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Owls face five bowl teams

By MARK WEAVER
Fourth of a series of articles on SWC teams

If the Rice Owls have a team left by the time they start conference play, they may truly be called miracle men.

Three of the Owls first four games

are against Houston, LSU and defending national champion Notre Dame. Five of their first six games are against bowl teams of last year, including Texas and Texas Tech.

Last year the Owls seemed to have had lady luck on their side in victories over Arkansas, Texas A&M and TCU. Those three teams out-gained Rice 1077 yards to 401, but

the Owls managed to salvage wins.

"I can see the day when we're going to win that championship," Owl Coach Al Conover said. "I don't think it's very far away either. The big boys don't work hard any more. Success has created complacency from the Roman Empire on up."

If the schedule is bad news to Conover, the fact five offensive and

seven defensive starters return this year's squad may cheer him up. "We're going to make an attempt at being balanced this year," Conover said. "We're going to get four yards on first downs this year, and we're going to have pressure in the offensive line big enough to back up what I've said."

The Owls will have size on their offensive line, but inexperience will be evident as sophomore Tom Moore (6-2, 254) is the only starting starter. Junior James Lillard (215) will play guard with Moore and Randy Eggemeyer (6-4, 215) will be the tackles on the offensive side. Hal Perkins (6-0, 200) and Stanfield (6-3, 230) will be bringing the offensive front area to 230 pounds, up 15 pounds last season.

At quarterback Conover will choose between sophomore Tom Kramer (6-2, 182) or senior Tom Geisler (6-0, 192). Kramer was last year as a freshman against Notre Dame and looked good although Geisler replaced Kramer at

shoulder injury and directed their last three victories. Conover is reluctant to say who will start. Kramer seems to have an edge.

Tommy's not a great runner, he's a threat when he runs," Conover said. "And he has a fine eye on the ball. Tommy's a winner."

In the backfield Gary Ferguson (5-9, 179) will return as a halfback and last year's best rusher. Junior John Coleman (5-9, 195) will be the returning state fullback and sophomore Tom Woodridge (6-3, 187) will be flanker.

On defense, senior nose guard Cornelius Walker (6-2, 257) led the Owls much improved defense. The brother of Aggie running back Skip Walker is All-American material.

Senior tackle Jody Medford (6-3, 201) are also considered Conover as all-conference material. Dee McCurry and Mark Babbitt will also be at linebacker.

Running kickoffs and punt returns will be the job of sophomore James Sykes was the nation's No. 1 kickoff returner. He runs the 44.4.

The chances of the Owls depend on their young quarterback, Cornelius Walker, who has a slight strain, and lady luck. The Owls should be tough and the offense gain experience. If they can win without their oak tree.

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