Gong, Going... Gone

By Paul Burna

DALLAS, Feb. 17—Dallas can be a discouraging place. Just two days, we gleaned the following scraps of information:

1. A long, long way from South Oak Cliff to the north side.
2. Snow is not just a thing you read about in the papers.
3. A horse on the horn isn’t as easy as it looks.
4. Dallas is the wrong place to go if you want to see Rice win a basketball game.

Learning each of the three had its rewarding aspects. Not much can be said for the fourth.

That Last One was an expensive piece of knowledge, too. It cost Rice a shot at the basketball championship of the Southwest Conference and gave archive Dallas a clear walk-home path to the title.

Rice went into Dallas hoping to win in Big D for the first time since 1945. When the Owls last won in Dallas, World War II was still being fought.

Unfortunately, that last statement is still true.

Only Enchanted

The Owls were just whipped. They were behind in a first-half breakdown and saw their side game just fall apart. When they did apply the pressure in the second half, SMU just wouldn’t crack.

Other explanations have been offered. The Dallas papers praised Rice’s defense as “perfecting” and Kendall Rhodie to 10 points at the half. Perhaps a ten-point half, but not in the old-fashioned arithmetical tradition, that adds up to 20 points per game, an average we used to think was right.

No, Rice wasn’t “hunted.” A better explanation is that the outside was cold. Barry Rodigle was blanked, Herb Steinkamp had only two field goals, and Larry Phillips was kept to two points. In the first half, the Owls were taking (and missing) good outside shots in preference to bringing it to Rice, who wasn’t guarded nearly as closely by SMU as by tech or Arkansas.

Owls Got Whipped

A second explanation—equally insufficient—was offered by the Houston Chronicle: poor officiating.

The crux of this complaint was a ball around the key of play of game. Trailing by 13 at the half, the Owls made a brilliant run at the roses and cut the Mustang lead to four. The Owls scored every time they had their hands on the ball in the first six minutes of the second half—almost. They were two seconds short.

Then Steinkamp led a three-on-two fast break, passed the ball into Rhine, who hit a jump shot. Two points behind!

Traveling was called. No Owls won in Dallas, World War II.

It was almost like inserting an immovable object in the path of a seemingly irresistible force just to test the force’s strength. The Owls had incredible momentum, were scoring at an unbelievable pace, and had Dee Hayes and the SMU players on the bench shak- ing their heads in frustration. The Owls couldn’t miss.

Owls Lost Momentum And Ball Game

But all of a sudden the momentum was gone, and minutes later the Mustangs were in the lead and the Tony lead was rebuilt.

Our reaction to the play was that it was a monstrous break and that 1:04 of the second half was the turning point in the game. If it was a bad call, it was the turning point.

Otherwise, the officiating was good, except one instance when SMU’s James Thompson staked a claim to the foul line basket. The Owl basket in the lane and spent the better part of a minute there. Or at least he was there in ex- cess of the allotted three seconds, and was not asked to leave, nor were his team mates coerced into going out of the game. Mr. Thompson had Thompson- ed it through the net.

It is claimed that since the Owls hit mere field goals than the Ponies, they actually outplayed them, and were beaten only at the free throw line.

Like many statistics, this is misleading. Most of the SMU field goals were net shots. When a Mustang would be fouled in the act of shooting. The real explanation of the game was the failure of the Rice defense to keep the Ponies from getting good shots. When the Owls fouled, there was often to stop an excellent SMU shot. If the Owls fouled, no doubt the field goal margin would have been different.

We wrote two weeks ago that a hot outside team could beat the Owls, and SMU was a hot team indeed Saturday night. Rice scored 20 points in the second half, and gained only three.

But with 14:05, it was all too clear that the last futile hope that was gone, and somewhere southwest of Dallas on Highway 81 a sigh of relief could be imagined. It was, for all but the University of Texas, the saddest time in sports; the time to start thinking about "next year." It won’t be easy in ’64, but it can’t be any harder than winning in ’63 will be.

OWLOOK