Rice's Ferguson is secret weapon for Bird arsenal

HOUSTON (AP) — Tricky Rice Coach Al Conover's arsenal includes a secret weapon that he tries to keep camouflaged until the proper strategic moment when he unleases it to prey on the enemy.

Conover has this secret weapon disguised in the form of a 5-foot-9, 185-pound running back who is supposed to be too slow and too small to play college football.

But that's all part of the disguise. When a tense occasion arises, like last Saturday in Rice Stadium, Conover ignores this disguise, adjusts Gary Ferguson's radar toward the goalline and sends the senior bundle of dynamite into the game.

Ferguson exploded a few Texas Tech dreams Saturday when he rushed 129 yards for the game, including a 30-yard dash that set up the clinching touchdown.

Ferguson's performance earned for him The Associated Press Southwest Conference Offensive Player of the Week honor over some other outstanding offensive performances.

"I've always been reminded how small I am," Ferguson said. "In the seventh grade I came home and told my dad I thought I would be the starting running back and he told me not to be too discouraged if I didn't play because there might be some other runners bigger and fas-

Ferguson kept hearing the same talk during his high school days at Uvalde and during the recruiting season after his senior year.

"Being small hurts in a lot of ways but you can learn ways to overcome it," Ferguson said. "I tell Coach Conover that I'm our secret weapon. We've got these big offensive linemen and I just squat down behind them and the defense can't see me.

Ferguson, whose speed isn't all that bad at 4.7 in the 40-yard dash, sprang from his hiding place often enough against the Red Raiders to help Rice to its first victory of the season after a 0-5-1 start.

"If we had been 0-5-1 last year or the year before I think we might have fallen apart," Ferguson said. "But there's something about these guys. It don't know what to call it. "Right now we have one of the better teams in the conference. We just don't have the record to show

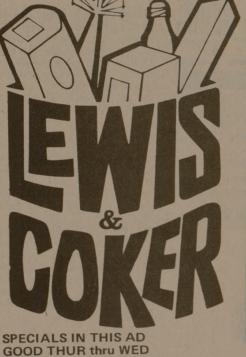
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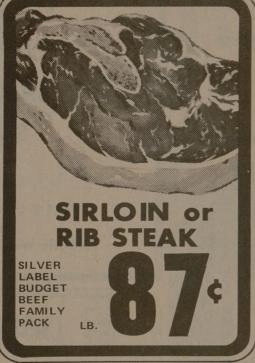
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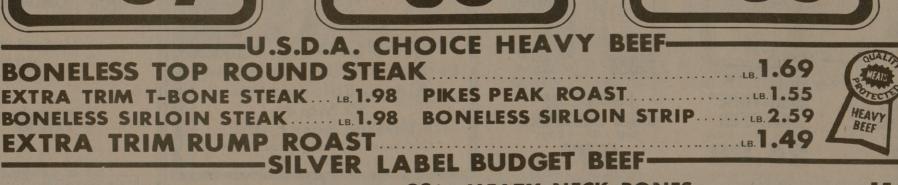




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