

Sports

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Red hot Mustangs to entertain Aggies

By KURT ALLEN
Battalion Staff

If one Southwest Conference team contains more surprises this year than any other, it would have to be SMU.

At season's start, the Mustangs were expected to be a good team, but in the vein of Texas A&M, were not thought to be top conference title contenders. That role was reserved for Houston, Arkansas and Texas as evidenced by the preseason *Texas Football* magazine poll.

They were also not considered a prime candidate for top 20 national ranking. But the Ponies refused to believe the polls, compiling instead a 5-2 record so far along with a scoring average of 27 points per game.

Admittedly, their 2-2 conference record puts their title hopes on the back burner for now. Yet SMU nearly won both of its conference losses against Baylor and Houston, which indicates its strength.

In the Baylor game at Waco, the Mustangs took a large early lead and

held it until a furious Bear comeback late in the second half made the final score 32-28.

As for the Houston loss, SMU could have easily won the game, but did not execute very well and let the Cougars stay in the game. Houston eventually eked out a 13-11 decision. SMU Head Coach Ron Meyer still shakes his head over the results.

"You can't be human and not think about those two games," said Meyer. "Especially when any one of countless plays could have turned those two games around."

Then, last weekend against Texas, the Ponies finally showed what they were capable of doing. As usual, their offense did a credible job. The real story was the wrecking job the SMU defense did on the super-charged Longhorn offensive machine.

Texas had been averaging 31 points a game coming into the SMU contest, but the Mustangs tightened the screws letting only six points slip from their grasp.

Even more convincing was the job they did on Longhorn quarterback Donnie Little. Before the Ponies feasted on him, Little had led the conference in total offense with about 200 yards a game. But the Ponies only allowed him to complete nine of 23 passes for 76 yards, while holding him to 24 yards on the ground.

"We have finally forged our way up to respectability," said Meyer on

Monday. "Now we have to on. I felt that we could go into Austin and win the game."

What's so ironic about all this is that the Mustang offense had been expected to carry the team. Few people would have dreamed in late August that SMU could hold Texas to six points.

So far, rushing has been the bread and butter of the Ponies' offense. This was especially true against Texas where SMU piled up 283 yards on the ground.

The star of that game was tailback Craig James who ran for 146 yards including a 53-yard TD scamper. That gave James 535 yards for the season, meaning he could still possibly have a 1,000-yard season.

Another player to watch is fellow tailback Eric Dickerson who picked up 85 yards against Texas and now has 513 yards as well. Meanwhile, the Ponies' passing game has had some rough going which resulted in junior quarterback Mike Ford being benched in favor of freshman Lance McIlhenny.

McIlhenny completed only one of eight passes against Texas in his first start, but according to Meyer, executed an almost flawless ball game. "Lance McIlhenny is not your typical freshman," said Meyer. "I was very, very pleased with his performance."

"Mike Ford was helping me call the plays on the sidelines. He was working with Lance in the third quarter. And I think that's a tre-

mendous thing for Ford and Mike Fisher to be so supportive."

The story of Mike Ford this year is an unfortunate one. After suffering an injury during last year's 5-6 season, Ford won an extra year of eligibility and there had been high hopes for this year.

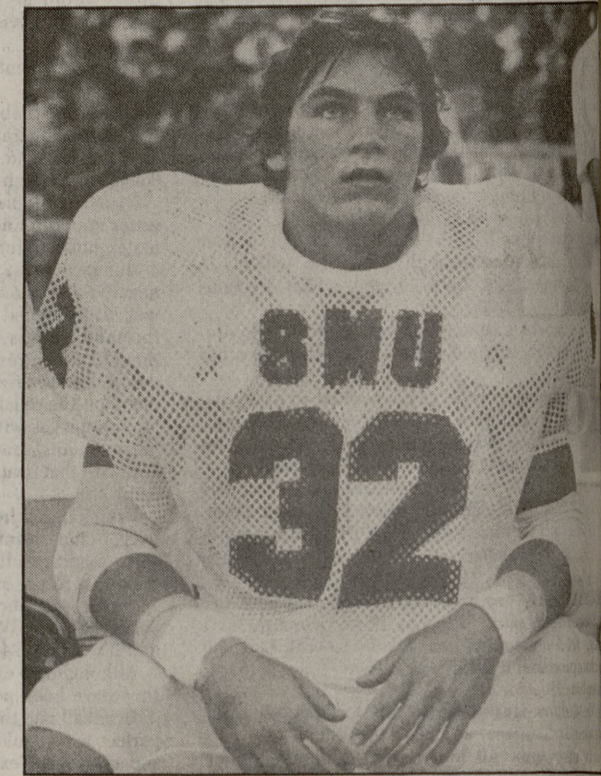
But his performance this year has been sub-par. After the Ponies' first six games and just before the Texas contest, Ford had completed only 46.7 percent of his passes and had thrown an alarming eight interceptions in 152 attempts. In both the Mustang's losses, Ford's interceptions were cited as crucial factors.

It was those lackluster performances against Baylor and Houston that led Meyer to replace Ford with McIlhenny. Meyer Monday said McIlhenny will continue indefinitely as the starter.

Meyer also said a bowl bid was a legitimate goal for his players and he was not afraid to talk about it with four games still left to play.

He did say Monday that the upset win over Texas was a landmark in the Mustang's program, but admitted the victory would be diminished if SMU lost to downtrodden Texas A&M.

For those wondering what happened to Mustang Mania, that exercise in media hype was put on the back burner at season's start. There had been a lot of criticism for building up a team's image when it only finished 5-6.



SMU running back Craig James has gained over 530 yards this season to lead the surprising Mustangs, who knocked out Texas last week 20-6 in Austin. Teammate Eric Dickerson and James together have gained over 1,000 yards so far. A&M and SMU play Saturday afternoon at 2:50.

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Metcalf continues search for Ag guard
By JON HEIDTKE
Battalion Staff

"The five best players don't always make the best team," said Texas A&M University Head Basketball Coach Shelby Metcalf Tuesday. "The chemistry has to be there too."

And so the search continues for the right chemistry for Texas A&M's team.

In past seasons, Metcalf has brought his teams along slowly. They would usually reach their peak in the Southwest Conference near the end of the season. But the dean of SWC coaches wants to settle on his best players before the season gets underway, so they will be able to keep a better hold on a possible national ranking.

Last year, the Aggies opened the season with a top 20 national ranking in both polls, but two straight losses knocked the Ags out of the top 20.

So this year, in an attempt to stay ranked, Metcalf wants to establish his top people early. "It's tough to get back in (the rankings)," he said, "so we want to be as ready as possible from the start."

Saturday before the Rice football game, the Ags held their second intra-squad scrimmage and the results were nothing to write home about. The scrimmage marked the first time the new improved "Wall" played together.

Rynn Wright, Vernon Smith, Rudy Woods and Claude Rife compose the "Wall" which will be rock solid again this year. Rife, a sophomore from Crockett, has a year of experience and is ready to become an integral part.

But a big problem facing Metcalf is finding the best guard combination. Tyrone Ladson, Reggie Roberts, Jay McHugh and Roy Jones are all possible candidates, but only Ladson has the experience.

"Tyrone will be good enough to win with, if he stays likes the ball," Metcalf said, "but we need to get a couple of second guards ready."

Roberts and McHugh are the early favorites, but Metcalf plans to go into the season with a point guard and the "Wall."

Metcalf said that this point, there are a lot of things the Ags haven't even touched on, but work on the transition game and ball movement have been an early concern for him.

The Aggies face a rough schedule this year, with only nine home games compared to 18 on the road. This will make it especially tough to stay in the polls, and Metcalf realizes it.

But Metcalf is no stranger to tough situations, and since he holds a doctorate degree, he is just the man the Aggies need to come up with the right chemistry for a successful season.

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