

Aggies in crucial contest

By BILL ROBINSON
Assistant Sports Editor

Tonight could be a turning point in the Southwest Conference basketball race. Not at the top, but a turning point just the same.

With the SWC post-season tournament looming just two weeks hence, the bottom half of the conference will be looking to grasp as high a position as possible in the standings in a full slate of hoop action tonight.

One of the most crucial of these contests will be in Fort Worth, where Coach Shelby Metcalf will lead Texas A&M against Coach Jim Killingsworth and his TCU Horned Frogs.

For the Aggies it is not so much a question of where they will be playing in the first round of the tournament as it is of who A&M will face. The Aggies are virtually assured of a home berth to begin the tourney.

But for TCU, each victory brings them a step closer to finishing in the top six — and off the road to open tournament action.

Metcalf says TCU will pose a real challenge for the Aggies.

"They scare us to death because of the long shooters they have," he said. "And playing up there is tough."

"We're now in the position where Rice has to lose, and we have to win, in order to get the home court advantage."

The Aggies will get some outside help on that end tonight because Rice faces almost certain defeat at the hands of the Houston Cougars.

Houston has won 36 consecutive SWC games and the Cougars have only lost to the Owls once in their 25 meetings.

And in Waco tonight, the Baylor Bears will have their best opportunity this season to pull themselves out of the SWC cellar when they host the Texas Longhorns. A Baylor victory would move them into a last-place tie with the Horns.

Texas finished last in the SWC a year ago in a one-win season and this year's club has only managed two conference victories. The Horns have not won a SWC road game in well over two years, a comforting thought for the Bears.

Before the 1983 campaign Texas had finished last in the SWC basketball race only three times, in 1931, 1957 and 1959. Two years after their 1931 cellar finish the Longhorns won the league and just one year after their 1959 collapse they were conference champions.

Considering the overall youth and strength of the league, that's not likely to happen this time.

Finally, the Arkansas Razorbacks gear up for their Sunday showdown with Houston by travelling to Lubbock to do battle with a vastly improved Texas Tech team.



Photo by DEAN SAITTO

Texas A&M center Jimmie Gilbert works the baseline against TCU forward Paul Kapturkiewicz in the Aggies' loss to the Horned Frogs earlier this season. TCU hosts A&M tonight in a Southwest Conference game at 7:30.

Cabell returns to Astros

United Press International

The Houston Astros Monday signed free agent fielder Enos Cabell to a two-year contract, making him the second free agent to return to the team this year.

Infield-outfielder Cabell, 34, a 12-year major league veteran, played the last two seasons at Detroit. He had played for

Houston between 1975 and 1980. Earlier this year, free agent Denny Walling was released.

Terms of his contract were not released. Cabell's career high batting average of .311 was achieved last year at Detroit.

He started his major league career in Baltimore between 1972 and 1974.

Looking for respect:

USFL ready to 'play ball'

United Press International

NEW YORK — Now that it has the attention of the National Football League — along with all pro football players and their agents — the United States Football League hopes to ingrain spring football in the hearts and minds of the fans.

The USFL heads into its second year coming off a good off-season, in which it made a lot of headlines, flashed a lot of money and took some of the NFL's brightest stars and best college prospects.

When play begins Feb. 26, USFL brass hope the fans take to the league as warmly as some of the top football "names" have embraced it.

"Last year, I thought the USFL was going to be another World Football League," said quarterback Brian Sipe, who jumped from the NFL's Cleveland Browns to the New Jersey Generals. "But it changed a lot in one season. It gained a lot of credibility in the off-season and that had a lot to do with my decision to come here."

The USFL beefed up to 18 teams from the original 12 and only seven of the original owners remain. Donald Trump in New Jersey, Jerry Argovitz in Houston, Ed DeBartolo Sr. in Pittsburgh, J. William Oldenburg in Los Angeles and James Hoffman in

Chicago bring new cash and energy to the league.

Along with Houston and Pittsburgh, there are expansion teams in Jacksonville, San Antonio, Oklahoma and Memphis. Also, the Boston team moved to New Orleans while Arizona and Chicago flip-flopped franchises.

For the most part, the newcomers are aggressive and more willing to challenge the NFL than the original owners. Battles loom down the road concerning unchecked spending and a possible move to the fall, but the owners are taking a "strength-in-numbers" approach for now.

"Expansion was very helpful, all the new franchises are strong ones and they brought in increased revenues," said Dr. Ted Diethrich, owner of the Arizona Wranglers. "Two other important things are the changes in ownership in New Jersey and Los Angeles. Both of those franchises will be stronger."

Along with Sipe, the USFL claimed quarterbacks Cliff Stoudt from Pittsburgh, Glen Carano from the Cowboys, and the Houston Gamblers signed Jim Kelly.

Just as important, the USFL has added to the less glamorous offensive positions and overall defense. Michigan paid most at-

tention to those spots last year with Tyrone McGriff, Ray Pinney and linebacker John Coker, and went on to win the league championship.

Tight ends Dan Ross and Gary Lewis, safety Gary Barbaro, offensive linemen George Yano and Mike Butler, and linebackers Jim LeClair and Willie Harper were pilfered from the NFL.

Still, the USFL's best position is running back. Herschel Walker, Kelvin Bryant and Tim Spencer were among its brightest stars in 1983 and they'll be joined by Joe Cribbs in Birmingham and Mike Rozier in Pittsburgh. The league received a setback here when Billy Sims was sent back to the NFL's Detroit Lions by a court of law after Argovitz thought he had him signed at Houston. But Cribbs was one of the NFL's best, and Rozier joins Walker to give the USFL the past two Heisman Trophy winners.

Three former head NFL coaches were added: Walt Michaels in New Jersey, Marv Levy in Chicago and Jack Pardee in Houston.

With free-spending owners, and more name players and coaches, USFL officials expect to do much better in attendance and television ratings in 1984.

Duran in danger of losing crown

United Press International

PANAMA CITY, Panama — The World Boxing Association said Tuesday that junior middleweight champion Roberto Duran could lose his title if he insists on fighting World Boxing Council champion Tommy Hearns.

Duran, who asked special permission for a bout with world middleweight champion Marvin Hagler last November, was required to face the WBA's No. 1 challenger, Jamaican Mike McCallum, within three months of the Hagler fight.

Duran, however, wants to fight WBC super welterweight champion Tommy Hearns next, his counterpart in the 154-pound class. Duran stands to net several million dollars.

Alberto Aleman, international coordinator for

WBA, said at a news conference Tuesday that if Duran does not keep his pledge to fight McCallum, he could be stripped of his junior middleweight crown.

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