

SPORTS

Guns', Gamblers' USFL futures look shaky

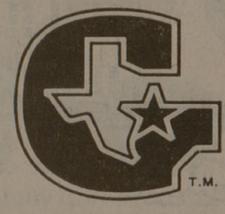
Associated Press
 SAN ANTONIO — If Clinton Manges is a superstitious man, he would have had a sense of doom the night of March 5, 1984, the night the lights went out while his USFL team was playing a nationally televised game.
 Manges' newly organized San Antonio Gunslingers had to wait in the dark for about 20 minutes before the lights were restored at Alamo Stadium.
 Then they took a 35-7 beating at the hands of the Houston Gamblers.
 That night has proven a harbinger of what was to come for the ill-fated Gunslingers, who have had few bright moments since.
 Things haven't been rosy for the Houston Gamblers, either, who have suffered from plummeting attendance and financial problems. All this, despite a winning 9-7 season so far.
 San Antonio, never a winning football team, last year finished 7-11 and this year has struggled to a dismal 4-12 record.
 But ineptness on the gridiron has almost been the least of the team's worries this year.
 Team members have been battling the front office for their paychecks since the season began.

Paychecks have bounced and have been as late as five weeks. Finally in May, the USFL Players Association stepped in and filed grievances, forcing payment on two past due paychecks.
 But that's just the tip of the iceberg.
 Manges' USFL franchise has been the target of countless lawsuits — most of them seeking collection on bad debts.
 Fan support has steadily diminished from a season-high of 21,800 in the March 10 game against Tampa Bay to a paltry 4,900 last Sunday against Los Angeles. The team sold only 9,700 season tickets. The Gunslingers have had troubles since the franchise was born. A South Texas oilman and rancher, Manges stirred up intense opposition when he convinced the San Antonio school board, in a hastily called meeting, to grant him a 30-year lease on Alamo Stadium.
 The aging facility for years has been used for high school athletic events.
 The district still is able to use the stadium, to which Manges claims to have added millions of dollars worth of improvements. He has, in fact, added artificial turf and a new track.
 Manges' lease on the stadium so angered residents living near the facility that they filed suit seeking to have the lease nullified.
 A district judge upheld the validity of the lease, but the case is still under appeal.
 The school board since has had a change of heart (and of membership) and now is arguing in court that the lease should be torn up because it was granted during an illegal meeting.
 The controversy, payroll problems and confusion surrounding the Gunslingers have taken their toll on the team members, coaches and the news media.
 Head coach Jim Bates resigned May 18, hours before the team was

to play Oakland.
 Players, who San Antonio sports columnist Kevin O'Keeffe says "lead the league in patience," have held countless stormy meetings where they discussed walkouts.
 Last weekend, the team came within hours of disbanding before Manges came up with two overdue paychecks and preserved his players' contracts.
 The players association had filed a grievance on behalf of the players and an arbitrator had ruled if they were not paid by June 8, all 50 players would become free agents.
 Manges has taken many of his troubles out on the media, banning certain reporters from the press box for what he terms "negative" reporting.
 He has blamed San Antonio's "establishment" for many of his woes, refusing to get more specific than saying he is referring to "Republicans."
 And he has vowed the team will survive.
 "It'll be here when all the rest are gone," he once said.
 Curiously, some team members still express faith in Manges.
 "I know him a little better than the other players," linebacker Putt Choate said. "This football team is

his baby. He really loves it."
 Even though management has not always run the team in a conventional manner, Choate said he "always felt like they were doing the best they could."
 Fans are not so charitable in their assessment of the team.
 Choate said he could not predict what lies ahead for the Guns.
 "Mr. Manges has said he's going to have a team next year and it's going to be here," Choate said.
 "I don't think it would do the league any good for this team to fold," he said. "It could be the first domino."

The situation is nearly as shaky with the Gamblers, where there is talk of a move.
 "There doesn't seem to be much incentive for hanging around here if we can't get the support," said owner Jerry Argovitz.
 Argovitz has used the possibility of moving to chide fans into attending more games.
 In a highly publicized promotional effort, the Gamblers offered a \$1 million annuity to a winning fan if 40,000 people showed up for a May 20 game in the Astrodome against the Jacksonville Bulls. The drawing never came off because only 17,127 fans attended.
 Gambler team members might have gone unpaid if not for a \$1.5 million loan from the USFL.
 The Gamblers have taken a turn to the worse this year after winning their division title and making a playoff appearance last season.
 The team made a name for itself with the imaginative run-and-shoot offense and a go-for-broke quarterback Jim Kelly.
 The Gamblers appeared headed for a repeat performance this year when they won their first five games.
 But suddenly the wheels came off with dwindling attendance and financial problems.



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by Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds

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Sanctions against SMU may rock Richter scale

Associated Press
 DALLAS — The long, hot sweat has begun for Southern Methodist University and football may never be the same again on the quiet little hill-top campus off Mockingbird Lane.
 The 26-month investigation in the Mustangs' football program is now in the appeal stage with the full NCAA Council weighing the evidence.
 The Council meets in mid-August with a verdict expected by sometime in early September.
 It's difficult to find many SMU alumni who believe the Mustangs will escape NCAA sanctions.
 In fact, the rumor mill is grinding full force that the Mustangs could be hit with some of the severest blows on record.
 Example: A participant in last week's American Football Coaches Association Golf Tournament who has well-placed NCAA sources hinted darkly that he had heard the Mustangs might even lose all their scholarships for at least one year.
 If that happened, it would take SMU's football program a long time to recover. You can't play a major college schedule with walk-ons.
 The NCAA is looking at SMU as a five-time loser and repeat offenders have always paid a heavy price. Another probation would be the Mustangs' sixth probation period since 1958. Wichita State is the all-time

Hip pains won't stop Zoeller at U.S. Open

Associated Press
 BIRMINGHAM, Mich. — Last year Fuzzy Zoeller waved the white flag of surrender at Greg Norman, then beat him for the American national golf championship.
 This year, Zoeller refuses to surrender to nagging pain as he heads into the defense of his title in the 85th United States Open which begins Thursday.
 "I'm not 100 percent," Zoeller said Wednesday, "but I'm not bad at all. I think I can be competitive. The last three or four weeks I've been hurting almost every day."
 Zoeller, whose career was threatened when he was forced to undergo major back surgery after his U.S. Open victory last year, has made a remarkable comeback this season. He won the Bay Hill Classic in only his third start after the surgery.
 And that kind of success prompted him to attempt a string of

five consecutive tournaments. That, he said, was a mistake.
 "There's no doubt that somewhere in that string of five, I injured myself somewhere along the line," Zoeller said.
 He's now experiencing pain in the right hip "which radiates up into the right shoulder."
 Despite his problems, Zoeller declined to count himself out of the 72-hole chase for a \$103,000 first prize.
 "There's probably 50 guys (in the field of 156) who can win," he said.
 Asked if Fuzzy Zoeller was among them, he grinned:
 "Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. I'm there. I don't count myself out. If I can make it to the first tee, I can win."
 Arrayed against him are the world's best players and an extremely difficult golf course, the Donald Ross-designed Oakland Hills Country Club course that Ben Hogan called "The Monster."
 "The rough is up, maybe 4 1/2 inches and the greens, they're very severe," Zoeller said.
 Contender Seve Ballesteros of Spain, winner of two British Opens and two Masters said he's "playing good, but not too good. Just right. Moving up."
 "I'm quite pleased with the state of my game," said Bernhard Langer, the West German who won the Masters title two months ago in Augusta, Ga.
 Those two, along with Norman, the Australian star known as "the Great White Shark," who took Zoeller to a playoff last year, provide a strong foreign threat.
 Jack Nicklaus, who owns a record collection of 17 major professional titles, has not won in more than a year but insists that at 45 he remains a threat to win a record fifth American national championship.

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