

Small-town football a treat for devoted fans, spectators

by Joe Tindel Jr.
Battalion Staff

Sports enthusiasts are accustomed to scanning their favorite section of the newspaper and finding informative tidbits about big-name teams and individuals. Stories about the Cowboys, Oilers, Aggies, Longhorns, Bjorn Borg or Ed Garvey are commonplace.

The same thing goes for high school football coverage. Fans often read about the big 5A schools like Houston Memorial, Houston Lee, Houston Stratford, Houston Captain Crunch or Northeast Southwest Houston on Travis Street.

It's getting hard to keep up with all the metro schools these days. Believe it or not, there's really one in class 4A called San Antonio South San West. For those tired of the fast-paced brand of football played in the big-time, there's an alternative. The school names are easier to remember in this league. As a matter of fact, some of them are unforgettable.

How could anyone confuse Wink High School with anything? Many small school names have unique qualities. Some are emotional — like Happy High. Others are historic, such as Robert Lee or perhaps DeLeon. Still others are flashy (Ben Bolt), peaceful (Union Hill) and flowing (Agua Dulce).

It would be a mistake to tell the residents of the hamlets of small schools that their football isn't as important as anyone else's. These schools may not graduate more than 30 students each spring, but they're just as able to field a football team on Friday nights as Dallas Carter or Fort Worth Eastern Hills.

And when their teams reach the state playoffs, townspeople are ecstatic. Dairy Queen signs display messages of congratulations, businesses may hang team memorabilia in windows and sometimes schools turn out several hours early to hold a pep rally.

They'll turn out for the games, too. At Saturday's quarterfinals match between Granger and defending Class A champion Bremond, about 5,000 fans filled the stadium. That's more than the combined population of both towns.

"You can't ask for anything better than the community we have here," Bremond Head Coach Bill Cummings said.

Considering the demands placed on small school teams, it's only fair they get such treatment from fans.

For one thing, class A, AA and even AAA football is unique in that most of the 11 players who start on offense usually start on defense as well. Since players often go both ways, as Granger Coach Russell Poling puts it, players have to learn to

really concentrate because they can blame no one but themselves for mistakes.

And Cummings says: "I think mental attitude in our class has as much to do (with success) as anything."

Poling says small schools, especially class A schools, also tend to see rapid changes in the number of talented players available. For example, Groom High might have seven outstanding athletes one year and none the next.

Chances are greater that a 5A school like Richardson Lake Highlands can at least partially defeat the effects of graduation with some talented underclassmen.

And often small schools are losers in a popularity contest. Poling said when a coach somehow does manage to field a consistently powerful team in the small school ranks, he's likely to move to a better paying and hopefully more rewarding job in a larger school.

Poling said he believes stable coaching is a huge factor in class A football.

"I think in some ways if you have a more stable coaching situation in a smaller school it's more evident than in a larger school," he said. "After a coach gets a program set up and everything going his way, it gives them (the team) a very great advantage."

Cummings said he's one of

the fortunate few who have had a couple of talented groups of players. Cummings has established a good program at Bremond, but contrary to the trend, he said he has no plans of leaving for a job at a bigger school.

"I'm satisfied with where I am or I wouldn't have stayed last year," Cummings said.

Who wouldn't be? His team is as big as some 5A teams and his main weapon is 210-pound Duncan Thompson, a bruising back with 4.5 speed and more than 2,000 yards this season. Bremond is 13-0 on the season after defeating Poling's Granger Lions 30-6 Saturday.

Poling's team finished 12-2, and the Granger coach boasted talent like potential all-stater Johnny Dorn, a 160-pound tailback who piled up more than 2,500 yards this season.

Four teams are still playing in class A this weekend. Bremond will face Union Hill at Terrell in one semifinal battle, while Roscoe and Knox City will battle it out in the Panhandle.

In the class AA semifinals, Hale Center and Eastland will tangle in Sweetwater. Groveton will square off with perennial power East Bernard here in Kyle Field Friday night at 8 p.m.

Navasota and Refugio will play in Austin Saturday in one class AAA semifinals game, while Littlefield and McGregor will battle in the other bout in San Angelo Saturday.

TANK McNAMARA

by Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds



Rockets fall to 3-16 with loss

United Press International
HOUSTON — Every game is important to Seattle coach Lenny Wilkens — even when the SuperSonics are playing a weak team like the Houston Rockets.

"We went into this game like any other game," Wilkens said after the Sonics scored a run-away 107-88 victory over the Rockets Tuesday night. Seattle took the lead for good

at the 5:58 mark of the first quarter and led at the half, 49-41. The Sonics coasted to a third-quarter lead of 82-62 with center Jack Sikma scoring 11 points during that period.

Steinbrenner's entrance means big-time bargaining at meetings

United Press International
HONOLULU — Generally on the Hawaiian Islands there's a calm period before a storm.

If that's the case, the tranquility of the baseball meetings is about to be disrupted.

George Steinbrenner, baseball's hurricane, has arrived.

The principal owner of the New York Yankees blew into town late Tuesday night and he's expected to start things stirring on both the free-agent and trading fronts.

So far there has been only one trade and one minor free-agent signing since the meetings began Sunday.

But, the unresolved status of free-agents Steve Garvey, Floyd Bannister and Steve Kemp have stalled several potential trades from being made, and Stein-

brenner is a key figure in negotiations with all three players.

He met with Garvey's agent, Jerry Kapstein, at the airport in Los Angeles Tuesday before flying to Honolulu and is expected to talk to Bannister's agent, Tom Reich, today.

"I had a good meeting with Kapstein, that's all I can say," Steinbrenner said.

A report began circulating late Tuesday night that Garvey had decided to sign with the Chicago Cubs but Kapstein, contacted in Los Angeles, denied it.

"No agreement has been reached," Kapstein said.

Kapstein said five clubs were still in contention for Garvey.

Bannister is said to be leaning toward signing with Philadelphia so he can play on the same team as his boyhood idol, Steve

Carlton.

However, it is believed Steinbrenner will make one final pitch to land the American League strikeout king with a financial offer the 27-year-old lefthander may find difficult to refuse.

Steinbrenner also is interested in obtaining shortstop Alfredo Griffen from Toronto but the Blue Jays have asked for outfielder Gary Roenicke in the deal. The Orioles would be reluctant to trade Roenicke unless

they could replace him with Kemp.

If the Yankees could sign Bannister, it would free them to trade one of their pitchers, such as Ron Guidry, for a power-hitting third baseman, such as Atlanta's Bob Horner.

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