Owlook: When the clock strikes midnight for Cinderella

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Having thus weathered last week's minor insurrection in the Sports Department staff, once more it's time to scan the distant horizons of our clouded and (by now) rather thoroughly battered crystal ball. At the beginning of the basketball season our dauntless basketball analyst, inexperienced in the shot and shell that can befall an errant sportswriter when his well thought-out predictions gang aft agley (we, for instance met with such a notable lack of success during the football season that we felt it advisable to transform the Sports Department into a non-profit organization); all the above being so, our basketball analyst dealt out his Tarot cards, cut open two rather fat pigeons, consulted his horoscope, and predicted the 1967 Owls would "win at least seven games and escape the SWC cellar."

Thus far, amazingly, although the Owls are currently tied with Arkansas for last place, the first portion of his forecast has proven true, for to date the team has won exactly seven games.

A Cinderella team

Compared with the prophecies of other writers covering Rice basketball, our brilliant analyst showed considerably more optimism, for at the beginning of the year it was deemed well-nigh impossible that a coach in his first year could take a group of previously undistinguished veterans, mix them with an equally undistinguished group up from the freshman ranks, and produce a team that would keep opposing coaches up late at night, if not tearing their hair (which is a commodity in short supply among basketball coaches for some reason), at least worrying over what Rice's defense could do to a previously poised team.

This year's team, in short, to use a cliche pioneered and worked into the ground by the noble press of our nation, has been a "Cinderella team," whose color and aggressiveness have lured the average blase Rice student to the cobweb-encrusted nether regions of Autry Court.

Three months ago the notion that Rice could defeat Baylor, overpower TCU, and annihilate A&M was completely preposterous. And yet, dear reader, such strange and unforeseen happenings did occur.

Midnight

There are certain inherent disadvantages to being a Cinderella team, however, and the chief of these is that when the clock strikes midnight, there take place certain transformations, not unlike those so thoroughly chronicled by Ovid.

And so it is with the Owls, we fear, for although the team has occasionally looked impressive in its recent games—and probably played its best game of the season against SMU—the carriage in which it was riding so high has shown definite orangish tendencies, and its prancing white horses have occasionally been seen to sniff at a piece of cheese along the route.

For whatever reason, whether because opposing coaches have discovered the Owls' attack suffers immeasurably when Bill Doty gets into foul trouble, because they have learned Rice is vulnerable to a run-and-shoot, fast break type of game, or because they have devised ways to negate Rice's press, the Owls have been in a prolonged slump the past couple of weeks.

If this is not stopped—and it can be stopped only by a victory over Texas Tech this Thursday—the latter portion of the afore-mentioned prophecy, that Rice will escape from its two-year tenure in the SWC cellar, will not come to pass. For the honor of the clairvoyant Thresher sports department, we sincerely hope for a victory.

This particular time of year is encouraging, however, in that there are so many different brands of sports happening at the same time that there is usually one in which Rice is doing so well that it is pleasant to write about. This year, strangely enough, baseball is the immediate bright spot on the Rice sporting horizon.

Now, baseball at Rice has never been held in high esteem; without exception you can casually wander by the diamond, find an excellent seat in the sun-drenched bleachers, along with the twenty-five or thirty other faithful spectators, (whom you secretly suspect to be friends and roommates of the mighty warriors performing on the diamond), watch two or three innings of play, and wander home.

This year, however, things show promise of being greatly different, for the Rice baseball team (which has never, repeat, never, won a SWC championship) has so far made a clean sweep of all its non-Conference opponents, demonstrating in the process the two essentials for a winning team: pitching and hitting.

Powerful pitching

As regards the SWC race, although Rice can not be picked as the favorite, the Owls have an advantage in returning more top-notch pitchers than any other team. All-SWC Ray Hosten, Ron Henson (who has the major league scouts drooling) and Bill Palmer, who seems to have recovered completely from a broken ankle suffered during the intramural season, should send multitudes of opposing hitters back to the dugout.

The majority of the other schools in the Conference, on the other hand, have had their pitching ranks debilitated by graduation and—the most feared enemy of college coaches, professional signings. In the hitting department, the Owls boast Andy Rooker (all SWC in 1965) powerful Frankie Mandola at first base as well as the powerful bats of Palmer and Henson.

Tennis slumps

Unfortunately, tennis, customarily the bright spot of Rice's spring sports, is probably well-nigh abandoned as a lost cause. The loss of John Pickens, who is making a State Department sponsored goodwill tour abroad (and is not in training for espionage, despite persistent rumors that the Rice tennis team is really a front for the CIA) leaves Butch Seewagen as the sole returning letterman.

And the results thus far have shown this loss, as in its first three matches Rice has failed to win a single point. Thus, it appears Rice has little chance of maintaining its traditional grip on the SWC tennis championship.

And so, although the basketball and tennis teams seem to have fallen on hard days, there is always baseball. And surely one successful sport at a time is enough for any fan.