

Mustangs to play with SWC instead of fire

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Somewhere the temperature falls below 100 degrees. Somewhere leaves are falling from the tops of trees. Somewhere the breeze of autumn blows.

Although it may not feel like it, football season is upon us again.

The SMU Mustangs are feeling the heat and it's the kind of heat that comes from basking in the recruiting sun too long. It's not even a Sun Bowl heat.

This is the kind of heat that comes from playing with fire, and the Ponies finally got burned. The NCAA recently slapped SMU's football program with extensive probation for its illegal recruiting practices.

The other Southwest Conference teams should be counting their lucky stars because the Mustangs are not only the kings of the SWC, they are part of the cream of the national crop in 1985.

So with all that in mind, here's the order in which this sports writer thinks the nine SWC teams will finish in 1985:

1. SMU

With 17 returning starters, not even the NCAA can trip them up. The Mustangs should walk through the SWC schedule without a scratch, and, despite not being allowed to go to the Cotton Bowl, could still play for the national championship on Dec. 7 against Oklahoma, ranked No. 1 in most preseason polls.

The Ponies finished 10-2 last season, which included an Aloha Bowl win over Notre Dame. Top returners on offense are quarterback Don King, running backs Jeff Atkins and Reggie Dupard, a possible Heisman Trophy candidate, and flanker Ron Morris. The Mustangs averaged 396.5 yards a game and King led the SWC in passing and total offense last season.

On the defensive side of the line, the Mustangs allowed 349.9 yards a game. All-SWC noseguard Jerry Ball anchors the line. T.D. Briggs and Kit Case are the top linebackers in SMU's 3-4 alignment.

The only hole to fill seems to be that of All-SWC linebacker Anthony Beverly, who decided not to return

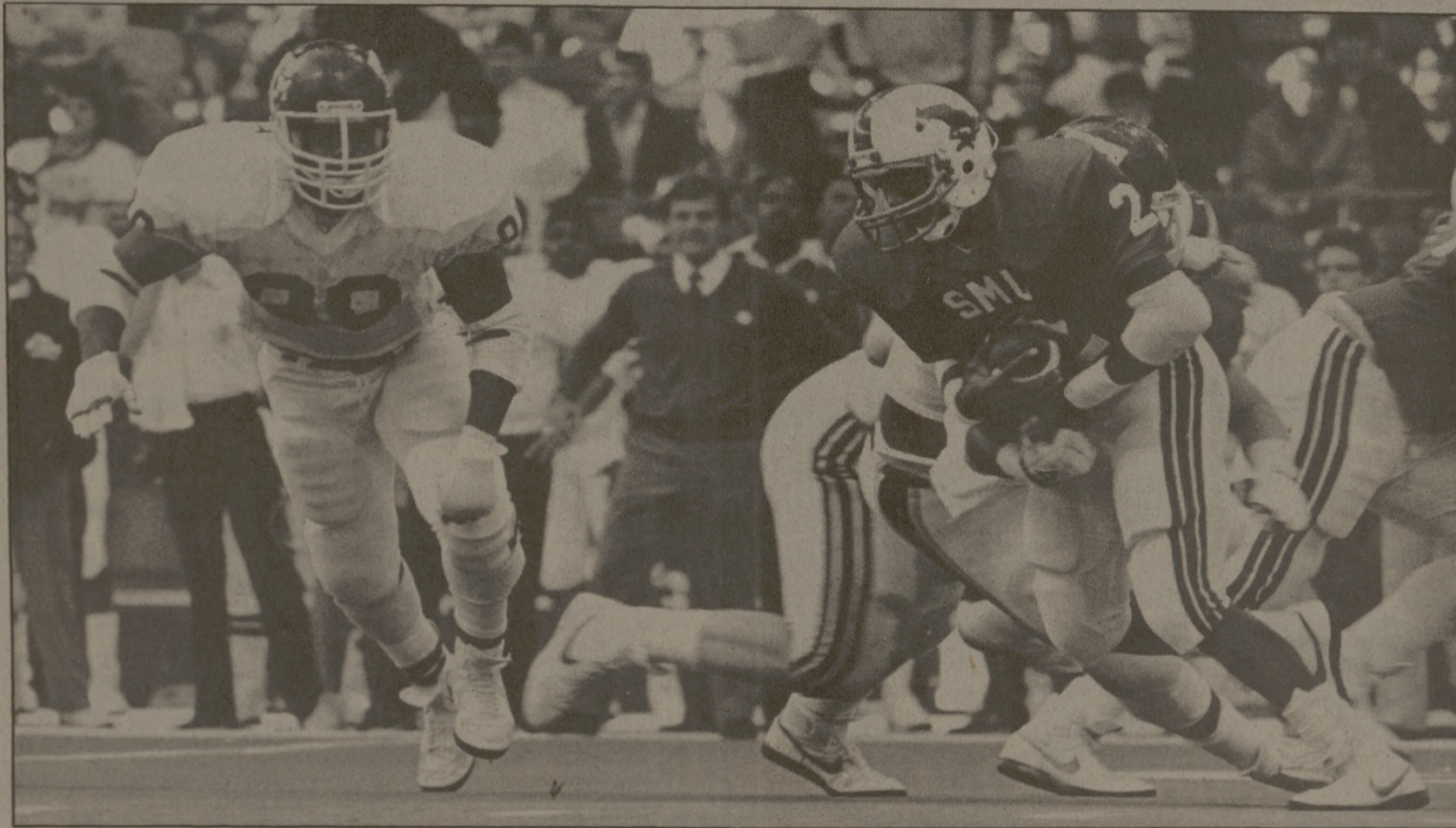


Photo by JOHN MAKELY

SMU's All-Southwest Conference quarterback Don King (2) returns to lead the Mustang attack in '85. The Ponies are ranked No. 3 in the

for his final year of eligibility.

2. TEXAS A&M

Although it might be a bit optimistic, look for the Aggies in the Cotton Bowl for only the second time since World War II. It's Jackie Sherrill's fourth year, which means there can be no more excuses. The Aggies have a history of spring optimism and fall reality, but this season there appears to be reason for optimism. After late season wins over Top 20 teams, TCU and Texas, A&M appears to be primed and ready.

Fourteen starters return from last season's 6-5 team. Quarterbacks Craig Stump and Kevin Murray will battle it out for the starting job. Murray led the SWC in total offense in '83, only to break his ankle in the third game of '84. Stump took over and passed for 1,135 yards and 10 touchdowns. More importantly, he led the Ags to both upset wins over the Frogs and Horns.

The Aggies are weakest at runningback and wide receiver.

Roger Vick and Anthony Toney lead the sometimes anemic running game, but A&M is lacking a break

away runner. Look for freshmen to contribute here.

Sherrill has expressed concern about his receiving corps, and for good reason, because the Aggies lack speed to get deep.

Flanker Jeff Nelson returns after leading the team in receptions in '84. However, from there the receivers grow thin. Shea Walker is slated to start at split end. The back-ups could provide help, but, as of yet, are untested.

The Aggies are strong at tight end, where four players return. The offensive line is also a strong point with All-SWC tackle Doug Williams

and center Matt Wilson the key players.

On defense, A&M won't miss All-American Ray Childress too much. Rod Saddler will be a capable replacement for Childress.

Johnny Holland is the best linebacker in the conference. John Roper looked good at one outside linebacking position in the spring.

Sophomore Terrence Brooks will play with three seniors in the secondary. The back-ups here could be starting for other SWC teams. This is one of the Aggies' biggest strengths.

The Aggies' last Cotton Bowl ap-

pearance was 1968. The opponent? Alabama.

That's the last time the two teams met, and they'll meet again Sept. 14.

The final score?

How about A&M 20, Bama 16?

3. ARKANSAS

The Hogs return 47 lettermen from a team that finished 7-4-1 last year. Arkansas' reason for optimism rests with its defense.

The Razorbacks finished seventh nationally in scoring defense and 14th in total defense in '84. Ravin Caldwell is an All-SWC lineman and Kevin Wyatt earned postseason honors at defensive back last year.

On offense, the Hogs have THE BEST player in the SWC in split end James Shilbest. If they find a capable quarterback to throw the ball to him, they could be awesome. Greg Thomas has the edge at that position, but he lacks big game experience.

4. TCU

They won't be "unbeeeeveable" this year. Everyone will be zeroing in on the purple Frogs from Fort Worth.

Jim Wacker's 8-4 team returns 14 starters including Heisman Trophy candidate Kenneth Davis. Davis is the tailback that sets TCU's veer offense in motion.

The Frogs, however, are weak in the offensive line, at wide receiver and at quarterback. Look for freshmen such as Jasper wide receiver Reggie Davis to have a big impact. Sophomore Scott Ankrom, a prep standout at San Antonio Jay High School, should get the call at quarterback.

TCU has never been strong on defense, but with every starting lineman and linebacker returning, defense could be their forte this season. Noseguard Kent Tramel is the Frogs' best defensive player and team leader, but the loss of All-SWC free safety Byron Lynwood will hurt on third down and long.

5. TEXAS

When your punter is your best

See SWC Race, page 7



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