

Aikman says SWC reputation kept him from UT

LOS ANGELES (AP) — When UCLA quarterback Troy Aikman was transferring from Oklahoma two years ago, he thought about playing for the Texas Longhorns. But Aikman saw a problem that continues to hound the Southwest Conference — probation.

"When I transferred from OU, I was going to go to Texas," said Aikman, one of the top candidates for the Heisman Trophy. "But the way the conference has gone, it's been scarred a bit. It's going to be a while before they heal."

Aikman isn't the only one who has

avoided the SWC. UCLA, which will play SWC champ Arkansas in the Cotton Bowl Classic, has five Texas players who passed up opportunities to play in the SWC.

Some said they came to UCLA because they were afraid of the problems that have plagued the SWC in recent years.

"If the Southwest Conference would have stayed clean, I would be at SMU right now," said Fred Gilbert, a flanker from Huntsville. "But I wanted to play in some bowl

games, and didn't want to be on probation."

The SWC has had six of its nine football teams on probation in the past three years, including SMU, which received the NCAA's severest penalty — the suspension of its team for the 1987 season. School officials later canceled the 1988 season.

UCLA's transplanted Texas players say they wanted to go where they could receive national attention, play on television and in bowl games. But the constant NCAA investigations in the SWC, which in many times resulted in probations, loss of bowl ap-

pearances and other sanctions, forced them to go elsewhere.

Tight end Charles Arbuckle said the SWC has suffered because eight of its nine teams are in Texas, and the proximity of the schools generates intense recruiting competition.

"I really didn't like that recruiting war, and it seemed everyone was on probation," Arbuckle said. "When I was being recruited, I knew something was not right. They were all saying, 'This school's doing this and that school's doing that.'"

Although Reggie Moore said he liked Texas and Houston, he thought he could get more exposure and possibly get drafted by the NFL if he went outside the SWC.

"Texas has the best players, but there are a lot of bad things going on in that conference," Moore said.

Arbuckle said he recently spoke with friend Mickey Washington of Texas A&M, which received probation in September.

"I talked to him about two weeks ago and he said he was really upset,"

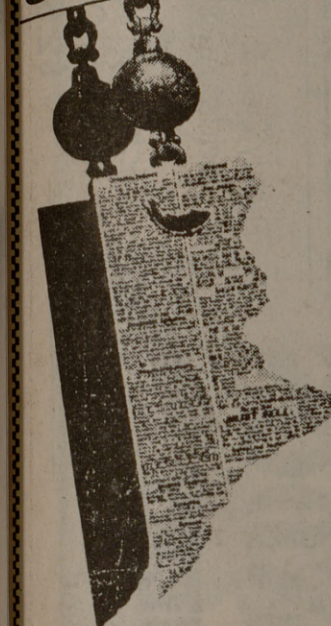
Arbuckle said. "Suffering from what someone else did is tough, and it seems like the problems are going to last for a long time."

For the year, Aikman completed 64 percent of his passes for 2,599 yards and 23 touchdowns.

But Aikman said he decided to play it safe by avoiding the SWC.

"Out here, everybody is saying we're going to walk over them," Gilbert said of SWC champ Arkansas. "If you are highly recruited and live in Texas, you don't want to stay."

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