Owls Show Improvement in 7-6 Win Over SMU

BY GERRY URBACH
The Owls’ new look and attitude was evidenced only by the narrow 7-6 score, signifying that they were at least victorious over the scrappy, but out-rammed, SMU Mustangs.

If one saw only the game and neglected the other attractions of a weekend at the State Fair in Big "D," then he missed much excitement. But perhaps after all the "thrills" of the 34-7 debacle at Stanford, a solid if unexciting victory, was welcome.

After a dull first half the Owls blitzed to a touchdown on their second sustained drive of the evening, climax'd by a perfectly executed 23 yard aerial from Walt McReynolds to Billy Hale.

SMU Scores

This touchdown spurred the heretofore somnolent SMU offense, and the Ponies not only crossed mid-field, but decided they liked that side of the field and struck paydirt on a halfback pass play.

Though no one knew at the time, the errant, scooper-style kick of John Cravenes which left the tally at 7-6 marked the end of the night’s point production for both sides.

Defense Outstanding

The Owls, while seemingly in complete control, could again muster little offensive punch. The defense, led by the incomparable Malcolm Walker, stood out again as it has in all four games the inconsistent flock have played.

The victory, narrow though it was, coupled with the stunning Razorback rout at Austin left the Owls in a virtual tie with Arkansas for the SWC lead.

Chances for continued enjoyment of this lofty perch are hampered by the invasion this week of the fallen idols, the Texas Longhorns, until last week the nation’s number 1 team.

Scoring a tie, the proud defending champs gambled and lost 14-15 to Arkansas, and come to Houston staring at elimination from the conference merry-go-round.

Thus the Steers may be double tough. Of course they may be demoralized after their heartbreaking defeat Saturday and be prime targets for an inspired Rice team.

Back in 1960 this was the situation when Rice defeated Texas 7-6, coincidently right after another one-point loss by the Steers to Arkansas.

The Longhorns return to Houston loaded with their usual powerful ground-devouring running game and their indomitable defensive platoon still operating efficiently, except perhaps on punt returns.

The ground game is sparked by the power sweeps of tailback Ernie Kay and the bull-like plays of fullback Harold Phillip. Junior Marvin Krystnik, only a mediocre passer at best, runs the Longhorn “flip-flop” offense.

Defense Tough

The defense is headed by linebacker Tony Nobis, a fierce competitor. For those who like pressure contests, this is one not to miss.

There are many big questions that will be answered by the time the 1964 renewal of this storied series is in the record books. Can Texas rebound, and will Rice finally live up to its preseason ranking and, with a victory, become a top contender for the Cotton Bowl spot?

The Owls have recent tradition on their side, having rounded up the bovines in Houston on every occasion the teams have met here since 1962, except for 1962’s 14-14 deadlock.

Last year, in Rice’s most inspired performance in recent years, the Owls lost 10-6 to the eventual national champions, in Austin.

Inspiration is the key here again. Rice has played four games with an effort that can only be described as monochalant and disinterested. So far this lackadaisical execution has produced only two victories over teams the Owls were much superior to, and two defeats, one of them of embarrassing proportions.

Arkansas Inspired

Arkansas, not figured by any one to be as strong as the blue-clad forces Jess Neely will send into battle Saturday night, showed what inspiration can do against the No. 1 team.

Let us hope that the Rice Owls will show what it can do against a team that is no longer No. 1, but which is still dangerous and determined.

There is also no question that they cannot win or even come close to winning with the attitude they have displayed so far this season.

Saturday, October 24, can be the beginning of a glorious finish to a season that has started with agonizing disappointment, if Rice can once again summon the inspiration with which it has contested its bitter rival in the past.

A Rice victory will set up a conference title and a Cotton Bowl berth showdown with Arkansas two weeks hence at Fayetteville.