

SMU players, coaches remain in limbo while NCAA ponders 'death penalty'

DALLAS (AP) — While Southern Methodist University waits for the NCAA to decide the future of the Mustang football program, players and coaches exist in limbo and ponder an uncertain future.

The NCAA is studying renewed charges of recruiting violations that could lead to a two-year suspension of SMU football.

On the outside, things are running as usual. The Mustangs began their off-season program Tuesday by running and lifting weights.

But beneath the surface, players are worried about their future.

"I'm scared as hell," junior Franky Thomas said. "You think about it all the time. I wonder. I wonder."

"Honestly, every player has it in the back of his mind — they're going to kill the program," junior Ken

Masterson said. "You can look at everybody and see they're thinking the NCAA is going to take it away."

A ruling will likely come after the Committee on Infractions meets Feb. 13-16 in San Diego, Calif.

Some players fear the NCAA will



make an example of SMU by making it the first school ever to receive the "death penalty" under which its pro-

gram would be suspended for up to two years.

"We know they have done a lot to clean house," a source within the NCAA told the *Dallas Times Herald*. "They are saying, 'We're bending over backward and the death penalty wouldn't help anyone now.' But on the other hand, some are thinking this is a golden opportunity to use the death penalty."

Following the resignations of athletic director Bob Hitch and Head Coach Bobby Collins in December, the assistant coaches are looking for jobs, and recruiting has ceased.

In Ownby Stadium, posters and Mustang memorabilia have been removed from the walls of the athletic office and boxes are stacked in corners.

"I'm tired of looking at these

boxes," defensive coach Randy Butler said. "They are ready to go and I am, too."

While the coaches wait for job offers, players mull transfers or life at SMU without football.

"I've been thinking about it quite a bit," freshman wide receiver Lynn James said. "It's my future but I have no control over that part. My future is controlled by somebody else."

However, most players remain hopeful that the SMU program will not be suspended.

"I don't think they are going to give us the gas," sophomore linebacker Dick Anderson said. "But we'll be on probation the rest of our natural lives."

New Yorks' secondary weak link in otherwise dominating defense

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) — Even the Denver Broncos know what you're talking about when one mentions the weak link of the New York Giants' defense.

For reasons even obvious to the Giants, the secondary has been sort of a whipping boy this season.

Whether the rap is deserved is another matter. What most people do remember about the Giants' secondary is seeing Gary Clark of Washington drop two deep passes in the NFC title game, passes some thought could have gone for touchdowns in a game New York eventually won 17-0.

"I wouldn't say they are weak in any sense of the word," Broncos wide receiver Steve Watson said. "If you look at their linebacking corps,

they are the ones who get all the attention. Nobody focuses on the defensive backs because they are overshadowed."

Overshadowed isn't the word. Dwarfed seems more appropriate to compare the Giants secondary to their front seven.

"I suppose we are the weak link," Giants safety Kenny Hill said. "We don't have three All Pro players in the secondary as we do at every other position in the defensive unit."

What the Giants will have in the secondary for Sunday's Super Bowl in Pasadena are a 12th-round draft choice at free safety, Herb Welch; an acquisition from the Los Angeles Raiders at strong safety in Hill; a free agent at left corner in Elvis Patterson, and a seventh-round draft

choice from 1983 at right corner, Perry Williams.

It's a group that has allowed an average of 217 yards per game, a figure that ranks in the lower third in the league. Against Denver earlier this year, Broncos quarterback John Elway completed 29 of 47 passes for 336 yards. He did not throw a touchdown.

"They beat up on our receivers pretty good," Watson said. "I think we have to approach this game a little differently. We have to change some things."

Most of the passes Elway completed were in the comfort zone between the linebackers and in front of the defensive backs.

Vida Blue signs with A's for one year

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Pitcher Vida Blue, a major figure in Oakland's glorious 1970s, made an emotional return to the A's Wednesday, and was welcomed by Reggie Jackson, who also has come home again.

"I really want to shed some tears, because I really am elated," said Blue, who is 37. "I'm really excited about getting the chance to play for the A's again."

The A's announced Blue's signing to a one-year contract at a news conference.

Blue and Jackson, 40, are the only players still active who were prominent members of the A's rosters during the team's championship years. The club won five consecutive American League West titles from 1971 to 1975 and won the World Series in 1972, 1973 and 1974.

Despite the emotion behind the return of Blue and Jackson, both said they came back because they believe they can help the team.

"The important thing to me is here's a guy who can still contribute," Jackson said after the conference.

Denver defensive coach dubbed 'genius'

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif. (AP) — Try as he might, Denver Broncos defensive coordinator Joe Collier can't shake the "genius" tag.

He meets the suggestion with a scowl, saying true geniuses belong in the laboratory finding cures for life-threatening diseases, not diagramming X's and O's for football players.

"He's uncomfortable with it,"

Broncos linebacker Tom Jackson said. "He'd never refer to himself as a genius. But as players, we think he is one."

In a business where job security is rare, Collier has, at least, shown a genius for survival. As the Broncos prepare for Sunday's Super Bowl matchup with the New York Giants, he is completing his 18th straight

season with the team. He has survived four head coaching changes.

A poll by a national publication this week showed Collier to be the most job-worthy assistant in the NFL. Head coaches were asked to list the assistants they would choose to begin building a new staff, and Collier was the overwhelming choice.

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