“Battle of Baton Rouge...”

Owls Face Mighty LSU Today

By TED HERMANN

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Amid the glamour of nation wide TV, coach Jess Neely's 20th edition Rice football squad opens its 1959 campaign in Baton Rouge at 3 o'clock this afternoon against Paul Dietzel's national champions, the LSU Bengal Tigers. The Tigers are 13 1/2 point favorites to take their eighteenth victory in this, the 30th meeting of the two teams in a series which dates back to 1915 and includes three ties.

Returning only sixteen lettermen, the Owls, termed by Neely as a team of desire, face the possibility of entering the contest with as many as four sophomores in the starting lineup, thus emphasizing the lack of experience on the '59 Owl squad. The most inexperienced positions are end and fullback. All four left ends, headed by promising Robert Johnston and backed by Wesley Stokes and Johnny Burrell, are either sophomores or junior college transfers. Such is the case at fullback where Roland Jackson, the most highly rated Rice fullback since Kosse Johnson, holds down the number one slot followed by Mike Bowen and Lonnie Caddell.

Three Deep

Elsewhere in the line and backfield the Owls are three deep in capable performers. This wealth of depth has led Neely to make the statement that he would like to “go with three units playing in spurts of about five minutes each in a quarter.”

From tackle to tackle the Owls are possibly one of the strongest teams in the nation with Don Rather, Rufus and Boyd King, Bobby Lively and Gene Miller lining up on the first team. The second unit, which is almost as talented, is headed by 250 pound sophomore tackle Delbert Wiley. Backing up Wiley are lettermen Gerald Gusler, Jerry Graves and Shelburne Ford, along with squadman Bill Donaldson.

Fortunately right end is fortified with more experience than left end, as the first two slots are held down by captain Billy Simmons and lettermen Charles Pollard.

Quarterbacks Look Sharp

Neely is also well stocked at quarterback with able ball handlers and signal callers Jon Schnable, Alvin Hartman and Wade Rogers. Schnable, always a dependable but not flashy field general, had one of his best nights as he completed eight of eleven in last Saturday's Blue-Gray tilt. Between the three squat backs, the ball was thrown 37 times Saturday with 19 completions, illustrating a newly found confidence in the Owl aerial attack.

Elsewhere in the backfield, the prospects are also bright as halfbacks Bill Bucek and Gordon Speer appear on the verge of great seasons predicted for them the past two years. However, their fine running and receiving is being matched by sophomore Johnny Stephenson, who is pushing the senior lettermen for the left half starting assignment. Right half is also well fortified with lettermen.
Max Webb supported by sophomores Gary Poage and Bob Wayt. Another sophomore standout is Bendy Poole, a fine punter as well as a good runner and receiver.

In comparison to Rice's meager experience, Coach of the Year Paul Dietzel returns all but four from last year's undefeated Sugar-Bowl champions, including 30 of his first 33 players. Returning are All-Americans Billy Cannon at halfback and Max Fugler at center, along with All-SEC selections halfback Johnny Robinson and quarterback Warren Rabb.

Cannon, Robinson, and Rabb will team with Merle Schexnaildre at fullback to form a Tiger backfield comparable to last year's, which ran up a total of 275 points against ten opponents. Meanwhile the Fugler-led White line and the famed Chinese Bandits were holding the opposition to a meager 53 points.

In the past few days, Coach Dietzel has devoted almost the entire hour and 45 minute workout to dummy scrimmage and defensive work against Owl plays.

Two of the three units which will share playing time have alternated running plays at top speed against a dummy defense while the third unit took a look at what the coaches thought the Owls will throw at them. The units alternated from one drill to the other, so that everybody worked on both offense and defense. Unfortunately for the Owls, press releases claim that the Bengals have looked quite impressive.

The Tigers are expected to be at full strength for the Rice engagement, with only a few bumps and bruises.