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By Tom Kirvan



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The 12th Man statue outside of Kyle Field is a focal point for Texas A&M football fans on game days.

KYLE FIELD



It's been nearly 40 years since Sean Page last suited up for the Texas A&M football team, but the San Antonio attorney can still feel the magnetic pull of the gridiron at the 102,733-seat Kyle Field, where he was a proud part of a kickoff unit that etched its name in Aggie lore.

Born and raised in the Lone Star State, where football reigns supreme, Page was a track standout in high school, a three-time letterwinner who displayed a special burst of speed that would catch the eye of the special teams coach at A&M in the mid-'80s when the Aggies were guided by Jackie Sherrill.

Sherrill, who coached Heisman Trophy winner Tony Dorsett at the University of Pittsburgh before landing the head coaching job at A&M, had a well-deserved reputation as a master motivator and innovator when he was hired to revive the football fortunes of the Aggies.

One of his first "out-of-the-box" moves involved the creation of the "12th Man Kickoff Team," a coverage unit comprised entirely of walk-on players who possessed the grit, determination, and perseverance to succeed.

Players like Page, a product of Churchill High School in San Antonio where he had a less than notable career as a wingback.

"I was not a very accomplished high school player," Page admitted. "I was a 149-pound wingback and there wasn't a high market for those types of guys in college. On the other hand, I was fast and I was hard to catch."

When he enrolled at A&M in College Station, Page packed 30 pounds of muscle onto his slender frame in hopes that he could earn a walk-on role as a defensive back for the Aggies.

"I always wanted to be a defensive player," Page said. "I wanted to go hit somebody. I didn't want to get hit. I didn't want my football career to be defined by how I played in high school, which included fumbling twice in one of my final games. I didn't want it to end that way. So, I went from fearing success to striving for success. It's a mindset that I've embraced ever since."

Page punched his ticket to the team by being a "four-four" guy in the 40-yard dash, the speed measurable that equates to 4.4 seconds to cover the sprint distance.

"There weren't too many guys who could run a 4.4, so that definitely caught the eye of the defensive backs coach and the special teams coach," Page noted. "Speed was my way of being on the team. You can't coach or teach speed."

During Page's walk-on career at A&M, the Aggies won three straight Southwest Conference titles and earned three Cotton Bowl berths, competing against the likes of such football powers as Auburn University, The Ohio State University, and University of Notre Dame.

"The first time we went to the Cotton Bowl, we beat Auburn (36-16) and their star running back Bo Jackson," Page proudly recounted. "The next year, we lost to Ohio State, who had All-Americans Chris Spielman and Cris Carter on their team. My final year, we defeated Notre Dame (35-10) and their star receiver Tim Brown, who won the Heisman Trophy that year. We had a lot of success during that stretch."

Page credits Coach Sherrill for sparking the A&M resurgence, saying his leadership inspired players and team alike.

"He taught us how to believe in ourselves, especially when others did not," Page said of Sherrill, who coached the Aggies from



Page capped his playing career with a 35-10 win in the Cotton Bowl against the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame, putting an exclamation point on a 10-2 season for the Aggies.

1982-88. “He never quit on a player who did not first quit on himself.”

Sherrill built a coaching staff at A&M that included such notables as defensive coordinator R.C. Slocum, who later would become the winningest football coach in Aggie history; linebackers coach Bob Davie, who led the Notre Dame program from 1997 to 2001; and defensive backs coach Curley Hallman, who went on to be the head coach at Southern Mississippi University, where he had star quarterback and future NFL great, Brett Favre.

For Page, plying his football trade with such company paid off handsomely in a memorable 1987 game against Louisiana State University (LSU), the traditional Southeastern Conference power that has produced more than its share of national titles, All-Americans, and Heisman Trophy winners.

In 1987, the LSU Tigers featured a bevy of star running backs and kick returners, including a speedster who broke off a long run against the 12th Man Kickoff Team in the first half.

“We kicked off to him to start the second half and all of a sudden he breaks free again,” Page recounted. “I was playing safety and it was just me and him. Basically, I’m thinking that if he scores, that’s going to be the end of this experiment of the ‘Kickoff Team.’ But I was lucky that day – I got him, hauling him down and preventing a touchdown.”

As a cherished reminder of his touchdown-saving play, Page was presented with a special plaque that now hangs in his home office. It symbolizes all

the hard work, the two-a-day practices in Texas heat, and “all the preparation that boiled down to that one moment,” said Page.

“To this day, Coach Sherrill always drops me a line before we play LSU, asking which one of our guys is ‘going to make a play’ like I did that day,” Page said with a broad smile.

Page also smiles when he thinks about the times that he and others on the A&M squad paid visits to kids hospitalized at Scottish Rite for Children in Dallas.

“Coach Sherrill organized those visits as part of our Cotton Bowl experiences,” Page said. “It was his way of emphasizing the importance of giving back and making a difference in the lives of others.”

It also helped spawn the creation of a nonprofit, the 12th Man Kickoff Team Foundation, to support scholarships at A&M, as well as to funnel financial support to the Emory Bellard ALS Clinic in Georgetown, Texas; Scottish Rite for Children; and MD Anderson Hospital in Houston.

According to Page, “setting up the foundation is my proudest career



Toasting their friendship at a recent reunion in South Carolina, Page (far right) is pictured with his former Texas A&M football coach Jackie Sherrill (left) and teammates Warren Barhorst and David Coolidge. “Jackie continues to keep tabs on his former players, and remains our mentor and coach to this day,” said Page.

achievement” based on the lasting impact it has made on a wide range of funding recipients.

Two years after obtaining his bachelor’s degree from A&M, Page earned a Master of Business Administration from Southern Methodist University. Three years later, he was awarded a law degree from St. Mary’s University School of Law in San Antonio.

Now as a partner in the San Antonio firm of Thornton, Biechlin, Reynolds & Guerra, L.C., Page focuses his practice on the defense of commercial motor vehicle and automotive claims. He also defends personal injury actions and property damage cases.

“One of the things I learned in football is that no matter how good you are, there’s always someone better – someone faster, smarter, and more talented,” Page said. “When you come up against those kinds of players or in the legal world, those kinds of lawyers, a lot depends on how you prepared for such a challenge. If you prepared yourself to the best of your ability, then everything will take care of itself.”

A fellow believer in the importance of preparation is Page’s wife, Mary Strauss, an attorney who serves as managing partner of Thornton Biechlin.

A University of Texas alumna, Strauss graduated from St. Mary’s School of Law in 1998. She has focused her

practice on litigation in the areas of premises liability, motor vehicle accidents, and first party liability/bad faith claims.

“When she came to the firm, she actually took my job,” said Page, who had been with the firm for three years and had been mentored by a partner who had a tough-minded – and occasionally high-decibel – approach to learning the law.

“He had a totally different approach to mentoring her, however,” said Page. “So, we were wondering, ‘Why isn’t he yelling at her?’ But then his lead paralegal, who had been with him forever, came in and set us straight: ‘No, it’s just because she’s smarter than you. She just knows what she’s doing.’” 



An A&M alum, Page lives in a “house divided,” as his wife, Mary, is a proud graduate of the University of Texas. In this photo from a Texas-Texas A&M game day party, Page had to force a smile while giving his due to the Longhorns after a victory over the Aggies.

