It would have been nice if you could have kept one eye on the clock and another on the ball, but unfortunately eyes work in pairs. So you compromised and watched neither, but just stared at the rim while those last seconds ticked off, hoping to see a large round object pass through the circle. Then there was a mass of humanity around Number 14—three seconds to go. (Maybe the eyes could do it after all) A pass out to the top of the lane—two seconds, one second—a shot, a buzzer, and for an infinity the Southwest Conference championship seemed to hang there on the rim. And then it fell away . . .

Such was the drama of the moment last Saturday when SMU fought for Southwest Conference survival with heroic ferocity and Rice matched fates with fierce heroics.

In all the excitement it surely seemed that the SWC title was at stake, and, considering the wild finish, such sentiments were excusable. But now it is clear enough that the 75-72 victory didn't mean a championship won; it just meant that one wasn't lost.

For while the Owls had all but eliminated a team that still will play a deciding role in the 1968 race, they had merely won a game they'd been expected all along to win. It was no upset, no "great victory," just a close shave for a favorite.

This is not to belittle the Owl effort. On a night when almost everyone was cold, Kendall Rhine played his greatest game, Larry Phillips was magnificent in the clutch, and Barry Rodriguez became a leader after Herb Steinkamp fouled out early.

Rhine, in fact, was almost unbelievable. His 44 points against Arkansas came mostly on layups, made easier by his three inch height advantage over any Arkansas defender. But against the Mustangs Rhine was shot off by excellent defense most of the night and had to rely on turn shots and his fallaway jump.

The result? Rhine hit 12 of 16, the first half while the rest of the Owls managed 2 for 15.

So February 12 and February 16 will tell the tale. On Lincoln's birthday the Owls meet Arkansas up in the Ozarks; four days later they journey to Dallas to meet SMU again. Winning both is a necessity, even for a tie with first-place Texas.

The Owls could conceivably win either one—or both. They beat SMU Saturday, as was pointed out, on a bad night. Dickie Cramer is sure to improve and the Owls are likewise certain to get a better balanced performance.

On the other hand, SMU made it very clear that if they're hot, no defense and no home court advantage can touch them. If the Mustangs have a hot night in Dallas, there's little hope for Rice, or Texas, or anyone else.

But if the Mustangs should be cold, or even lukewarm, the Owls will handle them with ease. It's a weird feeling; the result in Dallas depends.