

Tony Galluchi Second Guesses

By TONY GALLUCHI
Sports Editor

Minneapolis, Minn., Dec. 29, 1979 — Due to a mixup in the practice schedule thirteen members of the Aggie basketball team sat watching Rutgers — stomped by Minnesota 98-59 the night before — as they got in their final warmup prior to the consolation final of the Pillsbury Classic tourney. It gave them plenty of time to ponder. By taking a shoddy last-second 70-69 win over Chicago-Loyola the Aggies had the good fortune to be facing host Minnesota in the finals of this tournament.

Coming into this game, the Aggies had lost four games in the young season, four more than some people had expected.

After a rough opening act, however, they had bounced back and taken the title at the Rebel Classic in Las Vegas. To do so they had to hand Nevada-Las Vegas its first ever loss in that go-round. Minnesota had likewise never lost a Pillsbury Classic game. After this night's action the Golden Gophers would still have a perfect doughboy record.

All-Americans are not made at home. Seldom are they made in one season.

In the Southwest Conference it is still hard to be recognized as a basketball team — much less reap individual honors. And so it was that the basketball world focused its attention on Rudy Woods, the 6-11 sophomore center from Texas A&M. Sports Illustrated illustrated him. Street and Smith's prognosticators called him Best in the Southwest, a dominant. Maybe it was a little too much to ask of Rudy Woods that he become great only two years into his college career.

Last year the Aggies amazed almost everyone by racing through some perennial powers on the way to their best season ever. Things may have jelled just right at just the right time although the loss of the SWC title smarted a little. Nevertheless, attention was focused on the handful of young men from College Station who so disdainfully dispatched Kentucky and Indiana and San Francisco and Nevada-Las Vegas and New Mexico — who so casually stopped most all comers with "The Wall" — Woods, Rynn Wright and Vernon Smith. And in looking for a reason it was natural to look to the big man — once the most "highly coveted" big man in the country. He was awesome in many of the team's performances but to the extent that other players should be overlooked? No.

Against Minnesota, Woods came up against what most every pollster considered a bona fide first team All-American at the post, Kevin McHale.

Woods told me before the game that he knew McHale's moves. In deed he should — having played alongside him on two national teams last year. But McHale also knew Rudy's moves and took him to task.

McHale doesn't have any of the physical tools Woods has — which points up the tremendous potential in Rudy. McHale, though, benefits from something Rudy has yet to obtain — four years of experience.

Top that off with four years in the Big Ten and you have two critical factors which make McHale an All-American. One, he is playing against the toughest of all competition — there is little doubt that the Big Ten is the best basketball conference in the nation — and two, those who must vote are in contact every game.

Writers and coaches are as constantly aware of Big Ten basketball as they are ACC ball and Pac-10 ball.

Rudy Woods certainly has the right foot in the door, people are watching him, and that is extremely important. But he must also play well. Now that the pre-season scramble is over, the conference must be attended to. Following that is post-season play where even more people are in tune. For Rudy, only time will tell. Let us not hasten the judgment.

Time isn't standing still for two other Aggies, however; two who have not gotten their due. Vernon Smith and David Britton.

Britton is about to finish up his all-too-short career at A&M and the pros are looking. David has played consistent ball lately and would like nothing better than to get a chance to strut his stuff elsewhere. Smith is perhaps the best ballplayer to hit A&M since Sonny Parker left here four years ago. Vernon is a bonafide All-American right now, but you would hardly guess by the press he gets.

There are 56 games remaining to be played in the Southwest Conference basketball race this season, but one worth thinking ahead about will come on Jan. 22 — a week from tonight.

That is when Texas A&M and Arkansas meet for the first time this season, and after the events of the first two weeks of the campaign have been catalogued it appears those are the teams to beat.

The Aggies, who have begun to play well after a slow start, and the Razorbacks, playing at their top level of the season, emerged as the only unbeaten teams in conference play last week.

And they will be favorites to stay that way this week.

Texas A&M reached the 3-0 mark with its 63-60 win over Texas Tech early last week and Arkansas became 3-0 with a 55-50 triumph over Texas in Austin Saturday.

"If Texas A&M does not run away with things we might have a chance," Arkansas coach Eddie Sutton said last week. "If things balance out and everybody loses four or five games we might be one of those in there fighting."

But with the road win over Texas under their belts, the Razorbacks now have a slight advantage over the Aggies. The Razorbacks will almost certainly be considered the favorites in every other conference game they play this year — with the probable exception of their trip to Texas A&M and the possible exception of their visit to Texas Tech.

The biggest threat to either the Aggies or the Razorbacks this week will probably come Tuesday night in Dallas, where the SMU Mustangs will host A&M.

SMU, 1-3, is coming off a disappointing road loss to Houston — a game in which the Mustangs led by eight at the half only to collapse in the second period.

Although A&M had an 11-5 conference record last year and SMU was only 6-10, the Mustangs defeated the Aggies in Dallas last season, 78-76.

Top-ranked Aggie cagers to play Hogs

Coach: send team to Olympics

United Press International
DALLAS — George McMillion, coach of the most powerful collegiate swimming team in the southwest, said Monday if President Carter wanted to punish the Soviet Union for its invasion of Afghanistan he should let American athletes compete in the Olympics and keep the tourists home.

"Finances is the name of the game," said McMillion, head coach at SMU. "If we didn't let people go over there and spend money it would hurt quite a bit. But the athletes should be allowed to go."

McMillion has served on the American coaching staff at the last two Olympics, his team is trying for its 24th straight Southwest Conference championship and at least four members of his club have a chance to make the Olympic team.

"I know that some of the best times the youngsters spend at the Olympics are when they visit with athletes from other countries," McMillion said.

"Maybe some of these young people will grow up to be leaders in their countries. And if they get along at the Olympics they have a chance to get along later in life. That increases the chances for peace and that's what I care about."

"I don't want to steal the quote — I heard it from former Olympic champion John Nabor. He said, 'they once stopped wars to have the Olympics. Now they want to stop the Olympics because of a war.'

"You've seen those commercials that say, 'America does not send athletes to the Olympics, Americans do.' Well if America doesn't send the athletes to the Olympics I don't see how America can stop them from going. Of course, I know it can happen that way."

"I know President Carter has a tough decision to make and I'm glad I don't have to make it. But we are always talking about keeping politics out of the Olympics and here we are putting it in."

McMillion said any threat of a boycott would not slow down the preparation of American swimmers.

"The swimmers won't slow down until it's time to go to Moscow," the coach said. "They will never give up hope of going. They will train as hard as they can for the Olympic trials (set for late June in Austin) because that is a harder meet than the Olympics."

SMU Mustangs to try to break Aggies' unbeaten conference string

United Press International
Southern Methodist will try to throw a roadblock in front of the Texas A&M Aggies tonight and if the rest of the teams in the Southwest Conference could help the Mustangs, they would.

"If they beat us on our home court they will be in pretty good shape," said SMU coach Sonny Allen.

Texas A&M goes into tonight's round of conference action tied for the league lead with Arkansas, both at 3-0. A&M's trip to Dallas will be its first major road test, having played only TCU on the road in the SWC season.

Arkansas has a slight edge in the schedule since the Razorbacks own a road win at Texas.

The Mustangs need a win badly to keep alive any hopes of making a run at the league title. After going 8-2 in inter-sectional play, SMU has put together only a 1-3 conference record — losing at home to Texas and on the road to Houston and

Arkansas. SMU has won its home games with Texas A&M the past four years, however, including a two-point decision last year when the Aggies were ranked 19th in the country.

Arkansas will host Baylor, 1-2, in the other feature attraction Tuesday night while Rice, 1-2, will visit Texas Tech, 3-1, and Texas, 2-2, will be at home against TCU, 0-4.

Texas is expected to pick up its first conference home victory of the season, having lost at home to both Texas Tech and Arkansas.

SMU scored 60 points in the first half against Houston last Saturday

night, only to be held to 21 points during the second half in a 96-81 victory for the Cougars.

"We have played some good basketball at times and I know we are capable of doing so again," said Allen. "If we can beat A&M then we are back in it. They have some very good players, but if we play tough against them we can handle them."

"A&M isn't just good on paper. They are good when you hit the floor. What you have to do is just pull that zone in tighter and fight it out. They have lost five games so they have weaknesses. But even if you know what those weaknesses are you aren't always able to anything about them."

The Aggies' chief problems last year, and early this year, concerned their guard play. Because of inconsistent play in the backcourt the opposition could play a tight zone and slow down A&M's tall front line of Rudy Woods, Rynn Wright and Vernon Smith.

For the last two weeks, however, A&M has played excellent defense and has had quality performances from Woods, the 6-11 center who when on form is the most dominant player at his position in the conference.

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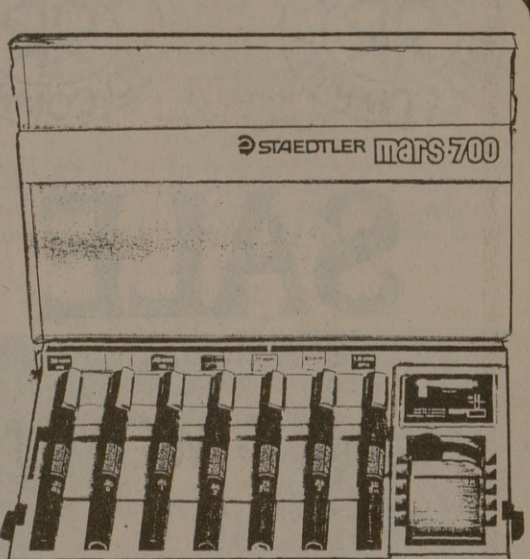
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