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SPORTS

Thursday, July 6, 1989

NCAA ends A&M football inquiry

By Steven Merritt

SPORTS EDITOR

The long-awaited question of whether the Texas A&M football program would receive further sanctions from the National Collegiate Athletic Association was answered Monday.

NCAA assistant executive director of enforcement David Berst informed A&M president William Mobley of the association's intent to terminate its inquiry into allegations of wrongdoing in the Aggie football program.

Berst's letter stems from the NCAA's investigation of a published report in which former A&M running back George Smith said that former head coach Jackie Sherrill paid him over \$4,000 in "hush money" for his cooperation in remaining silent about NCAA rules violations within the football program.

Smith's allegations, published by the *Dallas Morning News* in November 1988, said that Sherrill and the athletic department wanted him to stay quiet about past recruiting violations. Smith played the 1982 and '83 seasons at A&M before transferring to Clemson University in 1984.

Smith recanted on the allegations the next day, saying that he had lied to boost the sales of a forthcoming book and that the payments made to him were loans instead of "hush money." The loans were not considered an NCAA violation.

Smith said he received the last payment of \$500 on Sept. 13, 1988, four days after the NCAA placed the A&M football program on two years probation. Citing 25 violations of NCAA rules, the Committee on Infractions prohibited the Aggies from participating in post-season play for one year as well as cutting the program's scholarships and recruiting visits.

The football program will remain on probation until September 1990 and will be subject to the death penalty for further NCAA violations until that time. There will be no sanctions in effect for the current competition or recruiting season.

"As you know, the institution submitted a report to the NCAA indicating that, although Mr. Smith received cash on certain occasions from former head football coach Jackie Sherrill following Mr. Smith's departure from the university, the available information did not support that funds were provided to Mr. Smith in order to discourage the

young man from reporting information to the NCAA," Berst's letter said.

The letter continued that the enforcement staff conducted interviews, including several with Smith, but the information developed did not appear sufficiently reliable or substantial to allege violations of NCAA rules.

"Accordingly, it appears appropriate for the NCAA's inquiries regarding this matter to be terminated, and this decision was reported to the NCAA Committee on Infractions during the committee's June 23-25, 1989 meeting," the letter said.

Berst's letter concludes: "It should be noted that following Mr. Smith's public recantation, he subsequently altered that version in a manner that was more consistent with his original story, but even with his apparent cooperation and that of other important principals in the matter, this office is unable to distinguish fact from fiction."

Smith's allegations in November prompted A&M officials to conduct a two-month investigation, the find-

ings of which were submitted to the NCAA in January. The A&M concluded that Sherrill did not pay Smith money, but did not violate NCAA rules.

During the NCAA's examination of the A&M report, Smith told *Morning News* that he recalled the original allegations after he promised approximately \$500 from an A&M official, a story he later denied.

Citing mental strain and the need for a fresh start in a football program, Sherrill resigned on Dec. 12. He was replaced as football coach by assistant coach Slocum, while John David Crow promoted to athletic director.

President Mobley said he was pleased to have the matter resolved.

"We have addressed our problem and are confident that we are headed in the right direction," Mobley said. "We are unwaveringly committed to strong institutional control, and we have confidence in our leadership we have in place in the Athletic Department."

Our definition of excellence in athletics includes full compliance with all rules and regulations of the University, the Southwest Conference and the NCAA," Mobley said.

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Retired Schmidt elected to NL All-Star squad

NEW YORK (AP) — Mike Schmidt, retired since May 29, and Jose Canseco, disabled all season, were elected Wednesday to start in next week's All-Star Game.

Schmidt became the first retired player elected, but is ineligible because he is inactive. Canseco, however, can play and will make his 1989 major-league debut Tuesday night in Anaheim, Calif.

Schmidt, seventh on the all-time home run list, won the closest race at any position, holding off Cincinnati's Chris Sabo by 16,136 votes as the National League's third baseman. NL President Bill White and Manager Tom Lasorda will pick a replacement for Schmidt; a starter does not have to be announced until game time.

Canseco, last year's American League Most Valuable Player, has been out of action since spring training with a fractured wrist. Joining Canseco in Anaheim will be Athletics teammates Terry Steinbach at catcher and Mark McGwire at first base.

Will Clark led all vote-getters with 1,833,329 and Bo Jackson got the

most in the AL with 1,748,697. Darryl Strawberry won a spot in the NL outfield, but will not play because of an injured toe.

Only one race was decided in the final week. Texas' Julio Franco overcame a 7,000-vote margin and passed Steve Sax of New York as the AL's second baseman.

San Francisco's Kevin Mitchell, leading the majors with 27 home runs and 75 RBI, led NL outfielders. But Texas' Ruben Sierra, who leads the AL with a .338 average and is tied with Franco for the league lead with 61 RBI, finished sixth in the outfield.

Ozzie Smith of St. Louis will start for the seventh straight year as the NL's shortstop. Baltimore's Cal Ripken will start for the fifth time as the AL's shortstop.

Also elected for the AL were Boston's Wade Boggs at third base and Minnesota's Kirby Puckett in the outfield. For the NL, Benito Santiago of San Diego will start at catcher, Ryne Sandberg of Chicago at second base and Tony Gwynn of the Padres in the outfield.

Finks likely to be chosen new NFL commissioner

CHICAGO (AP) — Jim Finks, who once beat out John Units for a quarterback job but is better known for turning three losing teams into winners as an executive, is expected to be chosen Thursday as the NFL's first new commissioner in 30 years.

According to several NFL sources, Finks, who will turn 62 Aug. 31, will be the only recommendation to the NFL owners by the six-member selection committee when the owners meet at 3 p.m. EDT.

In fact, Finks met with the committee in New York Tuesday to finalize the details of his contract.

The vacancy was created when Pete Rozelle shocked the owners by announcing in March his intention to retire after 29 years.

"We're going to recommend one man. We were told to identify a guy and that's what we're going to do," Wellington Mara of the New York Giants, co-chairman of the committee, said Wednesday.

Mara would not confirm that

Finks was that man and stressed that the other owners didn't have to abide by the nomination. Nineteen of the 28 teams must vote for the candidate for him to be elected.

"We work under Roberts Rules of Order and we'll do it that way," Mara said. "Once we nominate our man, we'll open the floor to nominations and take a vote. If someone gets 19 votes, then we have our man."

"We're a running a very democratic society," said Art Modell of the Cleveland Browns, another committee member.

Nonetheless, other sources confirmed that the Finks, who in three seasons as president of the New Orleans Saints took a team that had never had a winning season in its 19-year existence and led it to 12-3 and 10-4 seasons the next year. In fact, the committee stipulated that he can't take any personnel from the Saints front office with him so as not to tear down what has just become a winning combination.

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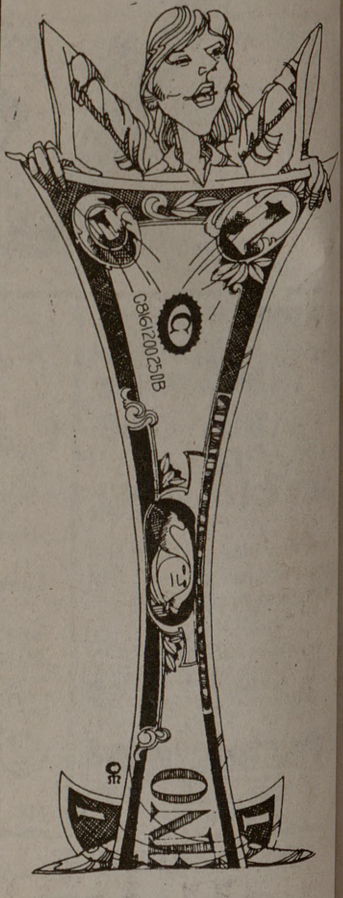
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