a full understanding of how much Roland had earned the right to be back on the floor with the Aggies for the 2010-11 season.

“We got signatures from all the Big 12 coaches stating that it would not be a competitive advantage if I returned for a fifth year,” Roland said. “All those coaches were on board with it, and the NCAA denied me once again.”

To fight through the pain, get back up after a horrific injury and yet still have the opportunity to return taken away from him, was far more painful than the broken leg.

“Being denied was really hard to take on,” Roland said. “They decided to not let me return, and it was a blow to my professional career.”

Roland would not play for Texas A&M again. To make matters worse, the timing of the NCAA's decision impacted where he could play beyond A&M.

“The NBA Draft had taken place,” Roland said. “Players worked out for European teams as well as NBA teams. The workouts and all those things were done, and I could not do anything because I was

After suffering a grueling leg injury during a matchup against the Washington Huskies, Roland was forced to spend Christmas Day and beyond at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle. The freak accident happened in front of a sellout crowd at the Hec Edmundson Pavilion.



TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS / GLEN JOHNSON (BOTTOM LEFT), WADE BARKER (BOTTOM RIGHT)



Roland achieved a notable milestone in August 2023 by completing his degree in agricultural leadership and development from Texas A&M. In October 2023, he accepted an assistant coach position at Chadron State College in Nebraska.

waiting on the decision from the NCAA.”

In what should have been either his final year at A&M or his rookie season as a professional, Roland had no team at all.

However, the process brought a new strength to Roland. He developed a mental toughness that carried him through the adversity. His determination to return to the court would not be denied.

Roland eventually earned opportunities with the Houston Rockets D-League team and the Rio Grande Valley Vipers in the NBA G League before playing seven seasons of professional basketball on foreign soil in Argentina, England and Latvia.

He is still on the court today, although in a new capacity. Roland spent three years as an assistant coach at Grace Prep Academy in Fort Worth, helping guide the school to a 4A State Championship in 2022. In October 2023, he moved to the collegiate ranks, accepting a job as an assistant coach at Chadron State College in Nebraska.

Roland has learned some valuable lessons on and off the basketball court. Now, he gets to impart that wisdom to others.

“I am paying it forward,” he said. “As an athlete,

adversity is always going to strike. It is going to strike in different forms, and it is going to be unfamiliar to you. Being able to adjust, reset your own internal clock and take on challenges the right way, is a huge thing. I think my story is a great example of that.”

Now a husband and father, Roland achieved a notable milestone in August 2023 by earning his degree in agricultural leadership and development from Texas A&M. This accomplishment is particularly significant considering the impact of his injury during his senior year at A&M.

“I was fortunate to have the opportunity to go back and finish things up,” he said of completing his degree more than a decade after leaving Aggieland to pursue his basketball dreams. “I went back and got it done.”

Roland’s perseverance and determination to succeed on and off the court can all be traced back to that fateful night in Seattle.

“A lot of unexplainable things happened that night,” he said. “The things I am blessed with today are all because of that night.”

TRISHA FORD

How the Aggie Softball head coach found her way to Texas A&M

BY MATT SIMON '98

THROUGH THE EYES OF SPECTATORS, TRISHA FORD'S first season at Texas A&M exceeded preseason expectations by quite a bit.

Thirty-five wins along with a top-seven league finish and a lot of “first time since” moments all generated a lot of positive momentum at Davis Diamond.

The feisty and uber-competitive leader of the Aggie Softball program was not satisfied.

“I always think we can beat anybody,” Ford said with a smile.

Now with an even more successful year two under her belt, Ford has proven that the future of Aggie Softball is exceedingly bright.

“We are going to play the game at the heart and the right way,” Ford said. “We are going to play with grit, tenacity and force. I want a highly-competitive, on-the-field softball product that plays the game with energy and never gives up the fight.

“When you look at all the things Texas A&M and its core values, that is what I want Aggie Softball to be about.”

The oldest of three children, Ford grew up in Fremont, California and was a star softball player at St. Mary's College in nearby Moraga. Once finished playing, coaching was not on her radar.

“I was going to be a research lawyer, and then I transitioned into pursuing a teaching credential,” Ford said. “I did that my fifth year and helped out as a student coach that season.”

In a twist of fate, a full-time position opened up on an interim basis with the Gaels' staff, and Ford took it — but not for the reason you may think.

“I was just trying to get paid and figure out how to pay the rent,” Ford said with a laugh. “I did that so I could finish my teaching credential and get going on that. It just kind of went from there.”

Soon thereafter, Ford was named interim coach and then head coach in 2002. Just a few years after graduating, she was running her first softball program.

Next came a nine-year stint as an assistant at Stanford where Ford learned how to run a program while experiencing tremendous success in one of the nation's toughest softball leagues.

“John Rittman really took a chance on me,” Ford said. “I was super young and very green, but he really taught me a lot and how to run a program. I learned so much from him.”

Following the 2012 season, Ford and her husband, Eddie (also a former student-athlete at St. Mary's) had one child with another on the way. With the high cost of living in the Bay Area at the time, they decided it was best for their family to start looking around. Fresno State, one of the top mid-major programs in the sport, had an opening and was a place Ford thought she could recruit to — and thus win.

And win she did.

The Bulldogs won 143 games in Ford's four seasons, never finishing worse than second in the Mountain West Conference. Following the success, the Arizona State Sun Devils came calling.

“I was not really looking to be a head coach, but I told Eddie I just feel like it is all in God's plan,” Ford said. “I am a big believer in that.”



“

I JUST FEEL LIKE THIS IS A VERY MAGICAL PLACE. YOU DO NOT REALLY UNDERSTAND IT UNTIL YOU ARE A PART OF IT. I JUST FEEL VERY LUCKY THAT MY PATH HAS LED ME HERE.

— TRISHA FORD

Since her hiring, Ford has elevated the Aggie Softball program to elite heights. Texas A&M ranked third in the SEC in 2024 — its highest finish since joining the league — and advanced to its first NCAA Super Regional since 2018 after winning its regional at Davis Diamond as a national No. 16 seed.

Again, success followed Ford with a 48-win season in year two that culminated with the program's first Women's College World Series trip in five years. After navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, Ford's 2022 team smashed their way through a brutal Pac-12 schedule, winning 20 league games en route to the Sun Devils' third-ever conference title.

Very soon after that victory, the phone rang. This time, Texas A&M was on the other end.

"Trisha was on our radar because of her success in the Pac-12," said Jeff Toole, Texas A&M senior associate athletics director and sport administrator for softball. "She is extraordinarily competitive and wants to be the best softball coach in the country."

"When she came to visit it was obvious that she was a fit. Texas A&M has a blue-collar history, and Trisha has a blue-collar background. We knew she would be comfortable and fit in here and turn us in to a really good program."

Year one saw the Aggies make a regional final and notch their best overall season since 2018. Year two brought a revamped roster that included returning veteran leaders, key impact transfers and a talented freshman class. The Aggies earned a 16-seed in the 2024 NCAA Division I Softball Tournament, advancing to super regionals and completing the

season scoring the second-most runs in program history (371).

Off the field, the Ford family has fallen in love with Aggieland, Texas A&M and everything that local residents know make their home so special.

"I did not fully understand it until now, after living through it the past two years," Ford said. "I have not met a mean soul. People are just polite here. The more that I get into the community, the more that my kids become part of the community. They have given us so much. The 12th Man Foundation donors have been great."

"I just feel like this is a very magical place. You do not really understand it until you are a part of it. I just feel very lucky that my path has led me here."



TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS / EVAN PLAT (TOP & BOTTOM LEFT), ADEN SHERTZER (BOTTOM RIGHT)



Membership Levels & Benefits

as of Jan. 1, 2024

	Associate \$25+	Young Alumni* \$50+	12th Man \$150+	MVP \$750+	MVP Gold \$2,500+	All-American \$10,000+	Champions Council \$50,000+	Diamond Champions Council \$1,000,000+
	1 YEAR	1 YEAR	1 YEAR	1 YEAR	1 YEAR	1 YEAR*	5 YEARS	LIFETIME
Membership Card	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12th Man Foundation Window Decal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Subscription to Athletics Update Emails	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4 Priority Points Per \$100 Donation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Years of Consecutive Giving Priority Points	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to Donor Ticket Presales [§]		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Subscription to 12th Man Magazine		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bonus Priority Points Per Year [‡]			5 POINTS	10 POINTS	15 POINTS	20 POINTS	25 POINTS	25 POINTS
Exclusive Window Decal				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Invitation to Tailgate at Home Football Games [¶]				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Speaker Series Events [¶]				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Invitation to Philanthropic Event [¶]				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
MVP Gold Reception [¶]					✓	✓	✓	✓
Basketball and Baseball Cocktail Receptions [¶]						✓	✓	✓
Regional Events						✓	✓	✓
Sideline Saturdays							✓	✓
Champions Council Weekend							✓	✓
Diamond Champions Council Exclusive Experience								✓
	Seat Contributions & Philanthropic Gifts*			Philanthropic Gifts Only				

*A&M graduates within the past 12 years are eligible | †All-American membership spans from the date of the commitment to December 31 of the following calendar year
[§]Donor Ticket Presale access subject to compliance with 12th Man Foundation Ticket Resale Policy | [¶]Required seat contributions as well as sport or program-specific gifts (booster clubs, support groups, spirit groups, etc.) do not qualify for bonus priority points | [‡]Registration fees may apply | [¶]All-American donors are invited to one (1) basketball reception and one (1) baseball reception per season | [¶]Each account will receive two (2) complimentary admissions to the event.

Ways to Support Texas A&M Athletics

ANNUAL FUND

Your contribution to the Annual Fund keeps the 12th Man Foundation operating at its greatest potential and helps make it possible for Texas A&M Athletics to support Aggie student-athletes with resources such as academic support, sports medicine, mental health services, marketing opportunities and elite coaches.

CAPITAL GIFTS

By making a capital gift, you can help ensure Texas A&M has the nation's best athletic facilities. These contributions are vital for the sustained success of Texas A&M Athletics and impact Aggie student-athletes well beyond their time on campus.

1922 FUND SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWMENT

You can make an indelible impact on Texas A&M Athletics by endowing a student-athlete scholarship through the 1922 Fund. A gift to the 1922 Fund helps provide opportunities for Aggie student-athletes to excel on the field, in the classroom and in the community.

SPORT-SPECIFIC EXCELLENCE FUNDS

Your gift to an excellence fund helps provide the necessary flexibility for Texas A&M Athletics leadership to respond to needs in a timely manner and give coaches and student-athletes every advantage to compete at the highest level.

SAM THORNTON '19

Former A&M Men's Swimming & Diving student-athlete launches career in athletics communications

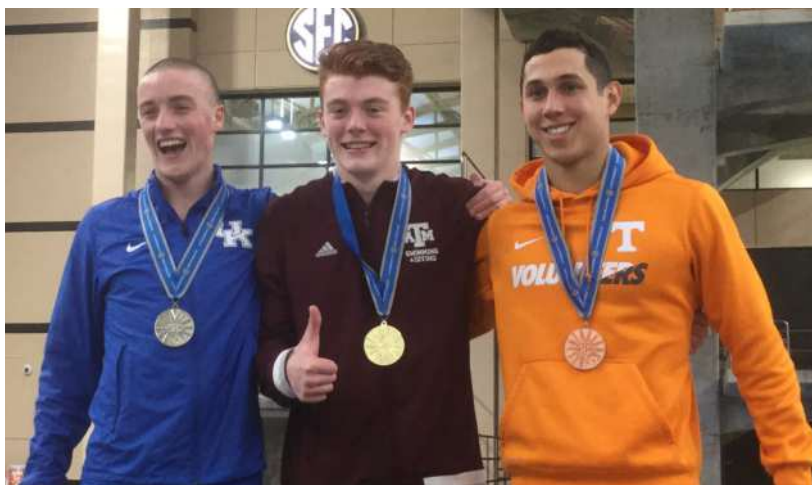
BY CARLEE RICHARDSON '25

MANY PEOPLE HEAR THE WORD “SCHOLARSHIP” AND think about the payment for an education, but a scholarship holds much more value than just its monetary worth. For student-athletes, this holds true not only during the time of competition, but for a lifetime after graduation. The investment into another becomes an opportunity, a door opened and a life changed — something Sam Thornton '19 experienced firsthand.

Being 4,700 miles away from home became the new normal for Thornton, after he signed his offer to dive for the Texas A&M Swimming & Diving team in 2015. A native of Bradford, England, Thornton experienced no shortage of opportunities upon his arrival to Aggieland. After becoming a four-year letter winner and six-time All-American diver for Texas A&M, Thornton now works for Aggie Athletics as an assistant director for athletics communications, covering volleyball, women's tennis and track and field.

Finding his way to the heart of Aggieland was no easy task. In fact, Thornton did not begin his recruitment process until he was 17.

“I had no idea what conferences or divisions were,” Thornton said. “But when I turned 17, I





During his senior year at Texas A&M (2018-19), Thornton earned the silver medal with a lifetime best score of 421.40 in the SEC Championships, made Second Team All-SEC in the 1M dive and placed second in the one-meter springboard with a 12-dive score of 775.40, earning an NCAA Championship berth.

started digging my teeth into research. I made a video my junior year of some of my diving and asked all of my American friends to share it.”

After receiving 17 Division I offers, Thornton narrowed his decision down to five schools: Texas A&M, Texas, Kentucky, Florida State and Hawaii.

“Funny enough, Texas A&M was actually the only school that I reached out to myself,” Thornton said. “In making my final decision, I wanted to go somewhere that also offered a valuable degree. So, I signed my offer to A&M sight unseen. I originally thought that Texas would be like the Arizona desert.”

Thornton was happily surprised to see no desert in sight when visiting College Station for the first time. Instead, Thornton saw the construction of a brand-new Kyle Field, experienced the camaraderie of the 12th Man and knew that it felt like home. Although he was confident in his choice, the overseas transition was not the smoothest sailing.

“My freshman year, I honestly had no idea what was going on,” Thornton said. “My first semester was a genuine whirlwind, and time management was the hardest thing to learn. I mean, you cannot do the diving without doing the schoolwork, too.”

Fortunately, Thornton was surrounded by the incredible resources that Texas A&M provides to every student-athlete.

“The athletics department staff did an incredible job,” Thornton said. “During that transition, I learned just how much time, resources and effort the people here are ready to pour into you.”

While competing from 2015 to 2019, Thornton completed his undergraduate degree in telecommunications. He recognized the opportunity to continue his education and earned a master’s degree in

sport management while serving as a volunteer and graduate assistant coach for the men’s and women’s swimming and diving teams from 2020 to 2022.

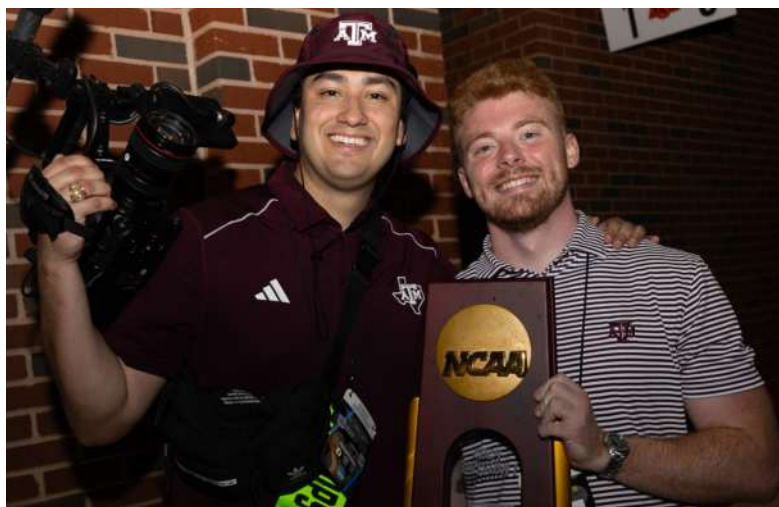
Not feeling quite done in Aggieland, Thornton set his eyes on a full-time opportunity to become a part of the Texas A&M Athletics Communications staff.

“The Aggie Network is so real, and I am a living, breathing testament to that,” Thornton said. “When I was closing in on finishing my master’s degree, I went and spoke with everyone in the athletics department that I knew pretty well. After three rounds of interviews, my first day on the job was chartering to Georgia with the volleyball team.”

Thornton has found his role extremely rewarding, as he holds the unique perspective of being a former A&M student-athlete.

“Here, I have never just been an employee, a student or an athlete,” Thornton said. “I love the people and the connections I have made. I feel valued for the things I do, and I love that I get to serve the student-athletes in the same way others did for me.”

Thornton’s entire story of opportunity began with a scholarship.



“

THE 12TH MAN FOUNDATION DONORS ARE THE REASON I GET TO DO WHAT I AM DOING, LIVING OUT MY DREAM. EVERY OPPORTUNITY THAT I HAVE RECEIVED SINCE ARRIVING HERE, I HAVE THEM TO THANK FOR IT.

— SAM THORNTON '19

A native of Bradford, England, Thornton graduated from Texas A&M in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in telecommunications. Upon graduating with his master's degree in sport management in 2022, Thornton accepted a full-time position with the Texas A&M Athletics Communications department.

“It is the reason I am who I am today,” Thornton said. “The 12th Man Foundation donors are the reason I get to do what I am doing, living out my dream. Every opportunity that I have received since arriving here, I have them to thank for it.”

After attending several 12th Man Foundation events since 2015, Thornton has connected with donors and developed strong relationships that will last a lifetime.

“The caliber of resources we have here at Texas

A&M are like no other,” Thornton said. “Nobody does it to this incredible of a degree, and that is all thanks to the 12th Man Foundation donors. I always try to remind our athletes to really learn and appreciate it. People pour their hard-earned money into our athletics programs to invest in us, and it truly is life-changing.”



INCREASE YOUR IMPACT ON TEXAS A&M STUDENT-ATHLETES

Donor contributions are vital to our mission of funding scholarships, programs and facilities in support of championship athletics at Texas A&M. Support student-athletes with a tax deductible*, philanthropic gift and gain additional priority points. Visit 12th.info/annualfund to give today!

**Contributions which are not tied to a ticket purchase may be tax deductible. Consult your tax advisor to determine the deductibility of your gift.*

JOE WRIGHT '82

Meet the chair of the 2024 12th Man Foundation Board of Trustees



ABOUT JOE

- » EARNED A DEGREE IN PETROLEUM ENGINEERING FROM TEXAS A&M IN 1982
- » RESIDES IN MIDLAND
- » LONGTIME AGGIE FOOTBALL SEASON TICKET HOLDER AND GENEROUS 12TH MAN FOUNDATION DONOR
- » HE AND HIS WIFE, JILL, HAVE FOUR CHILDREN: MOLLIE, HANNAH, KATIE & MATT

When did you first know you wanted to attend Texas A&M?

It was when I was about seven or eight years old. My oldest brother was a freshman at Texas A&M about that time, and he was in the Corps of Cadets. Specifically getting to see him march into Kyle Field is probably my first ever recollection of Texas A&M and knowing that I wanted to attend this university.

Why is Texas A&M University special to you and your family?

My dad came to A&M on a G.I. Bill after World War II, and he started the whole Wright family legacy. All of my brothers went to Texas A&M, our wives went and our children have all gone, and that has made A&M so special to our family. The way A&M has continued to hold its core values and its culture together over so many years of growth is also extremely special.

What led you to a career in the oil and gas industry?

Ultimately my college roommate at the time, Tim Leach, encouraged me to transfer into petroleum engineering.

How did your time at Texas A&M successfully prepare you for your career and life beyond?

Texas A&M gives you the confidence to be more than what you ever imagined. Part of that comes from our culture of understanding the importance of being a small piece of something greater and being able to recognize that. The university prepared me well from an educational standpoint. All the connections you make and the people you interact with on so many different levels while you are here, is also truly invaluable.

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

The very first involvement would certainly be through season tickets and meeting Jacob Green. That expanded with ultimately finding passions within the athletics department that I could financially support.

How have you seen the 12th Man Foundation Board of Trustees positively impact the organization's mission?

The board has been a good governing body that has ultimately helped the 12th Man Foundation staff continue to improve their systems, processes and overall efficiency.

What is one thing you have learned from the previous chair, Kevin McDonald '89?

Selfless service. Kevin has dedicated so many hours and so much of his time and talents ever since he has been on the board. He certainly has done so as chair, chair elect and now as past chair. He has set a great example of selfless service.

Why do you believe it is important to support Texas A&M Athletics through the 12th Man Foundation?

If you ever get the opportunity to talk with some of these student-athletes and listen to their stories, you will realize that the impact 12th Man Foundation donors can make not just on their lives but on their future families' lives is truly remarkable. Anytime that we can influence young people in a positive way — that is what we do this for.



RANDY

BOND '24

Aggie Football kicker is reaching high altitudes on the field and in the engineering classroom

BY KIRI STANFORD '14

RANDY BOND HAS ALWAYS BLED MAROON.

The son of a former drum major in the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band, Bond's love for Aggieland blossomed early. However, his path to play football at Texas A&M was anything but traditional.

In high school, Bond dreamed of landing a coveted spot in Texas A&M's College of Engineering.

He always knew he wanted to be an Aggie, but Bond's desire to become an engineer was shaped by two significant influences in his life. His club soccer coach, who happened to be a civil engineer, inspired Bond to consider a future in engineering. Additionally, Bond admired his grandfather who had worked for NASA. A fascination with the intricate designs of military airplanes led him to pursue a degree in aerospace engineering.

When he arrived on campus in the fall of 2020, Bond was focused on receiving an exceptional education in rocket science but found himself missing the joy of being a part of a team.

Throughout his youth, Bond logged countless hours on the field — primarily the soccer field. He was a First Team All-District soccer player for Plano West High School and earned Second Team All-District punter honors after joining the football team for his senior year.

Bond called his father for advice.

"I asked him if I should try out for the football team," Bond recalled. "He basically said, 'Go for it.'"

With that nudge of encouragement, Bond decided to try and walk on during the spring

semester of his freshman year.

"After the tryout, I was told I could compete during the spring, and they kept me around in the fall," Bond said. "I knew there were other guys in front of me, but I just kept going out each day working to get better."

That fall, Bond served in a backup role behind fellow kickers Seth Small and Caden Davis, however, he did have the opportunity to put his skills on display at Kyle Field. He made his Aggie Football debut during A&M's 2021 season opener, kicking off eight times against Kent State.

Bond's defining moment in an Aggie uniform unfolded during the second game of the 2022 season when he stepped in for Davis under the lights at Kyle Field and made a 26-yard field goal in A&M's 17-9 victory over Miami. He has kicked every field goal for the program since.

"It's surreal to me that I'm on the football team and that I've played in front of 100,000 people," Bond said. "People think I'm crazy when I say I'm also studying aerospace engineering."

Bond admits that balancing football and aerospace engineering is challenging as both programs are highly demanding and require exceptional time management. In such a rigorous student-athlete journey, he has found a profound yet simple idiom to be true — "Be where your feet are."

"I think it helps me focus on the task at hand," Bond said. "When I am at practice, I zone in exclusively on kicking. When I am in the classroom or



The son of a former drum major in the Aggie Band, Bond is continuing his Aggie family legacy and pursuing a degree in aerospace engineering while playing football for Texas A&M. The former walk-on kicker was selected to represent Texas A&M at the NASA Launch Services Program Experience that took place at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida in May.

lab, I am 100-percent focused on aerospace engineering. You compartmentalize with precision, because you have to.”

The former walk-on earned a scholarship in the fall of 2022 through the 1922 Fund.

“I am very fortunate to receive a scholarship,” Bond said. “The support of 12th Man Foundation donors has been extraordinary for me and my family.”

For Bond, the 1922 Fund represents not only financial support, but also a deep connection to the rich history and traditions of Texas A&M.

“1922 was a special year in Texas A&M history, as the original 12th Man came out of stands,” Bond said. “Trying out as a walk-on for the Aggie Football team, and then being afforded the opportunity to stick with the team while benefiting from the program that’s named for our original walk-on, means the world to me.”

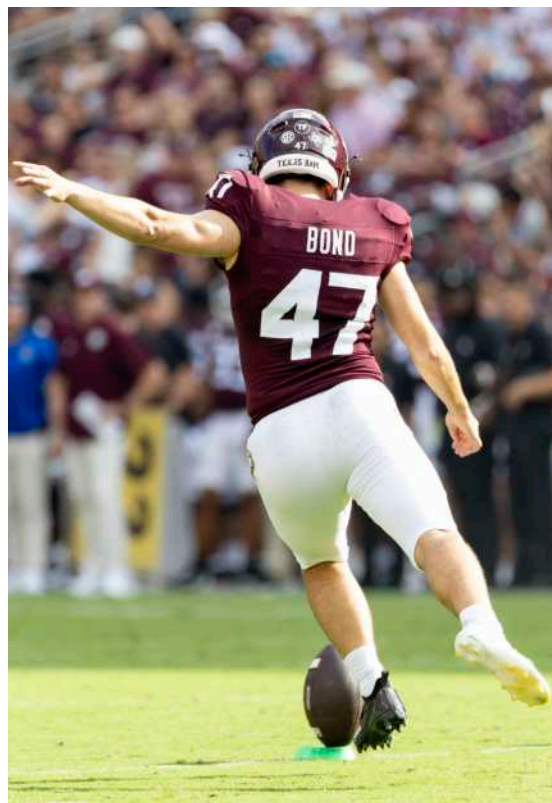
Bond’s dreams extend beyond the football field and the classroom. While he nurtures hopes of kicking in the NFL, he also feels called to contribute to the world of aerospace engineering.

If a future in professional football does not come to fruition, Bond aspires to work with industry leaders like Lockheed Martin or Boeing, focusing on designing and developing military aircraft. With his unwavering drive and determination, Bond is ready to excel wherever his feet take him.

“

I AM VERY FORTUNATE TO RECEIVE A SCHOLARSHIP. THE SUPPORT OF 12TH MAN FOUNDATION DONORS HAS BEEN EXTRAORDINARY FOR ME AND MY FAMILY.

— RANDY BOND '24



TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS \ ADEN SHERTZER (TOP RIGHT), RACHEL MAHAN (BOTTOM LEFT), BRENDALL O'BANON (BOTTOM RIGHT)



THANK YOU

STEVE BULTMAN AND JAY HOLMES

Thank you to Steve Bultman and Jay Holmes for their combined 45 years of service as head coaches of Texas A&M Swimming & Diving. Under Bultman, the women's program achieved an 11-year streak of top 10 finishes at the NCAA Championships and claimed four consecutive SEC Championship titles from 2016-19. Prior to becoming the leader of the men's program, Holmes was an assistant coach at Texas A&M from 1986-2004 and swam for the Aggies from 1980-84. During his tenure as head coach, the maroon and white experienced success with 14 top-25 team finishes and numerous Olympians, conference champions and All-Americans.



TEXAS A&M SWIMMING & DIVING



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AND AS WE NAVIGATE THE DYNAMIC LANDSCAPE WITH NIL, WE
ARE PROUD TO WORK WITH OUR PARTNERS AT TEXAS AGGIES
UNITED AND THE 12TH MAN FOUNDATION.

— TREV ALBERTS



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