The days are growing shorter now, and the last few hardy leaves on the trees are fighting a losing battle. The rains come more often, and the sun's weak rays are powerless to help.

Winter has come.

The days of autumn are but a memory, gone the way of the seasons. The birds are quiet, the sunsets are dull, the Stadium is empty.

Winter is here.

Winter arrives like no other season. Spring creeps up, with a flower here and a bud there, until suddenly it bursts forth in all its beauty. Summer evolves as the days get hotter, and then lingers on into the autumn as the sun ignores the calendar.

But winter arrives with a gloomy suddenness. When the last second ticks off the scoreboard clock, autumn joins the past tense. In America, fall and football are synonymous.

It is always with a trace of sadness, therefore, that we wake up on the last Saturday of football season. For day-in-day-out tension, there's nothing like baseball. For thrills, excitement, and action, basketball wins hands down. But for an athletic expression of the highest degree, football must be the choice.

A good football game is the best excuse for the existence of sport.

You were 163 miles away from your school, and almost as far from where your football team was playing, but when two o'clock came, you were by the radio. There was a lot to think about, since you were on the University of Texas campus.

You could think about the night of October 27, and Texas' 9-o-1 record, and why the 'Horns weren't Number One. You could look up at the Tower, and picture how beautiful it must have looked that night, bathed in darkness and the tears of defeat. Or you could think back to September 29, when you sat transfixed in front of another radio and listened unbelievably to the LSU game.

Or, if you cared to, you could think about how Baylor was beating hell out of your team in Waco. But one thing you never thought: that you were glad it would soon be all over. You might be losing, but it was still football.

Losing Billy Cox in the Blue-Grey game proved to be an irreplaceable damage. When Walter McReynolds led the Owls out of the wilderness at Baton Rouge, he looked like the answer.

But Mac later didn't come through, and at the end wasn't even given the chance. You can't play a quarter-back only in spot situations (third-and-ten, fourth-and-goal) or inside your own twenty yard line, and expect an all-American performance.

And Randy Kerbow, hampered all season by a bad leg, only briefly returned to his 1961 form. The Owls needed Cox badly.

The problem with Rice's '62 performance lies deeper than any outsider can dig. We've sometimes looked askance at both players and coaches—call it second-guessing if you will, but our mistakes remain in print forever. But admittedly you can hardly expect either a player or a coach to perform perfectly during a rugged ten-game schedule.

We began last week to wonder if the very system at Rice doesn't have something to do with the failure. At other schools football players live together in what is sometimes known as an "animal house," while Rice prides itself on integrating athletes into the College System.

It is beyond the scope of this column to determine the effect of athletes upon the College System; we'll leave that for the editorial pages. But the College System has an effect upon the athletes too.

It acts, first of all, as a divisive force. Instead of living together as a unit, players are split among four colleges. Automatically cliques begin to form and team unity is hurt. It is no secret—that rumors of dissension were prevalent in '61, and some were heard in early '62.

Secondly, the attitudes of the students are assimilated by the players. At Texas the walls of Moore-Hill Hall protect the Longhorns against the outside world. But not at Rice. Spirit isn't necessarily contagious; often teams can be "up" when the student body is "down," and vice versa. However, there is less chance of this at Rice, for the players are in closer contact with the student body.

This, perhaps, might help to explain why the Owls played so magnificently against their three big rivals—LSU, Texas, and the Aggies—and so poorly against all the rest. For, as one student put it, "We had a perfect season. We were 1-0-2." Funny thing about those other games on the schedule...

It may be that Rice's proudest athletic claim—that its athletes aren't simply "paid professionals," but active members of the student community—is a vital factor in a series of up-and-down years.

We don't think Rice should have an athletic dorm, however. It might help, but so would a better pass defense, more team speed, and better blocking. The latter are more easy to come by—or are they?

The scene moves indoors now, to rectangular arenas with hardwood floors, to busy Christmas shoppers, and to millions of little green trees in millions of homes. The hopes of September 29 are buried under an avalanche of losses, almost forgotten except for the feelings for what might have been. But even these fade away while the hopes for what might be rise anew. The '62 Owls may have been 2-6-2, but the '63 Owls are still unbeaten...