It Can Happen Here...

By PAUL BURKA

This is Rice-Texas week, the day after the game, but there's no further mention of that great rivalry in this sports column. There's another story far more important than any Rice-Texas game, a story of national importance, and yet one which isn't clean enough to print without some discussion of its worthlessness. It's a story about something that could never happen here.

TWO WEEKS AGO a Rice University student, in an act of incredible selfishness, asked two Rice basketball players to shave points in an upcoming basketball game. Ironically, state law prohibits journalists from mentioning this student's name, while professional ethics not only permit, but virtually demand naming the players, who thereupon will be watched throughout the rest of their careers although they are the honest ones.

The student, fortunately, no longer mars the reputation of the student body by his presence. The two athletes, also fortunately, remain, and hopefully will continue to contribute their share to a fine basketball team.

IT AMAZES US how one insignificant person can take it upon himself to hurt millions of people. It is even more pathetic when one realizes that those hurt the most are members of his own school's student body.

Of course, the persons most immediately involved are the two basketball players, who turned down the $500 apiece offer. Their careers and their reputations would have been ruined for life.

BUT MORE ARE AFFECTED—millions more. Most closely involved is the Rice basketball team, which has definitely suffered a let-down since the event. It is only to the credit of the players involved that they never stopped hustling; we'll never forget the magnificent effort by one of them in the second game against SMU.

No one will ever know if the conference race would have been at all different. Texas has continued to win, but if the Owls had put the pressure on the Longhorns by beating SMU in Dallas, it all could have been different. Or the Owls might have lost to SMU anyway. We'll never know...

A scar has marred Rice University because of this incident. Its reputation and that of its students has suffered. Southwest Conference basketball, insofar as it has a reputation after last year's officiating scandals, has suffered. And every basketball fan, and indeed every sports fan all over the country, has been hurt. Every scandal in sports hurts everyone connected with athletics, pro or amateur, player or fan.

There are, of course, heroic moments in every tragedy. Few realize the temptation in the offer, to shave points and still win the ball game, yet collect $500. True, to refuse it was the only honest way, but there are many who don't choose the honest way. It's bad, but it could have been a lot worse.

THEN JOHNNY FRANKIE earned our lasting respect by refusing to identify the two players when confronted by the press. We feel very strongly that their identities should have been kept secret, that the revelation of their names could bring them little but embarrassment.

In fact, the entire Rice basketball team performed brilliantly in the face of a possible collapse of morale. Frankie himself said he doesn't understand how they did it; we don't either. It's not so hard to fight until you get knocked down, but to get up and keep fighting is quite a bit harder. Yet each of the first three post-scandal games saw great comebacks by the Owls.

But the said fact remains that a student tried to bribe a fellow student. It would be nice to end this column optimistically, but we can't. For as long as there are sporting events, there will be those who try to pervert them. Just don't say, "It can never happen here." It can.