

SWC football coming soon

Late July means several things to many people. That long-awaited vacation. Weekends in the sun — or weekends at home. But, for many people around the southwest it means just one thing — Football.

The 1981 Southwest Conference football season is just around the corner. Schools around the conference are gearing up for what promises to be one of the most exciting races in recent memory.

Everywhere you look you see the signs of fall. Newspapers and magazines everywhere are full of stories and information about the upcoming season. Sports magazines have already come out with their predictions of who will win and who will lose.

The two biggest and, perhaps, the most respected sports publications in the state have released their predictions for the 1981 SWC race and both have interesting results.

Texas Football picks Texas to win the SWC championship this year. Houston is rated as number two, followed by SMU (3), Baylor (4), Arkansas (5), Texas A&M (6), TCU (7), Texas

Extra Points

by Ritchie Priddy

Tech (8), and Rice (9).

Texas Sports has the order a bit different. SMU is picked as the number one team followed by Texas (2), Arkansas (3), Houston (4), Baylor (5), TCU (6), Texas Tech (7) Texas A&M (8) and Rice (9).

The Aggies, though rated low, have 48 returning letterman — more than any other team in the league. SMU has 43 letterman returning. Texas and Rice each have 37, Baylor and Arkansas 36, TCU 35, Tech 34 and Houston with 25.

The 1981 Texas Aggies also feature, perhaps, one of the most experienced teams returning this fall. Though young, sophomores and juniors predominantly, they have had to step in early in their careers and fill some pretty big holes.

With all of this talent and experience why are the Aggies picked so low? My guess is because of the problems encountered last year. The pressure on Tom Wilson may have something to do with it. But talking with him Monday that pressure seems to have made him try that much harder to field the winning team that has eluded him the past two years.

Another reason for the low rating for the Aggies, and probably the most sound reason, may be the fact that the conference is so evenly matched. Every team has an arsenal of talent — the scholarship limit sees to that (only the best athletes are given scholarships). This year that talent seems to be even more evenly matched than in years past.

Despite the reason for the low rating, Wilson is excited about the 1981 Aggies and he has every right to be. The team is different this year, from the offensive formation to the attitude of the players. Things have changed. So much, in fact, that

everybody is looking forward to the September 6 kickoff against Cal-Berkeley.

Wilson's not worried about being picked to finish in the lower half of the conference.

"That could be a blessing in disguise (being picked so low)," he said. "I don't know that all of the sportswriters know how to pick the football teams. I would say, though, that if I were on the outside looking in, not knowing the things that I do about our program, I would probably pick us in the same area."

"We haven't done anything exciting in the last two years. We've had some big wins, but, overall we have not had the great football team," he said. "Our program has not been something a lot of people can get excited about."

Whatever the reason for the low pick Wilson is excited about the season. There's something fishy about that excitement, too. How can a man that has been through two straight losing seasons be excited about being picked to have a third?

Who knows the answer to that question, but one thing is for sure — his excitement is contagious.

TANK McNAMARA

by Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds

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Francis calls it quits

United Press International FOXBORO, Mass. — Last year the New England Patriots had two experienced, talented tight ends to help take the pressure off their running game. Now, with summer training camp just beginning, they have none.

Russ Francis, 28, the three-time All-Pro who developed a reputation as one of the best all-around tight ends in the NFL, shocked the Patriots by announcing his retirement Tuesday for personal reasons.

"I've given this a lot of thought in the last few months," Francis said in a radio interview. "A career change is not something one does overnight. All I can say right now is that I am retiring because of personal reasons. Beyond that, I can't go into it at this point."

Francis at times perturbed Patriots officials with his penchant for dangerous hobbies such as sky diving, motorcycling and shooting rapids.

The retirement leaves the Patriots, considered a strong contender in the AFC Eastern Division, without a veteran tight end under contract. Second-stringer Don Hasselbeck is unsigned, along with several other veterans. Only one rookie in training camp at Smithfield, R.I., is a tight end.

Patriots' spokesman Tom Hoffman said Francis and most other veterans are not due to report until 5 p.m. Friday.

Head Coach Ron Erhardt, who talked with Francis at his Wren-

tham home early Tuesday, apparently could not talk him out of retiring.

"We are in complete shock of something like this happening due to the fact training camp has just opened," said Patriots' President William Sullivan.

"We find the timing of this to be very inconsistent with Russ Francis' character, since in the past he has shown to be very considerate of the Patriots' management and his teammates," he said.

"It's going to be very difficult," the Hawaiian-born Francis said in a telephone interview with a Honolulu radio station. "It's been a lot of emotion. It's been fun. It's been a good game. I'm going to miss it."

Francis has a year remaining on his present contract and said he was not using the retirement decision as a means of getting a re-

negotiated contract.

He also discounted reports that he had sought — and was denied — a trade to a West Coast team so

he could be closer to his home, said his many injuries were a factor.

A remarkable athlete, Francis was drafted by the Kansas City Chiefs during the 1974 baseball season.

He consistently has scored the nationally televised "stars" sports competition organization.

Francis' best NFL season was 1979, with 39 receptions and 500 yards. His statistics were spectacular — averaging 10.8 TD catches and 500 yards and 5 p.m. ceptions per year. But he is an excellent blocker who was recently double-teamed, a society's New England receiver. Chris Morgan and Harold Jackson have 1,000-yard seasons.

Francis' agent, Kenneth Kin, said, "It was a difficult decision and he wants the best for England to know he appreciated all the support they gave him."

Dooley realizes it could be tough to repeat as national champs

United Press International NEW YORK — Vince Dooley has had his time in the sun. Now that he's back in the shade, and had time to reflect on it, he realizes winning isn't everything — unless you can keep doing it over and over.

Here's a man who did it all only six months ago, achieving what nobody else ever did by guiding the Georgia Bulldogs to their first national college football championship in 89 years.

His team won all 11 of its regular season games, then made Notre Dame its 12th straight victim in the Sugar Bowl to emerge No. 1 not only in the country but in the entire universe.

Now, with a brand new season approaching, he's getting some heart-warming messages from Georgia's overanxious alumni. Messages like: "Gee, that was a lotta fun." "How come we never did it before?" "Let's do it again."

Dooley is beginning his 18th year as head coach of the Bulldogs and he knows all about human nature. Give people a winner, and they look for you to do it again. Do it again, and they accept it almost as a matter of course.

"It could be a difficult year," he says. "Anything less than winning every game won't be good enough."

The Bulldogs, with Herschel Walker, their All-America freshman tailback, leading them, came very close to being the perfect

football team last season. However, even with Walker back and a more experienced Buck Belue returning at quarterback, they might not be quite as good this season as they were last. Dooley was given some advance notice of that upon greeting his players the first day of spring practice.

Absent were seven of Georgia's defensive players from last season and six players from the offensive unit. Plus the team's two regular kickers. They all had graduated.

Dooley talked about those holes that will have to be filled while he was here to address more than 50 of the nation's top high-school athletes named winners of the Hertz No. 1 awards. Walker and Belue both won those awards while they were still in high school, although Walker received his for his outstanding performance in track rather than football.

O.J. Simpson also spoke to the youngsters during a special panel discussion Wednesday and when Dooley was introduced to them, he talked about the importance of preparing themselves for when their athletic careers would be over.

He talked pretty much the same way to Herschel Walker earlier this year when the Montreal Alouettes of the Canadian Football League came around waving a contract for what was said to be as

much as \$750,000 in front of him. You can tell how much Dooley thinks of Walker by the way he speaks of him.

"He, as much as anyone else I can think of, represents the role model of someone preparing himself for that time when his athletic career is done," Dooley says. "O.J. Simpson is an excellent example of a player who did the same thing. Herschel is a serious student."

Before Walker met with Montreal officials to listen to what they had to say, Dooley met with him to point out some things he felt he should know.

"I merely warned him about the NCAA rules, the fact he could not accept anything from Montreal without jeopardizing his college career," Dooley explains. "He assured me he understood the rules."

After Walker came to his decision, he visited with Dooley in the coach's office at Athens, Ga., again.

"Coach, I was born in this country and I see no reason to leave it to make a living," he said. "The college experience is important to me. I'm staying."

"You made the decision I thought you'd make," Dooley said.

Dooley honestly admits that be-

fore last season started, he didn't foresee the Bulldogs going through the whole season undefeated. His wife, Barbara, did, though.

"For some reason or other, she had total confidence we would win every game," he says, smiling.

This season, though, the Bulldogs will simply be the defending champions.

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OddsMaker picks teams for game

United Press International LAS VEGAS, Nev. — OddsMaker Bob Martin has picked the Atlanta Falcons and the San Diego Chargers as co-favorites to reach Super Bowl XVI in January 1982.

Martin has given 4-1 odds on the two squads making it to the championship game, slightly ahead of Philadelphia, rated at 5-1.

The Dallas Cowboys, Los Angeles Rams and Oakland Raiders were picked at 6-1, followed by Cleveland Browns, 7-1; New England Patriots and Buffalo Bills, 8-1; Pittsburgh Steelers and Houston Oilers, 9-1.

Others attempting to reach the Super Bowl and their odds, were: Minnesota Vikings, Chicago Bears, Detroit Lions, 20-1; Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Denver Broncos, Baltimore Colts, Miami Dolphins, 25-1; New York Jets, 30-1 and Washington Redskins, 40-1.

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