Hard luck Rice to rip Red Raiders

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You’re up in the pressbox, and the game seems a mile away. The score’s 7-0, but Rice is on Texas’ seven yard line, and Shelton’s back to pass, but somebody deflects it. In your binoculars, the ball looks like a child’s balloon as it hangs in the air. It seems to float forever, and all the while you’re worrying, “Somebody might catch that. Somebody might catch that.”

And all at once something white engulfs the ball, and there’s someone running all alone, and then everyone’s running, and the man jiggles out of the field of your binoculars as you try to follow him. And Benningfield’s chasing him.

“Think he’ll catch him?” the fellow beside you asks his friend, but he doesn’t really care, and all the while the man’s running, and Benningfield’s chasing him, and inside you’re aching because he’s running, he’s running.

And then the scoreboard reads 13-0, and the pressbox announcer says, “A ninety yard interception return. That’s the longest this year,” and the man next to you smugly says, “That’ll break Rice’s back,” but it isn’t your back that’s broken: it’s something else.

And after the game ends and everyone goes home, you wander down from the pressbox and slowly make your way through the deserted stadium. Up above, the scoreboard lights still glow “Texas 14, Rice 6,” over the stadium, now so empty. Almost as empty as your heart.

And yet, even in defeat there have been some bright spots. Perhaps the most important sign has been the continually improving play of Robby Shelton, who at the mid-point of the season has rushed for a total of over five hundred yards, setting a pace far above that of both Dicky Maegle and Kosse Johnson, Rice stars of the ’50’s.

This week, Texas Tech visits Rice Stadium, bringing with them a good opportunity for Rice to break out of the losing rut. For Tech, like Rice, has had its problems this year. Decimated by the loss of last year’s offensive leaders, Tom Wilson and Donny Anderson, the Raiders have lost five consecutive games after an opening victory over Kansas.

Statistically, Rice holds a slight edge over the Raiders: the teams are approximately equal in offensive performances, but Rice has shown a somewhat stouter defense. And, luckily for the Owls, Texas Tech has been especially weak in rushing defense.

Robby Shelton (who leads the conference in rushing), L. V. Benningfield (who has made the longest run from scrimmage this year), and company should have a fine time Saturday. In short, this should be Rice’s week.

And although last week our predictions tragically went awry, we’ll try again: Rice 21, Texas Tech 14.