

Reflections

by Richard Oliver



Regent deserves apology

Royce Wisenbaker, a Texas A&M University regent, is taking a bum rap from a lot of people because of his comments to a Fort Worth sportswriter last Thursday. I am sorry to say I am one of the culprits. In a commentary in The Battalion Monday I wrote that Wisenbaker had been quoted as saying Head Football Coach Tom Wilson would be fired at the end of the season. He didn't. To set the record straight, this is what he told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram's Jim Carley: "All I can say is that I'm an engineer. Mathematics is what guides me. I think things have always been tough for Coach Wilson from the start. And mathematically the chances are even slimmer now. "I think he's a fine young man and a fine coach. I think it was just his misfortune to step right into a hot seat. Wins and losses have a whole lot to do with the job he is in. And we're not in a good position now, that's plain to see. We have the best athletic dorm around, the best football stadium and facilities you could want and we have the best fans anywhere. The people who are paying for all this are clamoring for better results. That's no secret. In every little town in the state, you can hear it on the streets. "We're just getting beat. That's the main thing. It's not too bad that we're getting beat, but we're getting humiliated." Wisenbaker stopped short of saying Wilson would be fired at the end of the season. The Regents meet in a regular meeting Dec. 5-6 in Stephenville, after the season is over. "I would think there will be a lot of discussion about it (voting on Wilson's status) at that meeting certainly," he said. "I know a lot of

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people are up in arms about him (Wisenbaker). I receive many calls every day. But I think next year just depends on what happens the rest of this year. I committed the unpardonable journalistic sin. I took the interpretation of Wisenbaker's remarks from secondary sources. Other writers made the same mistake. I shouldn't have done it, they shouldn't have done it.

The whole thing is symptomatic of the big heat-little light atmosphere surrounding a major school football program in trouble. Emotionalism too often gets in the way of analysis. That's true of the coaches, the fans, the players — and sometimes of sportswriters who ought to know better.

Now, having confessed my sins and having apologized publicly to Regent Wisenbaker, let me say that the central point of my Monday commentary stands:

Tom Wilson deserves better than to be shoved out without a decent trial. He has been discussed and cussed for long enough behind closed doors, and it's hard enough recruiting and keeping a listless team together without that happening at the same time.

He has two years remaining on his contract, and I think he should be given the vote of confidence he needs so he can build the program to a respectable level. No man can be expected to do it without the confidence of his superiors. Give him a chance.

Texas A&M indeed has lost many games this season, often by large margins. But against Houston and Rice, the margin of victory for the opposition came due to errors by A&M players — not coaches. Penalties and fumbles cannot be blamed on Wilson.

The close losses to Houston and Rice have Wilson wondering. "We played well enough to win both times," he said Sunday. "In Houston, we should have won that game. Against Rice, a minor mistake and we lost. Against SMU, without mistakes in the kicking game it would have been close. Take away a few mistakes, and we might not be in this situation."

The next few weeks will be important ones for Wilson. The coach who took over and claimed a winning season in his first full year as head coach last year (the first time since 1951 that an Aggie coach has done that) now, a year later, finds himself trying to build a future in spite of, not because of support from, his superiors. The time is now to let Tom Wilson know if he can count on a future and thus have the confidence to build it.

Otherwise, Texas A&M fans can take as their fight song, "Another One Bites the Dust," and suffer through a few more rebuilding years. Remember 1978.

Hogs capture title; Ags finish 5th

The Arkansas Razorbacks, paced by individual winner Mark Andersen, took five of the first seven places Monday to capture its seventh consecutive Southwest Conference cross-country championship. Texas A&M University finished in fifth place.

Arkansas' win, captured over a route prepared at the Los Rios Country Club golf course, came by the widest margin in the 62 year history of the event.

Andersen ran the 10,000-meter course in 30:25 and the Razorbacks finished with 23 points. Texas was second with 79, Houston 123, Texas A&M 144, Rice 146, Texas Tech 156, SMU 204 and TCU 252.

Texas' Geoffrey Koech and Pedro Rivero Flores finished second and third in the individual competition — something of a surprise in itself — but Arkansas took the next four spots with David Barney finishing fourth, Tony Conroy fifth, David Taylor sixth and Pat Vaughn seventh.

The last three spots in the top ten went to Mike Bonem of Rice, James Scott of Baylor and Rob Topping of SMU.

Andy Elliot was A&M's highest finisher coming in 18th with a time of 32:44. Other A&M places and times: Ray Muenich, 25th in 33:19; Keith Bratton, 28th in 33:23; Jim Bolliter, 32nd in 33:42; Jim Sterling, 41st in 34:40; Craig Nolen, 43rd in 34:43; and Ralph Havens, 44th in 35:01.

Alborn to go recruiting

United Press International HOUSTON — Rice coach Ray Alborn enjoyed one of the fruits of victory Monday — a full house at his weekly "Quarterback Club" luncheon.

"It was the biggest crowd we've had since I've been at Rice," said Alborn, whose team has won three in a row and upped its season record to 4-4 with a thrilling 17-16 decision over Arkansas last Saturday night.

"There were a lot of people here who weren't sure we could win. And I appreciate the people who were loyal and stuck with us."

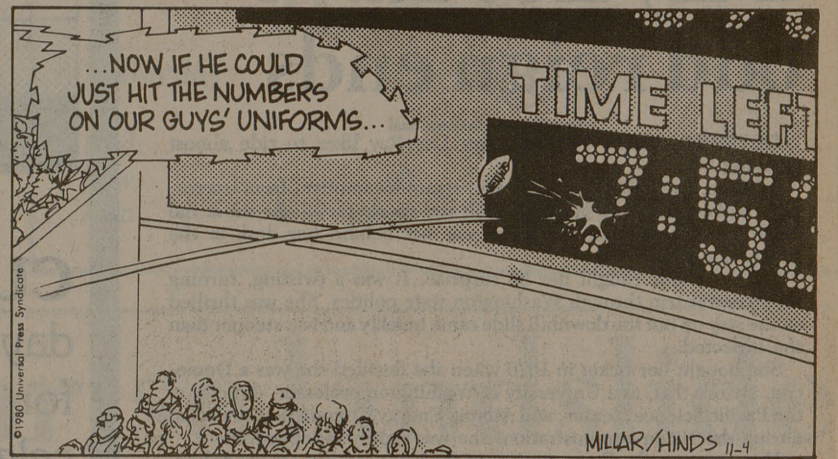
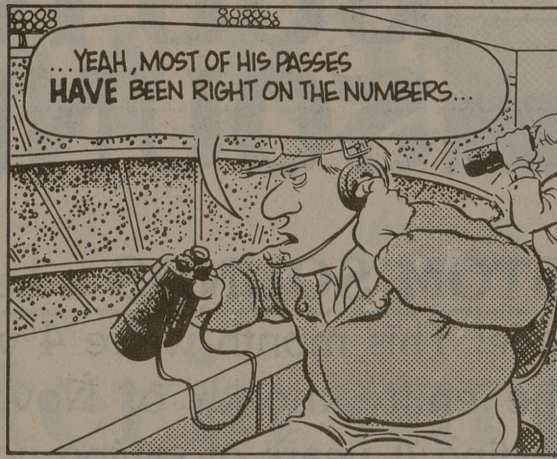
"It's nice to see them rewarded." Alborn also said the surprising success enjoyed by the Owls has had an effect on Rice recruiting.

"I thought we were doing pretty good before," he said, "but it is excellent now. We've had excellent reception at the places we have gone and I'm going to make a visit tonight."

"I hope SMU doesn't think I'm taking them lightly, but I am actually going to do some recruiting this week."

The Owls and SMU Mustangs, tied for third in the SWC race with 3-2 records, meet in Houston next Saturday.

TANK McNAMARA



Cardinals upset over loss

United Press International ST. LOUIS — Mel Gray has a new nickname for Dallas — the Cardiac Cowboys.

"They scored on that last play," said the St. Louis wide receiver. "We used to do that. The Cardiac Cardinals. They were the Cardiac Cowboys."

Gray, who caught six passes for 145 yards in Sunday's 27-24 loss to Dallas, was one of the few Cardinals willing to speak after the game about the crushing loss to the Cowboys. Most lingered long in the showers, and returned to their lockers red-eyed.

St. Louis was leading 24-20 when Dallas got the ball back at its own 31-yard line with 1:59 left on the clock. Facing a fourth-and-five from the St. Louis 28 after three pass completions, Danny White lofted the ball to the end zone and Tony Hill turned in time to catch it at the goal-line for a touchdown with 45 seconds remaining.

The other Cardinals previously had witnessed the Cowboys' amazing feats during the final two minutes of a game, but it was a new experience for rookie defensive end Curtis Greer.

"I don't see how he threw it," said Greer, who forced White to hurry the wobbly pass. "I heard the crowd react, and I turned around and saw the official with his hands in the air. I couldn't believe it."

"This is the most disappointing loss I've ever experienced."

St. Louis quarterback Jim Hart took little solace in Dallas Coach

Tom Landry's statements that the Cardinals "outplayed" the Cowboys, especially in the second half. "We lost," said Hart. "We lost to the Cowboys, and that's the greatest disappointment because of who they are, what they represent. "We've had such fun playing them in the past. They're the biggest game

for us. Losing to them is the biggest disappointment."

Cardinal cornerback Carl Allen added: "Year after year, the games are so close. Somebody always comes up with the big play, and it seems like it's always Dallas.

"It was fourth-and-five and we needed it. We didn't get it."

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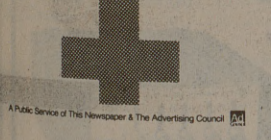
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