DIVIDED CAGE TEAM LED RICE TO CELLAR

By Ted Hermann

In 1954 and 1955 Rice recruited the finest group of high school basketball players ever to be assembled at one school in SWC history. The Houston newspapers immediately began predicting conference domination and national ranking for the Owls. And all Rice partisans took up the chant.

Tall Man's Game

For basketball was a tall man's game and Rice had the cream of the tall, "super" basketball players with such high school stars as Temple Tucker, Tinker Wilson, Tom Robitaille, Gary Griffin, and Willie Preston. And besides, the Owls had the front court talent to go with them in Gerry Thomas, Dale Ball, E. Jay McIlvain, and Bob Higgins.

But Not Tops

But domination never came.

Rice received national ranking only in pre-season polls. The best the timber topping Owls could manage in this four year dynasty was a second place in the 1957 conference race. Rice sank to fifth in 1958 and then hit bottom this year as Sports Illustrated printed; "Down in Texas where men are usually men, and the coaches are proud of it, it seems that some of the men have been up to little boys' tricks as Marshall Hughes of Texas and Don Suman of Rice were hanged in effigy last week by their respective student bodies."

Students Blame Suman

Since the student body is of the opinion that Coach Suman is completely to blame for the failure of the Rice basketball team, we feel obligated, after a brief investigation, to present the following facts for consideration by the student body.

Don Suman became head basketball coach in 1949 after serving three years as freshman basketball coach at Rice. After three years of rebuilding, in which Rice won only 25 while losing 45 and finishing no higher than 6th in the conference race, Gene Schwynder led the Owls out of the second division with second and first place finishes in 1953 and 1954.

His Record

In these two seasons Rice won 38 while losing 11. Since that time Suman's teams have finished 5th, 3rd, 2nd, and 5th in the ensuing races; compiling a four year total of 69-67.

Suman's nine year records at Rice are as follows: season 121-93 for 51.8%, conference 54-56 for 44.7%. Suman's record since the 1952-53 campaign is: season 96-48 for 66.7%, conference 46-28 for 62.2%.

Really Expert

As to Suman's basketball knowledge, there appears to be no one whom we consider as basketball experts who doubt Suman's basketball knowhow. Two weeks ago we watched as Suman diagrammed the strategy which he had devised for use against SMU's zone defense. In our humble opinion it was about as fine a strategy as could be devised. The fact that Butch Craig scored about five lay-ups using Suman's plan attests to this. The fault lies in the fact that the Owls were unable to continually execute the plays set up by their coach.

Team Divided

To answer the question of why, let's look at this year's Owl bas-

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The basketball squad. It appears that the Owls are divided into three factions. One group, which we are proud to say is headed by Tom Robitaille and Bob Higgins, is intent on playing sound, victorious basketball.

Another group, whose intentions are probably the best in the world, has bred discontent and dislike among teammates by their attempts to universalize their religious beliefs. The third group consists of those who put such things as smoking and late hours above all their basketball ambitions.

Content To Blame

This group seems content to leave the basketball situation as it is and pass the blame along to Suman. Needless to say, the finest coach in the world could not win basketball games with such a divided and discontented group of athletes, regardless of their talents.

By now you're asking, "But doesn't Suman have any faults?"

The answer is yes, and for the answer we went to the players. To use the words of one of the Owl cagers, "he just isn't tough enough." Yes, this is the only major fault that we could find in the coaching of Don Suman.

Must Be Rough

Suman just isn't as tough a disciplinarian as it appears he has to be to handle the group of players which he now has on his basketball squad. Whether a "harder" coach could have handled the present situation on the Rice Basketball squad is debatable but doubtful. At any rate discipline appears to be Don Suman's problem and the lack of it, his fault.

In conclusion, we would like to remind the Rice student body of one fact. The cost of victory is high and the taste of defeat is bitter. But the bitterness of defeat under Don Suman is not nearly as distasteful as the disgrace and probation which are the cost of victory of many "victorious" coaches.