

Rice Stadium Jinx Was There Again

SPORTS SECTION



By VAN CONNER
Battalion Sports Editor

The Rice Stadium jinx that seems to await A&M teams every year was there again Saturday as the Cadets could manage but one field goal against the passing and kicking of a well-healed Randy Kerbow and dropped their fourth straight Owl clash, 23-3.

There were quite a few lads who caused the Ags misery besides Kerbow. A guy named Ronnie Hatfield drew as much praise from his Rice teammates as did Kerbow. He had a pair of punt returns, 39 and 30 yards respectively, that robbed the Ags of vital field position in the second and third quarters.

THE 30-YARDER set up the final Owl TD that put them too far ahead to be caught up with. And with the final minute of the game ticking away, Hatfield intercepted a Jim Keller pass in the end zone to squelch the Ags' last chance for a touchdown.

Them that Hatfield has been poison to A&M this season. Arkansas had a Ken Hatfield that returned three Farmer punts to keep the Ags backed against their goal throughout the second half of that contest.

Rice grabbed the first lead in the game, on a field goal by Kerbow from the 26. After the ball had changed hands three more times, Keller handed the ball to Eddie VanDyke on the A&M 38 and the San Antonio senior sprinted 39 yards over right tackle to the Owl

23. The drive bogged down there and Mike Clark had to kick a 38-yard three pointer into a seven mph wind to tie it up late in the first quarter. It was Clark's sixth of the season, which gave him a tie for the season record set by Rice's Butch Blume last year.

Just as the second period began White team quarterback James Willenborg was hit by Rice end John Sylvester and fumbled. Owl guard John Nichols picked up his first fumble of the afternoon.

BEHIND THE passing of Kerbow to Sylvester and Gene Raesz, the Owls drove 50 yards in 13 plays for a touchdown. Fullback Paul Piper set it up with a 12-yard gain up the middle to the one and Kerbow carried over on a sneak.

Late in the half the Ags sought to get started again, but this time third-teamer John Sparling fumbled and Nichols came up with it again. A&M held, forced a punt out of bounds and then lost the ball deep in their own territory again on a Ronnie Brice to Raesz fumble.

Still stubborn on the next play, the Ags took over again when Ken Kipp picked off one of Kerbow's aeriels and ran it back 14 to the Ag 26.

As quick as it started, this A&M drive bogged down and they punted out to the Rice 31. Piper got five up the middle and, with one second left in the half, Kerbow threw a bulls-eye to end Jerry

Kelley for a 64-yard score. The PAT attempt went wide to the left and it was 16-3 at the half.

After the Aggie band gave its finest performance of the season, Rice couldn't move the ball on one set of downs and neither could the Cadets. The ensuing punt was a beauty, and deep man Hatfield was smothered where he caught it.

BUT THE PLAY was nullified and when Keller punted a second time for 44 yards, Hatfield ran it back 30 to the Ag 25. On first down, Kerbow threw to Sylvester for the last points of the game.

Just as the Farmers had another drive started, Willenborg threw for John Brotherton on the tackle-eligible pass but Rice's Russell Wayt picked it off to kill the bid.

Second team quarterback Walter McReynolds was running the Owls then and he put them on the A&M 26 with a 14-yard pass to Kelley. On the next play he tried for Wayt but linebacking Jerry Hopkins made a great interception for the Cadets.

With six minutes left in the final period Sparling and the offensive specialists went into business on the A&M 20. Budgie Ford picked up 10 yards on a crucial third down and then Jim Linnstaeder took a pitchout and raced 59 yards down the west sideline to the Rice 12. The drive was killed there when Ken McLean caught one out of bounds on fourth down.

At this point the Farmers drew two unsportsmanlike conduct penalties and Rice was out of the hole at its 47. But Lee Roy Caffey picked up a Kerbow fumble with a little over two minutes left and the Aggies had another chance.

On passes to Linnstaeder, Caffey and McLean, Willenborg and Keller took the Cadets back down to the Rice 10. With only seconds left, however, Hatfield intercepted a Keller to McLean attempt in the end zone.

Fish Kicker Will Take Over For 'The Toe'

Senior Mike Clark is the undisputed Aggie place-kicking stand-out of this season. But when he graduates Coach Hank Foldberg and the Ags won't suffer much because a strong-legged replacement is already on tap.

He's freshman Robert G. Lee, a 170-pound halfback from San Antonio (Jefferson). Lee kicked a 43-yarder against the Rice Owls. Fish coach Dick Johnson says, "He has a very strong leg."

Foldberg Praises Owls, Lists Reasons For Defeat

The A&M dressing room beneath Rice Stadium was a pretty dismal place Saturday, and, as might be expected, that of the Rice Owls was the opposite. Aggie head coach Hank Foldberg had nothing but praise for Jess Neely's squad and was disappointed in the performance of the hapless Cadets.

Foldberg listed several reasons why the Ags lost a 23-3 SWC decision in the chilly, soggy weather that invariably shows up for the annual A&M-Rice clash. Not necessarily in this order, he pointed out:

1. The "great" passing of Rice quarterback Randy Kerbow. 2. The receiving of Owl ends and backs. 3. The ability of the Rice line to hold out rushers. 4. Cadets misfires, such as pass interceptions and fumbles which prevented the Ags from getting good field position most of the afternoon.

SAID FOLDBERG, "It was evident that Rice was going to make it an aerial game—they came out passing from the start. We were able to stop their passing attack early but they stayed with it and Kerbow started connecting."

"Rice narrowed the splits between the linemen for this game and those big-shouldered Owls just kept us from getting to the passer. In the scouting films, the Owls had lined up with much wider splits."

Foldberg was more than favorably impressed with Kerbow.

"Kerbow hit more accurately than any passer we have faced all season. We had confidence in our pass defense all season, but when a boy like this fellow pinpoints them the way he does, there is not much you can do—except rush the passer and we couldn't do that effectively."

"We did so many things fundamentally wrong today," the Aggie mentor said. "We gave up the ball several times which nipped budding drives and covered two of our kicks poorly."

He said that if there was a turning point in the game it probably came early in the third quarter when quarterback Jim Keller's punt was nullified and the Ags were penalized five yards for in motion. Keller had kicked out to midfield but his second punt with

the ball on the Aggie 11 covered 44 yards and Rice's Ronnie Hatfield returned it 30 yards to the A&M 25.

On the next play Kerbow hit end John Sylvester with a 25-yard pass for the TD that put Rice ahead 23-3.

KELLER HAD great praise for the Owl linebackers (Malcolm Walker, Dan Malin and Paul Piper). "Every time I looked up it seemed that those guys were in my face. They played great football."

The Aggie captain, center Jerry Hopkins, commented, "We just couldn't put enough pressure on the passer and that was the difference. Rice had wonderful protection and Kerbow had a great day throwing."

Over in the Owl dressing room Neely was beaming. "We were pleased with the way our boys played. I was surprised we were able to score as much as we did."

"We knew they would be hard to run on, and I imagine the statistics will show that. They have a good, strong team and since we figured they would be tough to run on we worked a lot on our passing. Overall, I thought our linemen did a pretty good job. They gave the passer good protection; it did break down a time or two but not very much."

SAID NEELY, "Yes, Randy (Kerbow) had a real good day; he threw well." When asked about the variety of pass patterns and throwing to different spots he offered, "We were just trying to find out how they were covering so we could adjust to it. Our boys who are pass receivers maneuver real well and we wanted to see if we could get them open."

On Hatfield: "Yes, he had a fine day. He had that pass interception (in the end zone with about one minute left as the Ags made a scoring bid) and made a couple of good punt returns. He's not a bad boy."

Two Owl linemen had praise for the Ags. Guard Johnny Nichols said, "The Aggie hit real good. That (Ray) Kubala I thought was tougher to handle than any of them. He's pretty rugged."

Said tackle John Mims, "The Aggies had a good, tough team."

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