Aggies Have Kick

By JACK BOGACZYK
Sports Writer

The Aggie joke, that staple of Southwest Conference football, has a new punch line this season.

It seems that during Texas A&M’s pre-season two-a-day practices, an Aggie player who was extremely worn out approached Tony Franklin and told the junior kicking specialist that when it came to workouts, he “never does nothin’.”

Now that’s a funny one.

Franklin, who will join the Aggies when they help Virginia Tech usher in its 1977 season Saturday afternoon at Lane Stadium, holds several NCAA field goal records.

But he’ll come to Blacksburg today looking for his first three-pointer of the year after three misses last week.

That 0-for-3 performance in a 28-14 triumph over Kansas last week is deceiving, however, as the Aggies employ Franklin from distances where other teams punt. He was short on tries of 59 and 65 yards and wide left on a 52-yarder.

Franklin dials long distance between the uprights with regularity. And what better place for a kicker with a nudge foot to show up than right near the centerfold in Playboat, as Franklin did this month as a member of the magazine’s all-America squad.

“The biggest thing is concentration,” said Franklin, discussing his phenomenal success that allowed him to break the NCAA distance record twice in two quarters of the same game last year. “Mainly, my idea is to keep my head down and go with the same pattern each time. If I’m going to kick a long way, I just try to look upon it as just another kick.”

The 20-year-old Ft. Worth native booted 17 field goals a year ago to raise his two-year (and career) total to 29. He hit 10 of 19 tries from 50 yards or more in 1976, and a year earlier he established the NCAA distance mark for a freshman with a 59-yarder against Rice.

Against Baylor last Oct. 16, Franklin boomed a 64-yarder in the second quarter. And less than six minutes after halftime, he broke his own NCAA mark with a 65-yard effort.

“The way I look at it, a record is made to be broken,” said Franklin. “And someday, most of them will be. But I’d like to keep a couple of them.”

“Sure, I’d like to get all the long chances I could. But the idea is to do the best I can for my university. Whenever they dial my number, I’m supposed to be ready.”

Franklin’s style reminds one of long-time Kansas City Chiefs’ kicking specialist Jan Stenerud, the one-time Norwegian skier. The Aggie star appears to be booting with a bare instep in soccer-style fashion, but not so, he says.

“It’s not a true soccer style,” said Franklin, who also owns the NCAA bowl field goal distance record with a 62-yarder in last January’s Sun Bowl. “Basically, my style is a little in between both kicking techniques.

“It’s not as much of an angle as soccer style, but it’s not straight on, either. I mark off four little steps and then take two big ones on my approach. And I hit the ball an inch or two higher on my instep than soccer style kickers do.

“I started kicking barefoot when I was a sophomore in high school. One day I was kicking with my shoe on and decided to see what I could do with a bare foot. As it turned out, the ball was going about 10 yards farther when I kicked barefoot.”

Franklin scored 81 points a year ago as SWC scoring runnerup to Aggie fullback George Woddard, who had 17 touchdowns for 102 points.

This year, Franklin is working with a new holder in freshman David Beal after quarterback David Shipman finished his career as the booter’s assistant after the Aggies’ Sun Bowl win.

“Beal is a good holder,” said Franklin. “It just takes time. Shipman was the best holder I’ve ever had. It’s all timing.”

Franklin says he doesn’t do any weight training because “it just tightens the muscles up.” In practice, he’s booted a 75-yarder “with a little breeze” and kicks them from 60-65 regularly without any wind.

“There are some definite truths when a guy says a kicker isn’t a football player,” said the mustachioed Franklin. “But one guy came up to me during two-a-days and said ‘You never do nothin’. Then the same guy says later, ‘I wouldn’t want to have your job during a game. Kicking has changed a lot in the last 10 years, and kickers are getting lots more respect now.’

In his first two years, Franklin has provided the Aggies’ kick coverage team with lots of time to get downfield. Of his 68 kickoffs, 54 traveled into the end zone. More of the same might be expected Saturday, as A&M is a 14-point favorite over the Gobblers.

“All kickers are spoiled by artificial turf,” said Franklin, laughing. “It’s so much easier to get your footing. This week, there won’t be an advantage. I just hope Virginia Tech mows their lawn.”

TONY FRANKLIN
Long-Distance Aggie