

Cheer up, all you SWC fans! There are some good races

Are you discouraged because of the lack of drama this year in the Southwest Conference race? Are you disappointed because of the amazing dearth of qualified championship contenders? Is all of it making you consider abandoning the college game, focusing your attention on races with more doubt and uncertainty — Bush vs. Dukakis, perhaps?

Well, fear not. It would seem the problem is a phenomenon isolated to our dear state of Texas.

Quit whining about Arkansas having a stranglehold on the SWC. It could be worse.

Sure, if Texas and TCU lose Saturday a Hog win over Rice would give Arkansas a Cotton Bowl berth three weeks before the conference season is over. (Hog win over Rice — sounds like an exotic Chinese dish.)

Sure, the A&M-Arkansas game means next to nothing, since all the Hogs need to do to clinch is beat Rice and Baylor — hardly the labors of Hercules.

Sure, the mighty Longhorns, once perennial contenders for national glory, have become also-rans in the conference that they once dominated.

Sure, Rice and TCU are still members.

But don't despair. Instead of defecting to the ranks of the fans of pro ball, just concentrate a little on some of the more competitive races in the country.

Take the Southeastern Conference and the Big 10, for example. Just in those two conferences there are 12 teams within 1 1/2 games of the conference lead.

Our near neighbors to the east are having a race for the Sugar Bowl that is not to be believed. No team is undefeated in SEC play this year, but seven of the 10 teams have either one or two losses in conference.

Georgia has lost only to Kentucky. Florida only to Vanderbilt. LSU only to Florida. Auburn only to LSU. Alabama only to Mississippi. Ole Miss has lost to Georgia and Florida. Kentucky has dropped games to LSU and 'Bama. Whew! Ya gotta consider yourself pretty sorry if you're not in contention over there.

But then again, Tennessee can't possibly be as bad as its 1-6 record — the Vols were in the Top 20 at the beginning of the year. Vandy was good enough to beat Florida two weeks ago. And Mississippi State, well, the Bulldogs are just waiting for baseball season to start up again.

The poor SEC. It's never going to have a national champion. Teams like LSU and Auburn are about as good as any in the country. But they play such a tough regular-season schedule, it's almost impossible to go the entire way undefeated.

But on the good side, it makes for a great race every year with four or five of the top teams in the country playing each other.

Up in the nation's heartland, the race is almost as heated.

Michigan leads the Big 10 by an eyelash, with only a tie to Iowa spoiling a perfect conference slate. Iowa, too, is undefeated, but the Hawkeyes also tied Michigan State. (Whoever heard of a team having two ties in the same season?)

Indiana's loss last week to Michigan is the only blemish on the Hoosiers' record. Michigan State lost to Michigan and tied Iowa, but that's it. Even 4-3 Illinois is in the race, having only lost to the Spartans in the conference.

Poor Ohio State. Earle Bruce has got to be laughing his head off. He got fired for going 9-2 last year, and already the Buckeyes have lost three games in conference. They're



Hal L. Hammons
Sports Editor

3-4 overall. And they still haven't played Michigan, Michigan State or Iowa. They ain't got a prayer for Roses.

Even the Pac-10 looks interesting. Sure, the champion probably will wind up being the winner of the UCLA-USC game — just like it was in the good 'ol days — but Oregon isn't out of it. The Fightin' Ducks have already lost to the Trojans, but they still have to play the Bruins. A UCLA win over Southern Cal would open the door for a tri-championship — with Oregon a part of it.

raska winner, of course. But again, it's not in stone. Oklahoma State hasn't played OU, and a Cowboy win, coupled with a Sooner win over the Huskers, could give OSU a piece of the championship.

No Orange Bowl berth, of course. That bowl reserves the right to choose a participant in the event of a tie. OSU isn't quite the draw the other two are.

The rest of the Big 8 is, as usual, pathetic. The annual matchup to see what team is the best in the state of Kansas will only go to prove once again that the worst team in Division I-A football starts with the letter "K."

Iowa State and Missouri, after years of occasional competitiveness, have apparently grown tired of trying to beat the Sooners and Huskers. Now they're just trying to beat the Kansases.

Colorado shows some promise, but no one is writing any banner headlines proclaiming them heirs apparent to the conference crown.

In all fairness to everyone involved, the NCAA ought to declare the conference "the Big 4" and make them all go out and find a real schedule. But things are the way they are, and so it will in all likelihood wind up as the OU-Nebraska winner in the Orange Bowl again. Ho hum. They'll probably play Miami. Again. Ho hum.

The Rose Bowl, "The Granddaddy of them all," will for once be the most important one. It would take a strange turn of events to get a Pac 10 representative that wasn't undefeated and battling for a national championship.

UCLA or USC will take the field and thrash the Big 10 rep (Michigan, my guess) just like the Pac 10 always does. If they did it when they suited up the surfing team back in the '70s, think what they'll do when they have a real team.

The SEC champ (LSU, I'm betting, since Auburn's schedule is a little tougher and 'Bama is even afraid of rain) will get to face Notre Dame, Florida State, West Virginia, or the Husker-Sooner loser. History favors the latter. Common sense says the Irish.

The Fiesta will get the Big 8 loser and pit them against the best team they can scrounge up, meaning either Florida State or West Virginia.

That leaves a quality team — hopefully the Seminoles — for the Cotton Bowl. Using history as a guide, however, it'll probably be Arkansas vs. the Mountaineers. Boy, that'll make for great ratings, huh?

Astros GM plans to sign manager, pitchers soon

HOUSTON (AP) — Houston Astros General Manager Bill Wood is pointing to mid-November as the target date for hiring a new manager and signing free agent pitchers Nolan Ryan and Bob Forsch to contracts.

New York Mets hitting instructor Bill Robinson became the fourth managerial applicant on Wednesday, Wood confirmed Thursday.

"I was impressed with Bill, he's a guy who certainly knows the game," Wood said.

Robinson, 45, has been the Mets' hitting instructor for the past five years and is highly respected as a coach.

Former New York Yankees Manager Lou Piniella, Astros first base coach Matt Galante and Texas Rangers coach Art Howe previously interviewed with the Astros.

Piniella, a good friend of Astros coach Yogi Berra, could be the leading contender for the job vacated at the end of the season by Hal Lanier.

But Wood won't rate the applicants. "I've known Art and Matt a lot longer than I've known Lou," Wood said.

"But I liked the discussion I had with Lou and I think this is going to be a very tough choice."

Howe, a former Astros player, is the only applicant who has talked with Astros owner John McMullen.

Wood said he may interview more applicants before leaving Tuesday for the general managers' meeting in Palm Springs, Calif.

Wood says he wants to conclude the interviewing process by this weekend and name a new manager by the second week in November.

Piniella started last season as the Yankees general manager and finished it as manager. He was fired after the end of the season and replaced by Dallas Green.

Piniella is under a personal services contract worth \$1.2 million with the Yankees through the 1991 season.

Wood also said the Astros would try to re-sign pitcher Bob Forsch, who joined Nolan Ryan in declaring free agency on Wednesday.

"He can still do a lot of things," Wood said of Forsch. "He takes care of himself, and he provides you with much-

needed insurance and depth on the pitching staff."

Forsch, 38, was acquired by the Astros Aug. 31 and in six starts compiled a 1-4 record and a 6.51 earned run average.

Ryan announced his free agency on Tuesday after several meetings with Wood.

McMullen expressed disappointment at Ryan's action.

"I guess in this business there's no such thing as loyalty," McMullen said. "I made Nolan Ryan the highest paid player in baseball when I signed him in 1980."

"I think I've treated him and compensated him well over those years. That's why this is a little hard to swallow."

Ryan, despite a five-game losing streak in June, finished last season with a 12-11 record and 3.52 earned run average. He led the National League with 228 strikeouts.

Ryan earned \$1 million in salary and \$200,000 in incentive bonuses last season.

Rozelle between 2 extremes in NFL drug policy problem

Associated Press

The suggestion came after Pete Rozelle had once again been quizzed repeatedly about the NFL's drug problem the other day.

"Why doesn't he do what Peter Ueberroth did with baseball and what several people suggested Lyndon Johnson do with the Vietnam War?" a reporter asked. "Declare that there is no problem and go on to the next thing."

Indeed, why not?

For if the commissioner and the NFL are to be blamed for the off-field conduct of Reggie Rogers, Lawrence Taylor, David Croudip and the other players who have run afoul of addictive and often illegal substances, then every business in America should be held accountable for employees who pour their salaries into a shot glass or white powder.

In fact, Rozelle is caught in the middle between those who think a 30-day suspension is too short and a union that is ready to go to court to prevent him from imposing even that. The 30-day penalties handed out to second-time offenders this season are only the result of a ruling by an arbitrator in a grievance filed by the NFL Players Association that watered down what the league wanted to do.

In fact, the NFL is trying to temper its punishment with treatment, just as many businesses do.

Last Tuesday, Rozelle told owners and club executives that

he wants each team to have direct contact with drug and alcohol treatment facilities in their areas and doctors who specialize in such treatment rather than leaving the problem in the hands of team physicians — most of them orthopedic specialists.

Athletes involved with drugs are more visible so their involvement makes news, but are they more drug-prone? Twenty suspensions out of nearly 2,500 players tested in camp would suggest not, although most of those suspended were relatively prominent. When teams catch lesser players doing drugs, they're simply cut and nobody knows the difference.

In fact, the NFL's drug policy has become a captive of its labor policy.

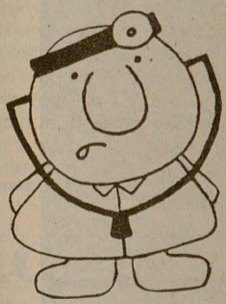
Unlike most businesses trying to deal with similar problems, the NFL doesn't have the cooperation of its union.

Two weeks after Atlanta's David Croudip died from apparently ingesting cocaine in a drink; one week after Detroit's Reggie Rogers was charged with vehicular homicide after an apparently alcohol-related accident that killed three teen-agers, the NFLPA indicated it would file suit to stop drug testing.

The NFLPA's contention is that the 1982 contract — technically no longer in effect but still being honored on many issues — does not allow random drug testing. And that, it says, is just what the league is doing.

PREMEDICAL/PREDENTAL SOCIETY MEETING

TIME: 8:00 P.M.
DATE: TUESDAY, NOV. 1
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PROGRAM: DR. ZENAIDO CAMACHO
BAYLOR COLLEGE OF MEDICINE



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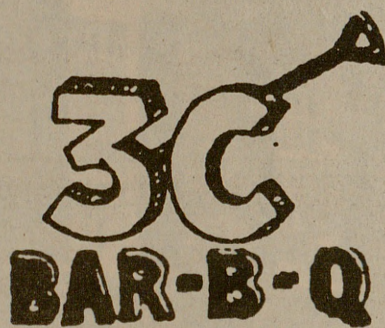
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