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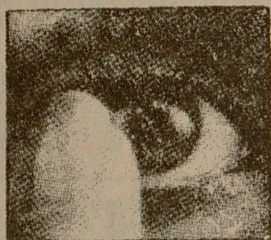
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Astros ax Lanier after 82-80 year

HOUSTON (AP) — Hal Lanier was fired as manager of the Astros Sunday after a disappointing season that ended with Houston losing 13 of its final 17 games.

Lanier, 46, said he was told about an hour before the game, a 5-1 loss to the San Diego Padres. Fired along with Lanier were third-base coach Denis Menke, bullpen coach Mark Hill and hitting instructor Gene Clines.

"Managing is the hardest job in baseball," Astros owner John McMullen said in a statement distributed in the press box at the start of the ninth inning. "It is the culmination of all the possible pressure on an individual."

"Hal Lanier has been a first-class citizen and done many positive things for the organization. We feel at this time, however, it is best to wipe the slate clean and start over again."

"I've had three great years with this club but this is not a happy time for anyone," Lanier said. "However, I don't hold any bitterness toward anyone. Dr. McMullen had a job to do. He and I have been friends and we'll continue to be friends. I think I'm the best competitor in this game. John McMullen just felt there needed to be a change."

"He has the right to be disappointed. He was committed that we wanted to have a pennant winner. We were still in the race in September, but I don't think any manager could have come in here and won the way we were scoring runs."

"I can't see anything ever being tougher than this," General Manager Bill Wood said. "However, the manager is the chief on the field. He sets the tone and direction of the team, and we just didn't get it done this year. We thought we had over-

come some of our problems, but they seemed to bubble up to the surface even more than before."

Astros players sensed Lanier's firing. "I don't think anyone was surprised," outfielder Terry Puhl said. "That's not to say it should have happened, and it's not over yet. There's going to be a general housecleaning."

"It's not for me to say if it was fair or not, but we did not perform well in the last month of the season," Nolan Ryan said. "We stayed in the race as long as anyone, but when we fell off, we fell off abruptly."

Lanier's fiery, aggressive style of baseball seemed to recharge the Astros in 1986. Lanier was named manager Nov. 5, 1985, promising the same wide-open base running attack he learned as a third-base coach under Whitey Herzog in St. Louis.

The Astros won the West Division by 10 games but lost to the New York Mets in a six-game playoff, dropping the final game in 16 innings. Lanier was named major league manager of the year by the Associated Press and National League manager of the year by the Baseball Writers Association of America.

But the Astros have faded in the stretch the past two seasons. In 1987, Houston was one-half game out of first place on Aug. 24 but lost 26 of their final 37, finishing 14 games out of first place. As late as Aug. 9 this year, the Astros were one-half game behind first-place Los Angeles.

After one loss, Lanier kicked over two large garbage cans, sending refuse flying, and shouted as players returned to the clubhouse after a frustrating loss. After another loss, he made the players take an additional two hours of batting practice.

Cunningham passes, rushes Eagles to win

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Randall Cunningham passed for two touchdowns and ran 33 yards for another to rally the Philadelphia Eagles from a 16-point first-quarter deficit to a 32-23 NFL victory over the Houston Oilers Sunday.

Cunningham completed 24 of 38 passes for 289 yards, while the Eagles' defense held Houston's usually explosive offense to 206 yards — 55 running and 156 passing.

The Oilers led 16-0 with 6:39 left in the first period. They blocked two punts, one for a touchdown and another resulting in a safety, and scored on a one-yard rollout by Cody Carlson.

Cunningham then started the Eagles' comeback with a 14-play, 75-yard drive capped three seconds into the second period with the first of three field goals by recently acquired placekicker Luis Zendejas. It was a 22-yarder.

Cunningham then took the Eagles 67 yards on five plays, throwing the final 38 to wide receiver Chris Carter to make it 16-10 with 10 minutes left in the half.

The Eagles, 2-3, took the lead 17-16 with 2:22 left in the half on a 16-yard pass from Cunningham to Gregg Garrity just inside the back end-zone line.

Philadelphia increased its lead to 20-16 with six seconds left in the half on a 39-yard field goal by Zendejas. Cunningham completed five passes in the 11-play, 53-yard drive.

With 8:36 left in the third period, the Eagles went up 27-16 on a 33-

yard scramble by Cunningham after he was unable to find a receiver.

Houston, 3-2, took a 7-0 lead 2:07 into the opening quarter when linebacker Eugene Seale blocked a punt and Cris Dishman picked it up and ran 10 yards into the end zone.

Eighty seconds later, linebacker Walter Johnson blocked an Eagles punt, the ball rolling out of the end zone for an automatic safety that made it 9-0.

Houston boosted its lead to 16-0 on a five-play, 64-yard drive with Carlson scoring from the one with 8:21 left in the first quarter.

Houston drove 98 yards on eight plays and three penalties for a touchdown 5:10 into the final period. Mike Rozier scored from the two to cap a drive in which Carlson completed five consecutive passes.

Carlson completed just eight of 25 passes for 150 yards, underthrowing and overthrowing wide-open receivers all afternoon.

On the ground, the Eagles held Rozier to 20 yards on eight carries and Allen Pinkett to seven on three.

Cunningham, in addition to his 33-yard touchdown run, scrambled for 26 yards for a total of 59 on three carries. Keith Byars accounted for 17 yards on 15 carries.

Cunningham connected with six receivers, including tight end Keith Jackson, 8-for-66, and Carter, 2-for-58.

On the Eagles' first scoring drive, Zendejas' 22-yard field goal, Cunningham completed passes of 6, 19, 12, 11 and 23 yards.



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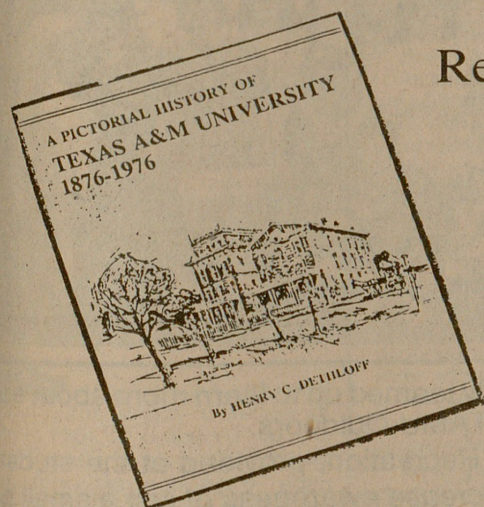
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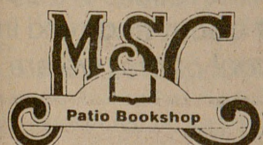
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Walker leads Cowboys against Saints tonight

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Herschel Walker will worry about renewing an old rivalry with Sam Mills Monday night, then consider issuing another challenge to heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson some time in the future.

Walker leads the Dallas Cowboys, 2-2, in both rushing and receiving. Mills is a Pro Bowl inside linebacker with the New Orleans Saints, 3-1.

"Yes, sir, I remember Sam Mills from the USFL," Walker said. "Very well."

"He is a very hard-nosed linebacker. He's the type of linebacker a lot of people would love to have on their team."

At 5-foot-9 and 225 pounds, Mills is the smallest interior linebacker in the NFL.

"He's one of the guys who will show you that size doesn't matter," said Walker, 6-1 and 225.

Mills played for Jim Mora with the Philadelphia-Baltimore Stars, then moved to the Saints and rejoined his coach when the USFL folded. Walker was with the New Jersey Generals, and Mora remembers him well.

"We played him a bunch," Mora said. "I think we were 5-3 against the New Jersey Generals."

"He caught a little dink pass one time, and he took off, and our sec-

ondary guys looked like they ran about 6-flat, he's so fast," he said.

Walker has done pretty well for the Cowboys, too — averaging 23 carries and 100 yards a game, plus catching an average of five passes a game for over 46 yards a contest.

"Without doubt, without question, a superstar," Mora said. "He's strong, big, powerful, fast, he can catch, he can block, he can beat you in a lot of ways."

"You really have to be at the top of your game defensively to stop the guy."

During the offseason, Walker danced with the Dallas ballet and expressed an interest in fighting Tyson. The joke was that it would be smarter for Walker to fight the ballet troupe and dance with Tyson, but he said he wasn't kidding.

"Last year, I was very serious about it. I haven't thought about it much lately, since this is football season," he said. "With the offseason, I may think about it again."

"I boxed a little a long time ago," he said. "I'm more into martial arts. I've been doing that about 10 years."

"I'm just competitive. It's the kind of person I am. I believe the Lord gives you just so much talent, and the more you do with that talent, the greater glory for Him."

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