Rice Coaching Duo To Inaugurate Silver Anniversary Year With LSU

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This year marks the Silver Anniversary for the Jess Neely-Joe Davis combination of head coach-line coach at Rice. A trip to the Cotton Bowl is the intended frosting on the anniversary cake.

The partnership actually goes back 34 years to the day Neely took over as head coach at Clemson and invited Davis to terminate a short business career to be his assistant.

Since that time the Neely-Davis duo has compiled a 179-137-16 record, won four Southwest Conference championships and finished in the first division 18 times.

When Neely started at Clemson in 1931, he inherited an athletic department that was “broke” — in both manpower and money. With the aid of Davis, Neely turned Clemson into a football power that reached its peak with a 1940 Cotton Bowl win.

After the game Neely strolled into the Clemson dressing room to be greeted by the shouts of his players and by two visitors from Rice Institute, Dr. Gaylord Johnson, Athletic Business Manager, and Al Tomforde, a Houston insurance man who had played on Rice's first teams from 1913-1916.

Move To Rice
When asked to come to Rice as athletic director and head football coach, Neely reacted in the taciturn manner for which he is now well known: neither Dr. Johnson nor Tomforde had the slightest idea what Neely's reaction to their proposal really was when they left the dressing rooms.

Twenty-five years later, Neely's decision is a legend in the Southwest Conference, and the Neely-Davis duo is still going strong.

They are looking forward to their 333rd consecutive game, 180th win, and 5th SWC championship.

Lifelong Friends
Neely's past accomplishments also include the past presidency of the American Football Coaches Association and membership of the NCAA grid rules committee. And it was under his leadership that the 70,000 seat Rice Stadium and one-million dollar field house were built.

Neely and Davis are lifelong best friends, both coming from Smyrna, Tennessee. Davis was a top end for Southwestern of Memphis when Neely was head coach there.

The friendship became one of football's most successful partnerships when Neely asked him to help out at Clemson.