Officiating shows clowning glory

By TOMMY HEARRON

This year’s basketball season will be dull.

Whereas last year’s team played a wide-open, shoot-from-anywhere, who-cares-about-defense-let’s-just-score-points brand of basketball which could turn even the most routine play into such wildly exciting spectacles as take-three-steps-before-dribbling, bounce-the-ball-off-your-teammate’s-ear, and heave-the-ball-into-the-stands.

No, sports fans, the basketball team this year is downright dull.

All they do is play simple, fundamental, sound basketball.

And they will probably win a few games, to the despair of those who remember last year’s excitement as the Owls almost broke the national record for consecutive losses.

But have no fear, sports fans, even if you don’t care for Rice victories (and after two consecutive disastrous seasons, it’s only the elite who even remember the meaning of the term) there still is ample entertainment at the game.

In addition to the oldtime crowd pleaser, the halftime court cleaning race (if you feel like betting on it, put your money on the fellow on the far side—he’s faster at the crucial spots, the ends of the court) the Southwest Conference has thoughtfully provided additional excitement and humor in the form of the little men in the black and white striped shirts.

Take the game Saturday against Southwest Texas, for instance, a game so exciting that it’s a shame the referees didn’t see it. At least, it was exciting for the portion we watched until we discovered it was more interesting to watch the officials.

Now, we don’t claim to be an expert on all the rules of basketball, but in the game last Saturday the referees seemed to be in the same position. Several strange things happened that we had never seen before: a Rice player taking down a rebound, dribbling out of bounds, and then merrily proceeding downcourt, fouls called on what were obviously cleanly-blocked shots, and (wonder of wonders) an actual, football-esque fumble, as a defensive man rammed the fellow bringing the ball downcourt, the ball popped into the air, and several other players scrambled for the loose ball. (Both teams played good, hard-hitting ball, but Southwest Texas seemed to have the edge in downfield blocking.)

In their favor, we’d have to say the officials seemed prejudiced toward neither team, ignoring obvious fouls, calling insignificant offenses, (they seemed determined to call a foul at intervals of one per minute, regardless of what was happening on the court) and making equally atrocious blunders on behalf of each side.

Although it’s impossible to measure the effect of the awful officiating on the outcome of the game, it was fun just to sit there and wait for what the referees would do next.

But don’t misunderstand: we believe in hiring the handicapped. We just don’t think they should referee basketball games.