By CHUCK YINGLING

In a way, it was somewhat ironic. Tuesday night the Rice Owls and the Baylor Bears played what was undoubtedly one of the most exciting games in the SWC this year, and to what was undoubtedly one of the sparsest crowd in the SWC this year.

However, the Owls weren't complaining. After a nip-and-tuck ball game in which neither team had more than a four point lead until the last ten minutes, they came from behind to erase a seven point deficit and win, 61-58.

The score was knotted 58-59 with 58 seconds to play, and for the past three minutes Baylor had been playing sit-on-the-ball, trying to cling to a slim lead. However, the alert Owls managed to steal the ball enough to knot up the score, after which they called a time out, planning to go for the one shot that would win the game.

AFTER Dribbling around for what seemed like hours, Steve Smith, whose two free throws only a minute earlier had helped close the gap, took a jump shot which rimmed the basket and then bounced out. But Jim Fox was Jim-on-the-spot and came up under the basket to make the tip-in and send the Owls ahead.

Three seconds later, Ole Shipley was fouled and collected a free throw, but by that time, nobody cared. With one second to go, the Bears didn't have a chance, and so succumbed to their ninth straight conference defeat.

The game was a fast-moving, clean-played one as both teams hit over 40 percent of their floor shots and collected very few fouls. Mike Maroney was high point man for the Owls with 16, but was outscored by big John West, who pumped in 26 in a surprising effort for the Bruins. Shipley added 13 for Rice, and guards Roger McQueary and Steve Galloway also added fuel to the attack.

THE ENTIRE WEEK was a reversal of form. Winning on the road for the first time in loop play, the Owls also dropped their first conference home game, losing to the Arkansas Razorbacks 84-72.

The Rice victory, coupled with A&M's conquest of first place Texas Tech, set the stage for a hot rematch between the Owls and the Farmers, who prevailed 79-69 in College Station last week. Rice will be out for revenge, but the Aggies are fighting for the title and won't be an easy mark. Good student support would help a lot tomorrow night . . . a word to the wise, etc.

When you stop to think about it, Rice's record so far this year is really remarkable. The only major personnel changes from last year's squad which won only one SWC contest was the loss of David "Butch" Craig and the addition of Steve Galloway. Comparing scoring averages of these two would lead one to think the Owls should be nine or ten points weaker, but a glance at the record shows that's not the case.

WITH A 5-4 SLATE in loop action, there won't be any titles for Rice this year, but who does come up with the cup may depend a lot on who is able to get by the Owls at home—no easy task. With A&M and Tech still due a trip to Autry Court, things are far from settled.

In closing, we'd like to extend our congratulations and best wishes to the cross-town Houston Cougars, bound for the NCAA playoffs. Led by Gary Phillips and Ted Luckenbill, the Cats have turned in fine play all season, are presently knocking at the door of the top twenty, and should represent the Bayou City quite well in the playoffs. Good luck, Cougars!