An Epitaph For Texas: Owls Gloomed But 'Horns Doomed

By PAUL BURKA

We got a hint of things to come when we stopped by Rice Stadium last Thursday night to watch Oregon work out. Unfortunately, we had lost our glasses, so for two days we labored under the impression that the predominantly blurred images were traceable to faulty vision.

Or, at least, that's what we hoped. However, our fears proved superior to our feelings, for it is doubtful that a slow-motion camera could have slowed down Oregon's speed demons. Against such speed, our rods and cones were helpless.

This put them in good company, however: the Rice line.

Oregon is the fastest college football team we've ever seen, and that includes some dandies: Texas last year, some great Ole Miss teams, and LSU in Billy Cannon's heyday. Oregon is faster. They are so fast, in fact, that after watching Texas flounder unimpressively against Oklahoma on TV, one must come to the conclusion that Oregon could beat Texas by two touchdowns.

Unfortunately for sportswriters, who delight in making such comparisons, the two teams have already met this year. Sobering indeed is the historical fact that Oregon managed to lose to the Longhorns by 12 points.

It doesn't take a mathematician to calculate that Texas is at least four touchdowns, better than Rice. But it takes a sportswriter to figure they aren't.

The jury is still out on the 'Horns, and if they don't return a verdict soon, Arkansas is quite liable to take the law in its own hands Saturday. The most ridiculous statement of the young week came from Minneapolis, where the bookies are giving Arkansas and six and a half points. They deserve to lose money.

The Longhorns against Oklahoma spent the better part of the afternoon falling flat on their faces. However, the Steers were fortunate enough to find a football under themselves upon two of those occasions, one of which happened to occur in the Oklahoma end zone. We're not detracting from the potential of the Longhorns—no one can deny them that—but they did receive more than their share of breaks against the Okies. This week they're fighting not only the law of averages, but also a team famed for being lucky. And the Razorbacks are twice more blessed than Oklahoma; not only are they lucky, but they're good, too.

Just what is wrong with Texas is the great puzzle of the Southwest. There is no question that the 'Horns have yet to jell. They should have murdered Oklahoma; the Sooners shouldn't have scored and Texas ought to have run up at least a three-touchdown margin. Oregon just played Santa Claus in Austin, fumbling once on their own 14, once on the Texas one, and dropping touchdown passes from the Steer six.

Various theories have been expounded on failure. One is the Alumnus Theory, also known as fire-the-coach. Darrell Royal, it seems, is at fault because he keeps on playing Johnny Gembic at quarterback when even the alumnus's son could do a better job.

Then there's the Complacency Theory: too many seniors, too many easy wins last year. The 'Horns aren't hungry, it is said.

Only this week the Shadow-of-Death theory developed. The tragic death of sophomore guard Reggie Grob, who died early in the season after suffering a stroke during practice, has mentally affected the Longhorn team, it is argued. The coaches don't work the team hard, and the players have an ingrained fear.

The latter excuse is in a sense as tragic as the surroundings which gave it birth. Certainly all conference schools and people everywhere were deeply touched by the death of the young man, just as they were when Mike Kelsey died from similar circumstances at SMU. It is said that SMU's desire has noticeably increased this year, perhaps in an effort to vindicate the activity for which Kelsey gave his life: playing football for SMU. The argument works both ways.

Also worthy of mention is the fact that other conference schools were careful to avoid similar incidents; after learning of the death of Kelsey and the collapse of Grob, Jess Neely lightened the practice load on the Owls at the risk of not having them ready for the season opener. Yet not one mention has been made of this "excuse;" furthermore, the Owls took it easier, and still were quite ready for the LSU Tigers.

We never did buy the Complacency Theory and still don't. Sophomores can be complacent, seniors can have an intense desire. Passing five courses doesn't remove one's drive. Did Boyd King, Rufus King, Bobby Lively, or Jim Stroud let up when they were seniors in '60? It was the seniors which led the ball club—the hordes of returning juniors were a poor excuse for a contender a year later.

The Alumnus Theory gets closer to the heart of the matter. The old grads and disgruntled sportswriters are absolutely correct: Gembic can't move the ball club. However, this is no cause to fire a man who has produced consecutive seasons of 6-3-1, 7-3, 9-1, 7-3, 9-1 records, and now stands 42-11-1 at the University. Rather they should send him their sons. Texas, with all its wealth of material, needs a quarterback.

It isn't the Alumnus Theory itself which is correct; it is the Quarterback Corollary. And unless the Longhorns can find some magic locked away on the Forty Acres, the Theory will become a fact.

Texas, mighty Texas, will die before the month is out.