

Omar Smith retires after 15 years

Tennis coach leaves winning tradition at Aggieland

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A long winning tradition at A&M comes to an end in June as the last Omar Smith-coached tennis team winds up its season at the National Collegiate Tournament in Los Angeles.

Smith will retire at the end of this season after 15 years of coaching at A&M, including 12 straight winning ones. The coaching duties will fall on assistant coach Richard Barker.

Smith-coached teams have suffered only two losing seasons since

he took over the helm in 1960 and have produced two Southwest Conference doubles championships.

Sioux City, Iowa was the town where Smith began (1914) his long career by learning to walk. At age 11 he moved to San Antonio, officially becoming a Texan.

He graduated from Harlandale High, where he competed in both tennis and football.

Smith then entered A&M where he lettered as a football guard and won the intramural lightweight boxing title. He did not compete in tennis.

The Boy Scouts of America was the next stop for Smith after graduating from A&M with an Economics de-

gree. He served as a field scout executive for the Sam Houston Area Council.

Smith took over the Aggieland tennis duties in 1960 with but a few partial scholarships.

Barker, A&M's first conference champion since 1952 (with Luis Rojas in Doubles) credits Smith with making the A&M program what it is today.

Smith points out many highlights in his stay at Aggieland.

Perhaps the first big event was when Barker, in 1964, knocked off Jimmy Parker in the semi-final round of the conference championships. Parker was the top seed.

Barker was defeated in the finals, but the loss was anti-climactic.

Barker and Rojas teamed that year to win the doubles title.

Smith also notes that one of the biggest disappointments came that year when the Ags led the conference in team standings going into the last match. The Aggies had to visit Rice for the last match. Rice, having lost only four points all season, were in hot pursuit of the Ags, losers of but one match.—"Unfortunately, we played in front of an overzealous crowd and lost the title," remembers Smith.

Barker's and Rojas' winning the prestigious Pan American doubles title and Dan Courson and Carter Lomax's win in the Rice tourney last year are other big highlights.

In 1969, Jon Ragland and Pete Faust brought another SWC doubles trophy home to College Station emphasizing Smith's great success with doubles teams. A&M doubles teams have gained the finals in conference play in seven of the past 12 years.

This past year was especially bright for the Ags as Smith completed his tenure with probably the finest crop of recruits ever to come to A&M in freshmen Charles Emley, Tom Courson, Mark Silberman and John Kirwan.

"This was a real good year considering the young players came along so well. They more than held down their end of it," noted Smith.

"The varsity boys really showed their mettle, especially in tournament play."

Smith was especially proud of Dan Courson and Bill Hoover who reached the final round of the Rice doubles. Hoover, a junior, also reached the finals in Southwest Conference singles. He lost to George Hardie, the defending champion.

A&M made the strongest showing at the conference tourney with four of the eight semi-finalists wearing maroon-and-white.

With this year's 20-9 record the 12 year winning season total comes to 169-95 for Smith's teams.

In addition, his 1964 team was ranked 10th in the nation and Smith was voted the 11th ranked coach in the nation in a poll by "World Tennis Magazine."

In the future Smith plans on devoting more time to his South East Texas chain of Dairy Queen Stores and "my flyrod". Smith is as avid a fisherman around Brazos County as noted bass sage Shelby Metcalf, and chances are he'll be spending more time practicing now than Metcalf.

Jokingly, Smith says that "Richards' (Barker) gonna make me chairman of the squeezegee committee." But Barker adds that Smith will

be around quite a bit to help out.

"When I start out I'll have a bit more talent to work with than coach (Smith) did, and he's responsible for it. Everything in the program is greatly improved thanks to him."

Smith acknowledges that "most schools know we have a tennis team now. We have beaten a lot of teams

travelin' through."

Chances are that the competition at the National Tournament, June 17-22, will notice A&M this year thanks to the efforts of Omar Smith.

Smith notes that his long tradition may be temporarily over but certainly not the winning for A&M tennis teams.



FOUR IN A ROW—Aggie rugby team held off a strong rally from the Houston Old Boys to post a 15-13 win and their fourth straight state title. The Ags are currently the national rugby champions. (Photo by Gary Baldasari)

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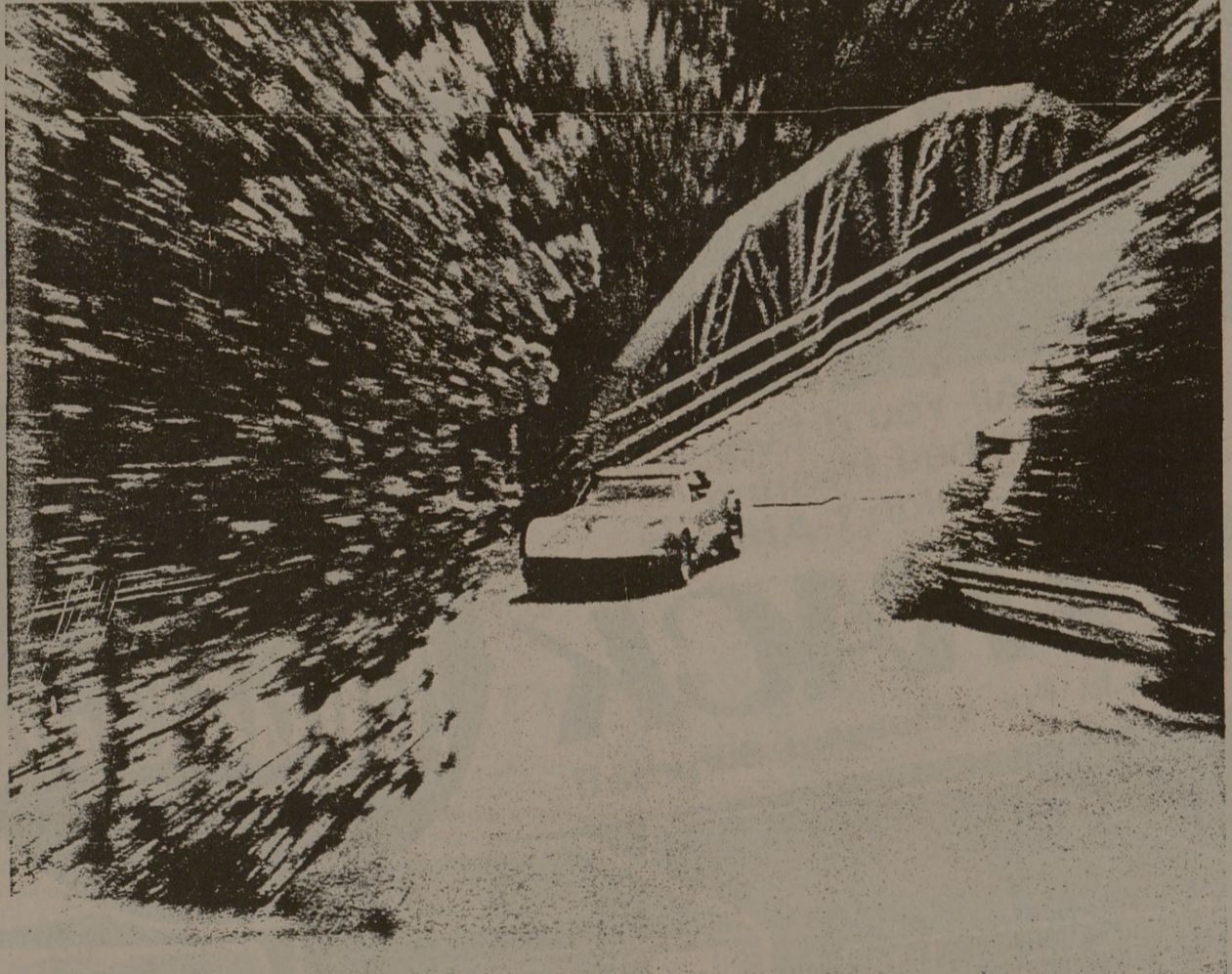
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