

Stallings Says Rice Game Toss-Up

Possibly, just possibly, Texas A&M could go into Saturday's Southwest Conference football scuffle in some capacity other than underdog.

For seven of eight games this campaign, the Aggies have drawn the black bean of the underdog. The Aggies were shaky favorites over Tulane, but succumbed nonetheless, 21-13.

A&M Coach Gene Stallings grinned at his weekly press conference and predicted a pretty good ball game with the Rice Owls.

"It should be a pretty evenly matched game," he said. "They've got some good young kids and we've got some good young kids. I'd say we're about even. We shouldn't be the underdog, but we shouldn't be the favorite, either."

A glance at the Owls' strong showing against Arkansas indicates Rice might be due the favorite's tag. The Owls spotted the Porkers 17 points, then roared back to go ahead 20-17 in the third period. Arkansas finally banged out a victory, however, 31-20.

Against another stout and common foe, the Owls upset LSU 17-15 while A&M settled for a 7-7 knot with the Tigers. Both bounced Texas Tech convincingly and both gave SMU fits before bowing.

Stallings was naturally disappointed with Saturday's 21-14 loss to SMU.

"I'm disappointed more for our seniors than for myself," he remarked, "They don't get another chance to win and they deserve more after such great

leadership and effort they have provided for our squad this year."

The Aggie coach was asked what is legal for a defensive player to do against a potential pass receiver.

"The defense can't grab hold of a man," Stallings explained. "A defensive man can ward off the offensive man. He can block him as long as the offensive man is between him and the man with the ball, but he can't push the offensive man once that man has gotten behind him."

Contrary to popular belief, Stallings was not chiding SMU Coach Hayden Fry about his men holding up Aggie receivers. But Stallings wouldn't say what the apparent sharp words were about.

"If they held us every play," Stallings commented, "It wouldn't have been Hayden's fault. He wasn't an official."

Asked about A&M's kickoffs, all of which appeared to be miscued on-side kicks, Stallings said, "They were not on-side kicks. We were trying to kick the ball on the ground down to about their 25-yard line. The kick had two objectives. One was to eliminate the possibility of a long runback by Jerry Levias. The other was to give us a chance to

recover the ball deep in their territory."

"We nearly got the football the second time we tried that type kickoff," he went on. "The idea is to have the ball roll along for several yards along the ground, then bounce high into the air. If the ball jumps up, we have a good chance of getting it. We had our two sprinters, Gilbert Smith and Brian Blessing, lined up outside to give us a good shot at getting the ball."

But the kickoff following A&M's second touchdown went askew. D. J. Moore fielded the bouncing ball on SMU's 35 and romped back to A&M's 48. That was the spark Pony quarterback Mac White needed. He spurred the Mustangs to paydirt in four plays, leaving 49 seconds of the 1:36 that remained in the first half when Aggie kicker Glynn Lindsey put his toe into the pig-hide.

Stallings didn't see much different about the SMU setup in the second half, although Coach Fry was quoted as saying he realigned his horses at intermission.

"There was nothing strikingly different," Stallings said. "They had some good blocks and interceptions in the last half."

Quizzed about a call for a pass on a first and goal situation from the SMU five, Stallings refused to second-guess himself. The pass, intended for Tom Buckman was picked off by Pony Pat Gibson in the end zone, killing an Aggie threat early in the third canto.

"It was the right play," he commented. "We hadn't moved the ball too well on the ground. I'd caught the tempo of the ball game earlier when we failed to make a first down at their 35 on a fourth and one situation."

The already heavily bandaged Aggies suffered further casualties in the Dallas warfare. Center Jim Singleton reinjured a knee and is all but definitely out of the Rice game. Halfback Wendell Housley, who ran very well against SMU's massive line, has a hurt shoulder.

To make matters worse, Tackle "Mo" Moorman is in University Hospital with the flu and Guard Gary Kovar has an infected toe. And Gilbert Smith, who blocked an SMU field goal try and snared a big pass for the Aggies, twist-

ed an ankle in practice Monday.

Still, Stallings isn't crying the blues. He thinks the Aggies will be fairly sound for Rice. Loyd Curington, who saw only limited action against SMU, is stronger now and may see heavier duty before an anticipated 50,000 people in his hometown.

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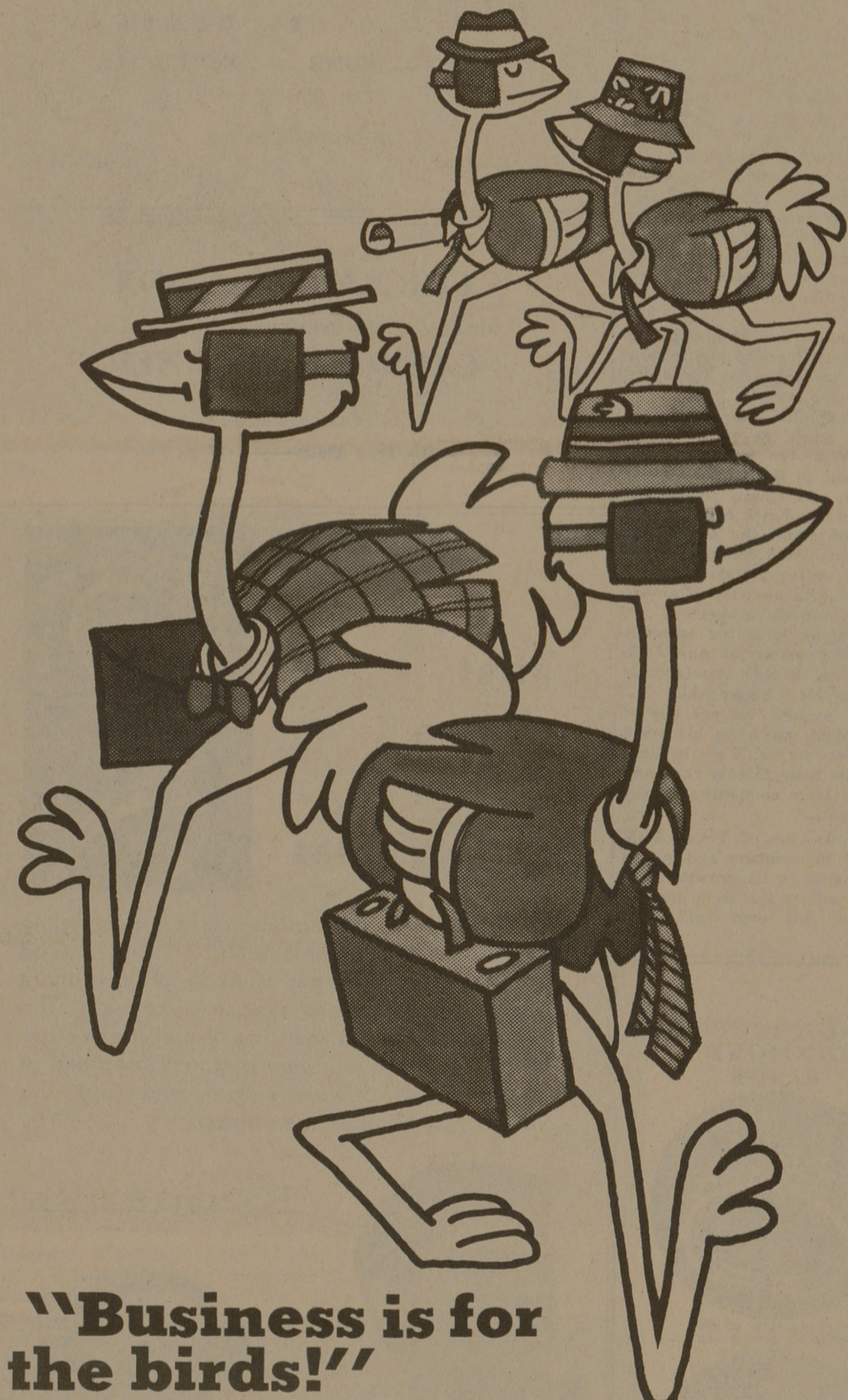
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