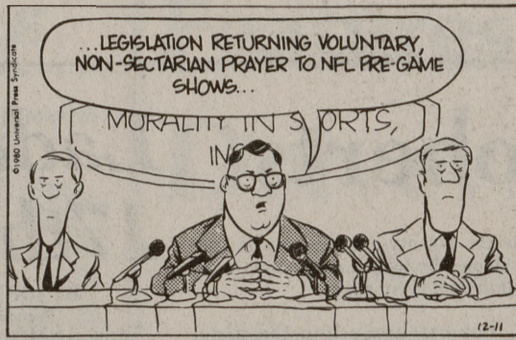
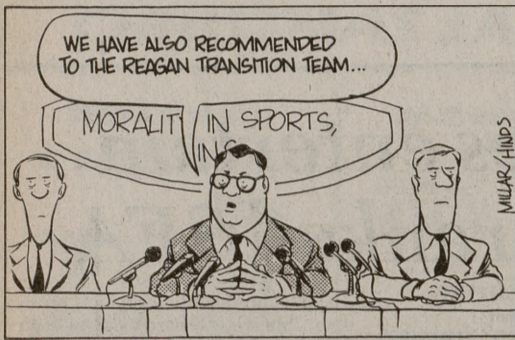


TANK McNAMARA

by Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds

Finally gets manager's job



J.R. will sue somebody

United Press International HOUSTON — The agent for Houston Astros pitcher J.R. Reich, battling to return to the mound after a life-threatening stroke in the middle of last season, said Wednesday a damage suit will be filed — but not against the Astros.

making steady progress toward realizing his aim of returning to the mound next season.

"He's doing very, very well. He has continued to make progress, exceptional progress," Reich said. "He's been working out for some time in Houston. My assessment would be that he would start throwing in January, but that's something that will be decided on (in consultation with doctors) in the next few weeks."

"He, J.R., is very optimistic as am I that he will be able to pitch again, although I wouldn't even attempt to speculate on the timing of his ability to pitch competitively because I just don't have that kind of knowledge."

Reich said Richard, 30, has returned to what non-athletes would consider a normal life. The 1979 starting pitcher in the all-star game has been driving his car alone and made a brief speech at the Tuesday dinner meeting.

"Many, many times before, during the lowest point of this situation, I have said that if he can return to normal activity that'll be great and pitching would be a bonus," Reich said.

"I would say that the change in that assessment has come from the incredible progress that he's made in such a short time where pitching again appears to be a reasonable expectation, whereas before it was a dream."

"Yes, there has been a decision made to proceed," attorney Tom Reich told UPI by telephone from the major league meetings in Dallas. "There are no proceedings that will be initiated by J.R. against the club."

Reich declined to say who will be sued, for how much, for what wrongs or where, but there had been reports Richard might sue some of his doctors. Earlier reports said the Astros also might be a target.

"I don't have any comment about the particulars," Reich said. "I would say that having reached the decision that has been reached to proceed it will be in the reasonably near future."

"It is not a source of enjoyment for J.R. or myself to proceed in this manner. It's our conclusion that this course of action is necessary to properly protect J.R.'s interests."

At the Dallas meeting Tuesday night, Reich received a special citation, Reich said, "for his courageous behavior" since the stroke during a pitching workout at the Astrodome July 30.

The 6-8 right-handed fastball pitcher has undergone two operations to remove clots from neck and shoulder arteries and, Reich said, is

Reich credited Richard's "guts" and determination for his recovery progress.

"What so many people didn't understand about J.R. is just that determination and commitment that he has," Reich said. "He's just a hell of a man."

United Press International DALLAS — It doesn't make any difference that there are 1,800 baseball people milling around in a hotel that has a lobby the size of a small town.

Big Frank Howard is still easy to spot. Even when he is sitting down. And Howard is attracting even more attention than usual at this year's winter meetings since he has recently been elevated to the position he has wanted for a very long time — that of major league manager.

"I kind of felt like I was on a treadmill," Howard said earlier this week, taking a break after his new team — the San Diego Padres — had negotiated the biggest trade in its history. "I felt I was stalemated and didn't seem to be making much progress. "So I was surprised when the

chance came along. I coveted the job in Milwaukee. But I knew they were interested in two or three other men. That's the way it goes. There is no bitterness there."

The head job in Milwaukee, where Howard was first base coach, came open with the retirement of George Bamberger and it eventually went to Bob Rodgers.

But from out of nowhere came San Diego general manager Jack McKeon offering Howard the No. 1 field job with the Padres.

"It was the first (major league) managerial job ever offered to me," Howard said. "I sure feel good about it. And I think I will feel good about it 162 games from now."

The 6-foot-7 Howard has often been referred to as the gentle giant. And now the Padres will find out just how gentle he is.

"I know in my heart that I was not the best player who ever played my game," Howard said. "But I took pride in the way I tried to play. As an instructor I will try to teach my players to play the same way."

"Me and my coaches are going to work as hard as possible. But we expect some things from the players, too. We expect them to be honest, we expect them to go about their practice sessions with the thought of improving and we expect them to play hard-nosed baseball for nine innings."

"I don't know what's wrong with a big-league player having good work habits and playing his rear off for an entire game."

And it didn't take long for Howard to fall into the managerial syndrome when it comes to key elements on his

newly inherited team. "We want to play good and use our speed," Howard said. "I know this sounds funny coming from a guy who had trouble controlling the ball out of the park."

"But pitching, speed and arm strength are the big things. I don't know how many games they will win, but they will sure as heck lose a lot of them."

And he has also learned that it is best to downplay his managerial skills.

"Maybe there are some who are geniuses," he said. "I'm not one of them. You are as good as your horses. You just have some horses and if you try to get the most out of them you have to give. That's all you

Dads, sons meet in championship

United Press International Being the son of the head coach doesn't always mean a starting role in Texas schoolboy football, but two coaches sons who have earned their starting positions will square off Saturday night in the Class 1A state championship game.

Alan Kassen is only a junior, but he is a 50 percent passer who has thrown for 10 touchdowns and over 900 yards and rushed for another 1,200 yards himself in helping direct the fourth-ranked Valley View Eagles to the state finals against third-ranked Rankin.

Kickoff for the championship game is set for 7:30 p.m. Saturday in Brownwood.

Kassen is the son of coach J. M. Kassen, who says a balanced running and passing offense and a strong defense led Valley View through the year undefeated and into the championship game.

"Alan has also been a key to our defense," Kassen said. "He intercepted 12 passes as our safety, and is a key factor to several opponents not throwing the ball more than they did."

But Kassen quickly points out his son is not the whole team.

"We've got a good fullback in Paul Nehib and a great wide receiver in Danny Windle," he said. Nehib has also rushed for more than 1,200 yards this season, and Windle has scored eight touchdowns on pass receptions.

Terry Turner is the halfback for Rankin, and the Red Devils are coached by Dwayne Turner. The

younger Turner shares running duties with fullback Dennis Black, and Rankin generally throws "just enough to keep the defense honest," the coach said.

"We have a good offensive line which blocks well enough that our backs can score a lot of points," Turner said. "And our defense is pretty good. We're small, so we have to stunt a lot. That keeps the opposition guessing as to what kind of defense to expect, and helps give us back some of the edge we give up in lack of size."

The Class 4A state championship will also be played Saturday, with sixth-ranked Huntsville meeting ninth-rated Paris at 3 p.m. in Baylor Stadium at Waco for that title.

Semi-finals are scheduled in Classes 5A, 3A and 2A, with the 5A games Saturday afternoon matchups and the other two divisions being played Friday night.

Second-ranked Port Arthur Jefferson faces fifth-rated San Antonio Holmes in Austin's Memorial Stadium and sixth-ranked Odessa Permian plays seventh-rated Dallas Highland Park in the Class 5A semis, with kickoff set for 2 p.m. in both games.

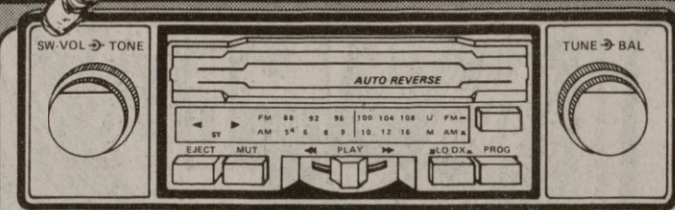
In Class 3A, top-ranked Pittsburg meets third-rated Stamford at Fort Worth's Clark Field, and West plays Van Vleck at College Station's Kyle Field. The Class 2A semifinals match top-rated Pilot Point against ninth-ranked Rotan in Jacksboro and seventh-rated Tidehaven against Forney in Bryan.

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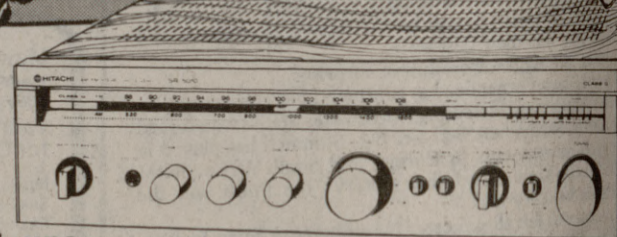


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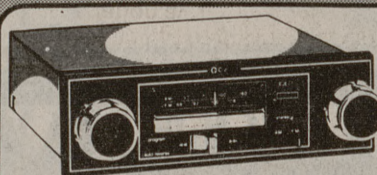
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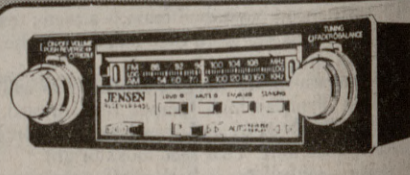


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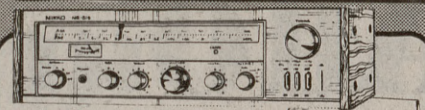


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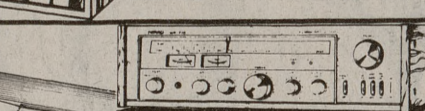


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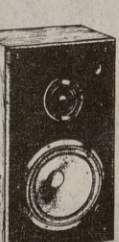


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