Susan Sontag, Aristotle, and Owls

By TOMMY HEARRON

Thresher Sports Editor

Quoting liberally from Susan Sontag a former Texas coach, I have come to the conclusion that this year’s football team would offer a living, breathing demonstration of Camp in its highest form because, if so he said, there would be a disproportionate number of the football it played.

Now at the end of the season, however, it is clear that despite its second consecutive losing season, the team had nothing at all campy about it: the form of the game was football, and the content was football. Hard-hitting, aggressive football of a brand that Rice Stadium hadn’t seen before.

No, these weren’t the Campy Owls. These were the Tragic Owls, and tragic in the true Aristotelian sense of the word.

Aristotelian Tragedy

Tragedy, according to Aristotle, if I may pluck Tony Cottee of the previously mentioned sports editor, occurs when an essentially noble character suffers a downfall because of some tragic flaw. Such a description, I think, is appropriate for Rice.

When they took the field against foes infinitely more powerful—teams such as Tennessee, UCLA, and Arkansas—there was nothing to suggest that they would play. When they fought valiantly only to lose in the last few seconds, surely some grandeur was there. And when they proved themselves able to bounce back week after week, the word seemed fitting to describe them. And that word is noble.

In short, the team had that indefinable something which Coach Neely came as close to describing to recruiting them a team with “character,” which would be trite and simplistic if it weren’t true.

And yet this team had a tragic flaw that led to its downfall, a flaw that embraced several shortcomings—the lack of a dependable secondary and an accurate place kicker, for example—but the chief reason for so many last minute losses was a lack of depth; the team simply could not substitute capable second-stringers to allow the starters to rest. The ability gap between the first and second teams was just too great.

Outstanding Owls

When Rice did have its starters in the game, though, there were quite a few outstanding players wearing blue uniforms, some of them assuredly good enough to be chosen to the All-Conference teams.

Chuck Latourette was unanimously named to the All-Conference team at safety, and Lester Lehman was picked at fullback. And yet we feel that Rice was a genuine injustice done when Jay Collines and Tony Tyser, at least one of whom should have been picked at defensive end, were omitted.

Perhaps the most heartening aspect of the season, though, is the overall youth of the team. Very few lettermen will be lost to graduation; only four starters have exhausted their eligibility. In fact, the nucleus of this team has the potential for years of success, and next year, the year after, if it can avoid the tragic flaw of this year’s squad.

And yet there are indications that this same lack of proportionality between the fore-seeable future.

Help for the future

For to have a truly good team, the sophomores and juniors on this year’s squad will be needing help both from players on this year’s freshman team and from the players who are now being recruited.

Now, this first source doesn’t seem to offer too much promise, for last year’s recruiting is generally recognized as one of the most disastrous in recent years.

Of all the players on the freshman squad, only center-linebacker Steve Bradshaw, linebacker towards, and quarterback Dickie Phillips seem likely to contend for starting roles next year.

And so, a profitable recruiting season is imperative. And although Rice has been handicapped by the delayed announcement of Bo Hargrave as head coach, his enthusiasm and energy should more than compensate for the time advantage the other schools possess.

The Rice football outlook looks considerably more hopeful.

"Are you sure you don’t want to join me again this year?"

By BILL KENNEDY

Thresher Sports Writer

To say that Rice basketball will be improved this year is a pretty meaningless statement. After all, there’s hardly any way to go but up after a 1-23 season.

The 1966 Owls have a new coach, new uniforms, a new defense, and hopefully a new spirit. And Chuck Knodel, who has tried to get rid of as many reminders of the bad old days as possible.

Changes to be made

Along with the new sky-blue uniforms, he is installing a new overplaying "pressure defense" calculated to force the opposition into mistakes. Knodel will also abandon former coach George Carlisle’s policy of recruiting solely in the Houston area. He plans to seek talent, including Negro players, wherever possible, especially in the basketball-happy Midwest where he recruited for Vanderbilt.

Knodel will use all twelve varsity players in the non-conference games in order to find the most effective starters. The defense is physically punishing, however, and some substitution will be necessary all year.

Among the twelve are four seniors, four juniors, and four sophomores, including last year’s second-high scorer, 6’8” Bill Doty and sometime-starters Larry Millen, Mike Insinman, and Marty Ivey.

Best of the sophomores may be 6’9” guard Greg Williams, an excellent passer and playmaker. Other promising sophs are 6’3” Johnny Coles and 6’7” post man Jim Hubenak.

Hubenak was high-scoring on the freshman team with an average of 19.9 points a game. Unfortunately, he too fell prey to the squads in antisocial activity, fouling out of nearly each game.

With Doty, Hubenak, and 6’7” junior Farrar Stockton under the basket, however, the Owls have no height deficiency. They lack rebounding muscle, however, and are hurting desperately for speed.

Early prophecies

As for the conference, no clear favorite has yet emerged, although TCU and defending champion SMU look strongest at the moment. The Mustangs have four starters returning from last year’s team, while the Frogs have gained strength through junior college transfers and a good soph crop.

Baylor, Texas, and A&M will be the SWC dark horses. Arkansas, which lost all five starters through graduation, Tech, and guess who are picked to battle for the cellar.

A final word: expect no miracles on the court this season, for the Owls are not all that different from last year’s disastrous squad. But do expect a tougher, more aggressive, better-drilled team that will win at least seven games and leave the SWC basement.