Supreme Effort Needed To Unrank Steers

By RONNIE KLINE

In 1957, the Texas Aggies matched into Houston on an eight game winning streak and ranked number one in the nation. Just hours later, the farmers plowed their way back to College Station under the load of a 7-6 defeat. One year later, the 4th ranked University of Texas Longhorns rode into Rice Stadium and were promptly shipped back to Austin, smarting under the sting of a 24-7 shellacking. With a particular affinity toward upsetting highly regarded SWC rivals, the Rice Owl football squad tomorrow faces what one writer has termed football’s “megaton bomb,” the University of Texas. The orange and white, ranked number three in the land, has not finished on the short end of a score since the Owls upset it 7-0 last season before 71,000 fans in Houston.

LEADING THE country in yards gained per game, the Longhorns have thus far displayed an awesome and overpowering arsenal of talent. We need not expound upon the virtues of such Steer stalwarts as Saxton, Collins, Poage, and company who have ridden their way to high scoring glory against such formidable opposition as California, Texas Tech, and Washington State.

We must admit that, with their vicious slaughter of the Piggies in Fayetteville last weekend, the Longhorns dispelled all doubts regarding their ability against top flight opposition. The Owls must indeed take notice (to say the least) of all the dust kicked in the faces of Longhorn opposition, even though the Steers are virtually the same gang which fell to the Big Blue 7-0 last year.

TWO DOMINANT factors differentiate tomorrow’s battle from the one held a year ago. First, the Longhorns, supporting a new “flip flop” offense, have in their favor what sports enthusiasts term the all-important factor—momentum; and yet “momentum” would hardly describe the Longhorns early season onslaught. This “momentum” has produced 172 points (a shocking average of 34 points per game) and all that with the first string logging comparatively little time! Some humorists point out that Steer great James Saxton may not letter because he’s too good to play! But let’s not ignore the Texas defense, which has yielded only thirty-nine points in five encounters.

With all this in their favor, the Longhorns would seem unbeatable, but still another important factor can be chalked up in their column. Playing in the friendly confines of Memorial Stadium (which, with the addition of four thousand bleacher seats, will seat sixty-two thousand fans), the Longhorns rarely lose. They’ll be aided by fifteen thousand and screaming students who will, if all goes true to form, completely surround the Owl cheering section.

IN RECENT YEARS, the Longhorns have succumbed to the Owls but twice in the rickety stadium. Both games were unbelievably exciting. In 1949, with just sixteen seconds left to tick away, Froggie Williams, Rice All-American, booted a breath-taking three pointer to give the Owls a 17-15 victory, which paved the way for the Big Blue to go undefeated in SWC action.

The 1953 game, with its unusual 4th period, is certainly worth description. After three quarters, Texas led Dicky Moegle and company 13-7. The Owls great defense, stocked with such formidable linemen as Chapman, Hudson, and Racks, bottled up the Texas attack deep in Steer territory. In order to prevent a possible disaster, Texas back-pedalled into its own end zone, choosing to give the Owls a safety in order to get a free kick. Scores: 13-9. Again, after halting an Owl drive, the Steers gave us another intentional safety. Score: 13-11.

Time left: one minute thirty seconds. By this time, you could have heard the roar of the crowd in Tumbleweed. With the ball on the Texas forty-seven yard line and with fifty seconds left on the clock, Owl quarterback Leroy Fenstermaker reared back and heaved; and Dan Hart made a sensational grab as he fell into the end zone, clutching an 18-13 victory neatly in his hands. The Longhorn fans were stunned; we were delirious; and the Owls went on to take a share of the SWC crown.

SO TO DEFEAT the Steers in Memorial Stadium is possible, if improbable. A victory here would send the Owls into the SWC lead with a huge psychological lift. On the other hand, the memory of Hart’s catch is worn thin by eight long years of frustration in Austin. Better take your track shoes with you — they’re liable to run us clear out of town.

THE OWLS’ Gary and Longhorns’ Ray Poage will forget brotherly love from about 8:00 to 10:30 p.m. Saturday night when Rice and Texas clash in Austin’s Memorial Stadium.