Fans exercise their riot to dissent

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On the beaches, in the streets, and on the court: for a no-contact, spectator sport, there was quite a bit of contact and quite a bit of spectator participation in Tuesday night’s basketball game. In fact, it almost became a full-scale riot.

Of course, riots are nothing new to the genteel Rice athletic tradition, but customarily they are reserved for more decorous occasions, including that annual rejuvenation ritual known as the Rice-A&M football game.

The interesting thing about Tuesday’s incident was that it occurred in support of football’s little and, alas, (at least in the Southwest) less popular sister. Now, indoor, steam-heated fistcuffs are nothing new either (the Astrodome, for example, claims to have had two separate incidents of them in the past few months, but this claim is open to question). The truly astounding thing is that it happened here at Rice in austere, with-figurative-ivy-covered Autry Court.

Such violence, of course, is deplorable. And here, in full view of the entire righteous world, let it be said: we officially deplore it. So there, you naughty people.

This odious task now out of the way, let us offer several justifications for this now-celebrated outburst of temper. One reason, of course, was that the tide in the tense, closely-contested basketball game was turning against the Owls. But an equally valid reason was the abominably pitiful officiating which contributed heavily to Houston’s air pollution last Tuesday.

Although the referees demonstrated the customary ineptness expected of Southwest Conference officials, several key calls against the Owls in the latter stages of the game were instrumental in triggering both Rice’s defeat and the wild melee that closed the game.

We refer specifically to the call made with about a minute remaining when the following chain of events happened: with the score tied a Texas man broke downcourt on a fast break, stopping directly under the basket. A Rice player (Greg Williams, we believe) crashed into him, a referee blew a whistle (one of the few activities they seem to have mastered), and the Texas player shot the ball, sending it through the hoop. Not only did the officials allow the basket, but they granted Texas a free throw, which gave the Longhorns an insurmountable three-point lead.

Now, a quick glance at a basketball rule book shows that a person fouled in the act of shooting is entitled to the goal and a free throw, but that a person fouled before he can shoot receives only a single free throw. And the latter was the case Tuesday night.

Now, it might be claimed that when Texas comes to town they bring their own officials with them. But to say this is a little unjust, for it ‘implies malice, whereas the officials are actually motivated by pure, uncomplicated incompetence.

Just where, then, do these officials come from? One rumor has it that they are recruited from among the early arrivals at each game (no experience necessary).

This rumor is false!

In actuality, according to usually reliable sources, SWC officials are drop-outs from the Houston Lighthouse for the Blind, whose uncompleted Braille translation of a dubious manuscript of the Russian version of basketball rules was printed with half the pages missing. One should not condemn. Nay, one can only hold one’s nose and sympathize.

And so, stately Autry court may never be the same under Coach Knodel’s reign as basketball coach. News of Tuesday’s incident will surely sadden those who remember the good old days when basketball was a sport you could watch without becoming involved, and when half-empty Autry Court was the quietest place on campus to study.

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