

Sports

4 lineman will vie for Lombardi

Associated Press

HOUSTON — The 16th annual Lombardi Award, symbolic of the nation's top collegiate lineman, will be presented Thursday night to one of four players: Oklahoma's Tony Casillas, Oklahoma State's Leslie O'Neal, Boston College's Mike Ruth or Michigan's Mike Hammerstein.

The trophy, a 40-pound block of granite, is presented in honor of the late Vince Lombardi, former head coach of the NFL's Green Bay Packers. Lombardi died in September 1970 of cancer.

Hammerstein, 6-foot-3, 265 pounds, led the Wolverines in tackles for losses this season with 22 for minus 110 yards. The senior defensive end also added 73 tackles, had nine quarterback sacks for 53 yards in losses, one fumble recovery and one interception.

Hammerstein said his being considered for the honor "is just a reflection of our defense this year. We were first in just about every category. I'm honored to represent our team here."

O'Neal, a 6-4, 249-pound senior defensive tackle, had 93 tackles, nine quarterback sacks and 15 tackles for losses to key the Cowboys' defense.

"I couldn't say I'd be displeased if I don't win," O'Neal said. "Being one of the final four is good considering all the schools involved."

Ruth, a 6-2, 268-pound senior nose guard, had 126 tackles for Boston College, 12 quarterback sacks, one interception and two forced fumbles.

"The attention has waned (since the Eagles were 4-8 this year after going to the Cotton Bowl at 9-2 last season), but you don't play football for attention, you play for other things," Ruth said.

Casillas, 6-3, 280, has had 35 tackles, four for losses and two quarterback sacks in seven games as a senior for the Sooners this season.

The annual Lombardi dinner is sponsored by the Downtown Rotary Club of Houston. Proceeds from the dinner go to the American Cancer Society for research.

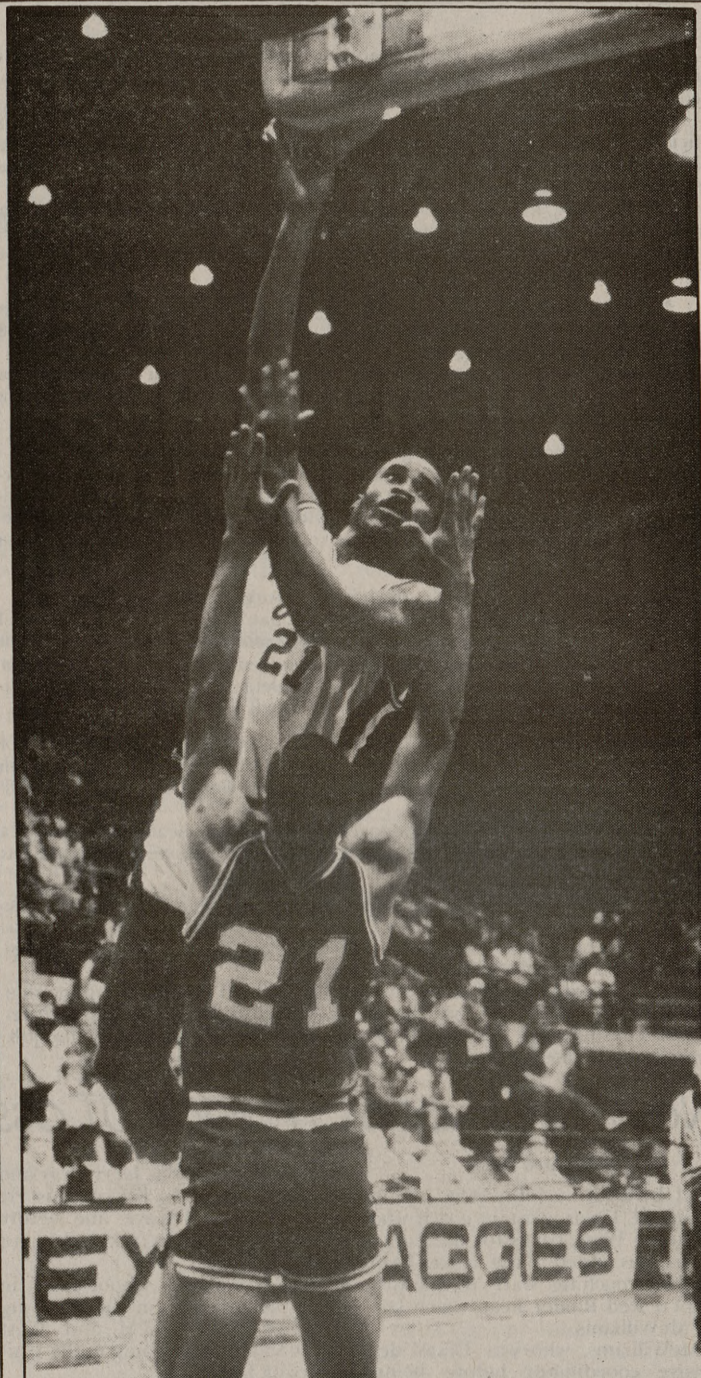


Photo by ANTHONY S. CASPER

A&M's Winston Crite (21 in white) goes into tonight's Lamar game as the Aggs' second-leading scorer, averaging 13.3 points a game.

Ags hope win is in 'Cards'

A&M cagers try hand at Lamar's winning tradition

By BRANDON BERRY
Sports Writer

The Texas A&M men's basketball team will travel to the Houston Summit tonight for the second time this season. And for the second time this season, the Lamar Cardinals will prove Houston to be far from a "neutral" site.

Lamar and A&M both played in the first round of the NIT Big Apple Tournament in the Summit on Nov. 21. Both teams lost in the closing seconds of their games to nationally-ranked opponents — A&M by having a comeback bid fall three points short against Alabama-Birmingham, 71-68, and Lamar dropping a five-point decision to eventual NIT champion Duke, 65-60.

But the Cards, who hail from Beaumont, were well supported in the stands — unlike the Aggies. The vast majority of the 2,200 in attendance were wearing crimson (a much brighter red than do-or-die maroon).

At the conclusion of the A&M-UAB game, one Cardinal fan yelled, "Enough for the warm-up game — bring on a real team. Go Cardinals!"

"They (the Cards) will be well-supported down there, there's no doubt about it," A&M Assistant Coach John Thornton said. "We know that they've already chartered five buses to take some of their students down to the game."

So, how did a town with an oil-based economy and a French heritage become so slam-dunk, East Coast basketball crazy?

"They're winners," Thornton said of the Cardinals. "They're a very confident team because they're coming off a good season last year and they've got a winning tradition when it comes to basketball."

That tradition includes seven straight 20-win seasons, six Southland Conference titles in the past eight years and eight straight post-season tournament invitations.

In the span of the past eight

years, most of which have been under the tutelage of former Eddie Sutton assistant Pat Foster, Lamar has beaten the likes of Alabama, Missouri, Oregon State and Houston.

And, already this season, the Cards have knocked off Villanova, last season's national champion.

"They're a very solid team," Thornton explained. "They jumped off to a 17-3 lead against Villanova and no one on their team had more than four points. They're a very well-balanced team."

"What stands out at you in looking at their films is that they have no glaring weaknesses. They've got good inside people, great depth, adequate ball handlers and they can shoot from the perimeter. They're a lot like us in that they play both a zone (defense) and a man-to-man."

"They played Duke closer than anyone else in the (NIT) tournament and I'm very impressed with them. They look better to me than Alabama-Birmingham."

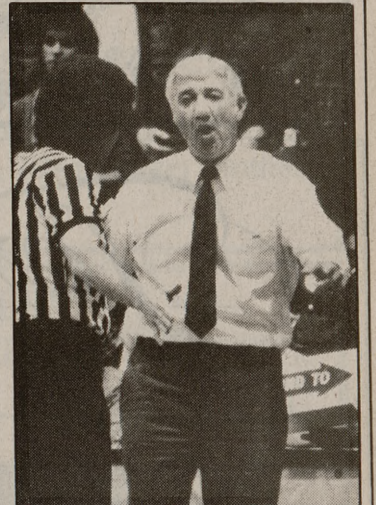
The Ags will face the Cardinals without the services of back-up center David Thompson and back-up point guard Gary Lewis. Both have hand injuries.

The rash of injuries, which has seen five different players miss practices or games, has further depleted A&M's bench strength, which was already a question mark going into this season.

"The guys we have in the starting line-up don't mind playing the extra minutes," Thornton said. "The only thing that bothers us is that we can't play as freely sometimes as we'd like because of possible foul problems."

"To win this game we need our starting five to play well — and I think they will. But what we really need is for one or two guys on the bench to come in and give us some good minutes."

The Aggies will start the game with Jimmie Gilbert at center, Winston Crite and Mike Clifford at the forward positions and



Texas A&M Coach Shelby Metcalf (right) takes his 2-1 Aggies to the Houston Summit tonight to battle the Lamar Cardinals.

Todd Holloway and Don Marbury at the two guard spots.

Marbury leads A&M scorers with an average of 26.7 points per game.

But, when Card fans look at this year's team, their eyes are most often drawn to the "Round Mound of Bank-shot and Rebound," James Gullely.

Gullely defies the laws of gravity and perpetual motion by being deceptively quick around the basket. "Deceptive" considering his 6-foot-8, 290 pound frame.

"They're a hard team to defend inside," Thornton said. "They've got a 6-foot-11 kid coming off the bench (Greg Anderson) and Todd and Gullely inside. Gullely's a little overweight, but he's quick. And we've got to try and guard against McCauley getting hot from the outside."

"What we have to do is take it to them offensively — we know they're going to do it to us. We can't afford to play conservatively and get behind them."

"Our guys like the challenge of playing teams like Lamar."

3 in a series

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