Anonymous grant finances feasibility study of cover for stadium; findings to go to Governors next month

By CHARLIE MYERS
Thrasher Reporter

Financed by an anonymous $25,000 grant, a study has been underway since June to investigate the feasibility of constructing a cover for the 70,000 seat Rice Stadium.

The study is being directed by the architectural firms of Lloyd, Morgan & Jones and the McGinty Partnership. The firms, headed by Rice architectural graduates, first designed the award-winning Rice Stadium in 1950.

The basic aerodynamic studies of storm loadings and stress analysis will be conducted by members of the Rice civil and mechanical engineering departments, many of whom were consultants on the Harris County Domed Stadium.

Ready Next Month

Although no deadline has been set for the study, Lee Estes of the Development Office stated that he thought the report would be presented to the Board of Directors next month. "It will then get some serious economic and financial considerations before a decision is reached," he said.

Among the several designs to be considered by the feasibility study group is a cover which may be rolled over the stadium in inclement weather. The sun-rain shade, resembling a huge tent-fly suspended over the stands and playing field, would be open on all sides to permit natural ventilation.

The top, either transparent or removable, will allow sunlight to sustain the growth of grass on the playing field. The cover would be the world's first all-weather open-air roof to be suspended over a full-sized stadium designed for football.

Football Revenue Sought

George R. Brown, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Rice University, stated, "We are now faced with serious annual operating fund deficits at the University. In order to continue to provide the high quality of education which we offer Rice students, we must consider every possible source of revenue to reduce these deficits.

"Several persons have suggested that we may increase our revenue from football patrons by providing an all-weather open-air facility. If this study proves that we can gain increased funds for education, we are prepared to investigate further the possibilities of actually constructing the cover over the stadium. If it doesn't look like it will show a net profit for the University's private educational effort, we will not pursue the matter further."

Increase Attendance

When questioned where funds for the undertaking would come from, should it prove feasible, Estes replied that he wasn't sure. Regarding the economic practicality of such a venture, Estes added, "The idea seems to be that a dome over a stadium will increase attendance."

He also said that the stadium would still be used only for football. At the moment, two of the three major football teams in Houston, the Owls and the Oilers, are playing all of their home games in the stadium and the third team, the University of Houston, has a contract with the Astrodome.