OWLOOK

Professional Second-Guessers

BY STUART GLASS

Thresher Sports Editor

At its very best, the position of professional second-guesser is the least remunerative and least appreciated in sports journalism. It is also the least-challenging. Any professional second-guesser worth his wage can find fault with the performance of the losing quarterback, or criticize the judgment of the losing coach. No creativity is required.

Nevertheless, the job has its compensations. The second-guesser can't be proved wrong in the majority of his statements. In other words, the game can't be played twice.

From the viewpoint of the coaching staff, the professional second-guesser is simply an occupational hazard. His presence is merely tolerated.

Therefore, there is little in the line of duty to relieve the boredom in the life of the professional second-guesser. So occasionally, one of them attempts to transcend the sterile realm of his occupation and stir up some excitement.

He publishes some quotations out of context.

Against The Rule

Having fished the Houston Post Sports Section out of the mud last Tuesday, early-rising Riceites were treated to two by-lined stories by Bob Rule, a veteran sportswriter, who should know better.

So as not to print any excerpts out of context, we shall publish some complete paragraphs.

"Jess Neely is giving serious thought to turning the destinies of the 1964 Rice Owls over to a pair of sophomore quarterbacks."

"Asked if he planned to stay with Walter McReynolds, his senior quarterback and tri-captain, Neely replied:"

"'I just don't see how we can.'

"McReynolds, certainly, will be given an equal opportunity. But the senior from Galveston has displayed an unsteadiness in the huddle that's not to Neely's liking, and his signal calling has never been of high quality."

The other story, a regular column, had this to say:

"During the next two games, I'm confident Neely plans to develop a new quarterback in whose hands he'll place his ball club for the rest of the year. It might be Ronnie Waldo, or it might be Mickey Holder."

Neely denies criticism

"But the veteran coach of the Owls apparently has gone as far as he intends to go with Walter McReynolds, the senior quarterback and tri-captain from Galveston."

"Waldo and Holder definitely will get the chance to step forward and claim the job, and certainly McReynolds will be given every opportunity to hold it. But Neely is in the mood for a change."

Since we believed that some of these statements did not ring true, we decided to give Coach Neely, a five-effigy letterman, a chance to defend himself. The verdict was that the Post stories were a collection of half-truths and innendos which would do credit to the Communist Manifesto.

Neely was blunt: "There was no reason for that story. I have never criticized a boy that way in the newspapers or before the team. The responsibility for the loss can't be placed on the shoulders of one boy. It was the fault of the whole team and the coaches."

Second Needed Anyway

"I took out McReynolds and put in Waldo in the last quarter because Walter wasn't moving the ball and I thought Ronnie might be able to. But maybe I was just clutching at straws. I don't think any quarterback in the country could have moved it. The responsibility was 99% LSU. They just had a good team."

Concerning his plans for using Waldo and Holder in the approaching West Virginia and Stanford games, Neely indicated that he was indeed looking for a second quarterback. This is sound football for at least two obvious reasons.

First, McReynolds is admittedly not Don Trull. It takes a great quarterback to play the entire game on offense, and if one man can't move the team, a temporary change of pace is necessary. Second, Walter has had several minor ankle and leg injuries the last two years, and in the event of a serious ailment, refraining from grooming a replacement before the conference starts would be disastrous.

Neely is still leaning to McReynolds as his starter for the rest of the year. He is not going to chuck two full years of experience just because of one bad game, especially since blame for the bad game cannot be put on Walter. Or, as Neely put it, "I put Craig Christopher in for Malcolm Walker, but that doesn't mean I'm benching Malcolm."

Workout Schedule Altered

But we resent Rule's article for several other reasons. We don't deny him his opinion, but opinion disguised between quotation marks is a vicious menace.

We resent the hypocrisy of applauding Walter's daring, as when he threw a screen pass for a touchdown in the 6-6 tie with LSU two years ago, and then saying that "his signal calling has never been of high quality." And we see no need in the remark about Walter's "unsteadiness in the huddle," which the starting players claim is no longer evident.

Most important, we are disturbed about the disruption of team morale which the article caused. Being head coach of a major football team is a tough, full-time job. For Mr. Neely to alter his workout schedule and call a team meeting to restore flagging morale caused by an uncalled for newspaper article is an unnecessary nuisance.

So what it all boils down to is that we prefer to entrust the handling of our football team, for better or for worse, to a professional coach and veteran of 25 years, instead of to a professional second-guesser.