Neely Says Athletic Program Is Rice 'Common Denominator'

By JERRY HANSON

Coach Jess Neely was guest speaker last Wednesday night as part of the current series of lectures at Autry House, "The University and Its Work." Neely, Athletic Director and Head Football Coach at Rice since 1940, discussed the athletic program at the school he has served for almost a quarter-century.

Coach Neely pointed out that an athletic department can provide a means of contact with the world outside the school which can not be provided by other departments. In this connection Neely said, "The athletic program can be a common denominator between the University and its Alumni and friends."

WHILE THE athletic program makes this specific contribution to the University Neely feels it is essential that it also be an integrated part of any school.

The Rice recruiting agents consider a boy's qualities that will enable him to become part of Rice. According to Neely, character, scholastic standing in upper half of the class, and athletic ability are the main items considered by his staff, in order of importance.

Neely believes that any boy's primary obligation is to get a degree. This attitude has resulted in the assimilation of many graduating athletes by firms here in Houston. Since 1950 one Houston firm has hired 89 boys and "none have gone sour."

THE POSITION of athletics at Rice differs from that of other Southwest Conference schools because of Rice's limited enrollment. The University of Texas annually gives more football scholarships than the fifty Rice allots for all sports.

No conference rule yet exists concerning a limit to scholarships, and Neely's remark, "I have no desire to limit other schools," attests to his generous Southern background.

THE COMMERCE program has improved Rice's competitive position for young athletes, Neely feels. "Many boys found the Academic curriculum too tough and were forced to join P.E. against their interests. Now those boys interested in business can enter the Commerce Department."

The result is that of forty-eight entering freshman athletes only about fifteen are Physical Education majors. Coach Neely was very proud that only one boy on scholarship failed to make his grades last year, and pointed out that athletics is not necessarily so time-consuming that it opposes scholarship.