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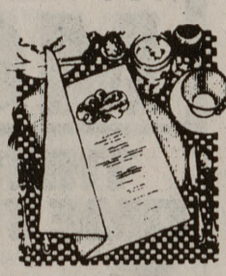
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Sports

Cowboys making run for title now

United Press International
DALLAS — Each year when the weather turns chilly it has happened with almost the same regularity as Christmas lights going up and parking lots filling up around the shopping centers.

As the pages of the calendar turn toward the playoffs, the Dallas Cowboys suddenly begin to play pretty good football.

Last year was a perfect example. Riddled by injuries and distracted by the dismissal of Thomas Henderson, Dallas got hot at the right time and knocked off both Philadelphia and Washington to win yet another division title.

And even though the Cowboys found themselves with a new look on the field this season, the results appear about the same — the team once again putting together its best look as post-season play approaches.

It comes at a time when some other potential Super Bowl contenders are struggling.

What is it about the Cowboys that brings out the best of them when it counts the most?

"I don't have any theory on it," Dallas coach Tom Landry said Tuesday. "I think your team picks up toward the end if you believe you can win. We've been believing we can win for a long time now and I think it affects the whole team."

One difference in this year's version of the Cowboys, however, has been the somewhat even keel with which the team has played. There have been no major slumps which have characterized many editions of the club — including the one last year.

"Usually if you are a solid team, one that has won Super Bowls and been in Super Bowls, you will flatten out in a valley and stay there for a while," Landry said. "But the team doesn't worry about it because they know for sure they can come out of the valley."

"But this team is not sure that if it gets in the valley it can come out. So they are playing a little differently. We haven't seen stretches of two, three or four games like we did last year. Of course last year we played teams like Pittsburgh and Houston in that stretch and they had a little bit to do with it."

Landry said a few weeks ago he liked the idea of finishing the season with a three-game stretch against Oakland, Los Angeles and Philadelphia because the team needed tough competition going into the playoffs.

"It's always easier to prepare for a game where it means something," Landry said. "We have to win against Los Angeles to have a chance to win the division against Philadelphia the next week."

"What you are seeing around the league right now are teams trying to hang on and win against teams that are out of it. That's the worst situation you can come into."

Out of the Blue

By Rick Stolle

Ags are foundation of W

In Monday's 75-58 win over the Sam Houston BearKats, the Aggie basketball team looked like the team A&M fans have been expecting. Last year's results whetted the appetites of many fans.

I have always wondered what kind of effect the crowd has on the Aggie basketball team. Monday, I found out.

In Monday's 75-58 win over the Sam Houston BearKats, the Aggie basketball team looked like the team A&M fans have been expecting. Last year's results whetted the appetites of most of the fans.

The win was partly, or maybe mainly, due to the fans who and sheer crowd noise shook the foundations of G. Rollie Coliseum.

Last year, from the stands, I thought the noise was just your average crowd noise. Now that I have sat on the court at the press table, I noticed differently. The noise that flooded upon the court was drowned out even the public address announcer's introduction of players. It was amazing that because the coliseum was not even at capacity.

Last year I wondered why and how the noise affected the team. This year I know why.

I have come to realize that the noise Aggie fans make in a basketball game can result in a totally different, better attitude for their basketball team as a whole.

The crowd at the basketball game is the foundation for The Wall. Without the foundation, The Wall crumbles. Without The Wall, the foundation is just another flat piece of concrete.

When the teams were introduced Monday, the noise from the stands fired the team up tremendously. They came back to the bench and obviously ready to play.

Tuesday, Dec. 2, the crowd was listless and the team played with the same listlessness until the crowd warmed up. Monday, with the crowd already fired up, the team was ready to play before game time.

The only differences besides the date and teams between the two games was the crowd. An Aggie crowd has a definite, positive effect on the basketball team.

As the pregame warmups were going on, the players from the other teams sneaked apprehensive peeks up into the stands to check out the crowd. They seemed to know instinctively that the crowd could control the flow of the game.

Indeed, the crowd did control the flow. When the Aggies got into the second half, it was the crowd, rising to its feet each time the Aggie brought the ball down the court that kind of reassured the Aggies and allowed them to regain control of the tempo of the game.

When the crowd let the team down, the team let the crowd down. With The Wall and its foundation intact, the Aggies have a good chance for a great season. Without one, the other crumbles to the elements of other teams.

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The Basic Need

WHO WAS NICODEMUS? (JOHN 3:1-13)

The sun was down and the time had come for a certain man to approach Jesus. Because the Bible records that he came "by night" (v. 2), it is clear that he was reluctant to be seen with Jesus in broad daylight. Was this a sinister man? No. He was Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

By carefully reading John 3, many admirable virtues can be seen about Nicodemus, portraying him as a man of unusual character and attainment. Verse 1 states that he was a "ruler of the Jews," holding a certain amount of honor and authority. Verse 10 says that he was a "master of Israel," obviously a highly educated teacher. Being an older man, he possessed much experience, and from his conversation with Jesus he appeared to be very honest and open. Without a doubt, he had a high standard of morality. Furthermore, by seeking instruction from Jesus at the risk of losing man's honor and esteem, he proved to be a genuine seeker of God. A noticeable humility was also evident in Nicodemus. He called Jesus, a man much younger than he, "Rabbi" and "teacher" (v. 2). Nicodemus seems to have coupled humility with a high degree of character and attainment. There before Jesus was a man of rare stature, desiring to be taught.

How did Jesus respond? He took this opportunity to reveal the basic need of mankind. In His conversation with Nicodemus, the Lord immediately revealed this need — "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v. 3). Jesus strongly testified that regardless of how good anyone is by human standards, he still needs regeneration. Moral as well as immoral people equally need regeneration.

A FALSE CONCEPT

Man's natural concept is that his behavior and conduct require improvement. This is why man feels that he needs the help of much teaching. This feeling was reflected in Nicodemus because he considered Christ to be "a teacher come from God" (v. 2). Indeed, the concept that man needs better teaching to improve himself pervades society; self-improvement books have inundated the bookstores. Many symposiums and courses are offered at colleges advertising promises of self-betterment. The effort to uplift and improve human life continues to be prominent in every culture. The Lord Jesus, however, came to turn man away from this false concept. His straightforward answer to Nicodemus — "Ye must be born again," struck at its very root (v. 7). Nicodemus, like all of humanity, needed another life, not mere teaching on self-improvement. Jesus' brief words affirmed that man needed a higher life, God's life, to meet his basic need.

THE SPIRIT BEGETTING SPIRIT

How could a man like Nicodemus receive God's life? It is by receiving God's Spirit. Jesus told him: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (v. 6). Just as he had acquired his physical life by birth, so to obtain God's life required another birth. This time he must be born of God's Spirit. His physical body was given birth by his parents, and his human spirit must be born of God's Spirit.


By speaking in this way to Nicodemus, the Lord established an absolute standard: all of mankind, regardless of moral or religious attainment, must be born again. Only the divine life born into man qualifies him to share in God's kingdom. To possess only the human life leaves man estranged from God now and ultimately will cause him to perish.

God's desire, however, is neither estrangement nor perdition. He longs to forgive man and impart His divine life into him. He delights to recover fallen man back to Himself. Therefore, when any person, regardless of his condition, sincerely opens his heart to the Lord Jesus, appreciates His death on the cross, and asks the Lord to come into him, his spirit will be regenerated. He will be "born anew" with the Spirit of God. How tremendous is the birth of the Spirit! Christ Himself will come into him and become the life-source of a new living. Christ in him can live a life pleasing to God. Then the kingdom of God can be enjoyed inwardly, not by futile self-improvement, but by the receiving of a new life.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16, Recovery Version)

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