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Lewis

Continued from page 9

the Southwest Conference all-time rushing mark held by Dickerson (4,450 yards in 1979-82).

Ranked third in the nation in rushing yards and averaging 136.6 yards per game, Lewis may just become No. 1 this weekend against Rice. But if he doesn't get the record at Kyle Field, Lewis figures to get it next week at SMU's Ownby Stadium.

Despite being from Dallas, Lewis — known as "Tank" — said he'd just as soon break the record while in College Station.

"I don't want to break it on the road," Lewis said. "I would prefer to break it at home in Aggieland. To have a guy that plays here and to break the record, that makes Aggies feel good, and the team feels good and it makes me feel good."

But Lewis said he is more concerned with winning the game against

the Owls than with breaking the conference record. The Aggies must win to keep their Cotton Bowl dreams a reality.

"I'm going to be really focused on us trying to win the game," he said. "That's what we've got to do first. The yards will come next."

And if the Aggies execute well, Lewis would give himself some strength in the Heisman Trophy watch.

The 6-0, 213-pound senior already owns or shares 17 A&M and SWC records and is on the verge of breaking three more.

Being the offensive bulk for A&M has put an imaginary bullseye on Lewis' chest — just the way he likes it.

"I've been the target for the last three years I've been here," Lewis said. "I don't care if they focus on me. Our offensive line is still going to blow them off the line. That's the bottom line."

In A&M's Oct. 13 battle with Houston, Lewis carried 21 times for 126 yards and four touchdowns — all four of the Aggies' scores — but the Cougars won, 36-31.

It was A&M's first SWC loss and the Aggies failed to capitalize on a 17-7 first-quarter lead. When Baylor ventured into Kyle Field the next weekend, A&M managed a tie that would have been a loss if not for a 59-yard field goal by Layne Talbot.

After the team's performance in those two games, A&M's chances of a conference championship and Cotton Bowl berth may be out of reach.

Lewis agreed that the team needs to concentrate and play as a unit if it wants to travel to Dallas Jan. 1.

"It's frustrating because we know we can do it," Lewis said. "We play good football for a half, and then we come back out and start slow. Our tempo has to pick up."

If the Aggies defeat Rice on Saturday, they'd pull into the second half of the SWC schedule with a 2-1-1 record. If Lewis rushes for 174 yards, he heads into the toughest part of the schedule as the all-time leading rusher in the conference.

"That's the best thing anyone could ask for — to get the record and

win the football game," Lewis said.

Lewis began the season with 3,321 yards and needed 1,130 to become the SWC's leading rusher. He ran for 961 yards in 1989 and 668 in 1987, but had his best season in 1988. Lewis, then a sophomore, rushed for 1,692 yards and was the nation's second leading rusher behind Oklahoma State's Barry Sanders — the eventual winner of the Heisman Trophy.

Lewis looked well on his way to fame in his senior year, but 1989 was a problem.

A combination of weight, injuries and an inconsistent offensive line kept the star tailback in check — and out of Heisman contention.

Lewis' first step to a trophy season this year was passing Curtis Dickey, A&M's all-time leading rusher. Dickey posted 3,703 yards in 1976-79. Lewis shot out of last year's season with 117, 141 and 141 yards in the first three games.

That was just enough to push him past Dickey during the University of North Texas game Sept. 22 and begin the gradual climb to the top of the SWC all-time rushing list.

"At the first of the year, I didn't realize the fact that I was that close to breaking anybody's record. I didn't know about passing Dickey until I got up right on it," Lewis said. "It's the same thing that's going on right now. I didn't know I needed this many yards to break Dickerson's record."

Lewis said he never could have attained record-breaking yardage without the play of the offensive line. Seniors Jason Rockhold, Mike Pappas, Mike Arthur, Matt McCall and junior Keith Alex block the way for Lewis to eat up yardage.

"I need to give all the credit to the offensive line," Lewis said. "They're the ones who put me here in the first place. They're the ones who are opening up the holes for me. Once they open the holes, then I'm on my own."

Sharing the backfield with Lewis is Robert Wilson. The junior fullback from Houston said he will celebrate Lewis' record-breaking career as a part of it.

"Once he passes Dickerson, as far

as the record goes, everyone in the country's going to know that he has a fullback and an offensive line blocking for him," Wilson said.

Wilson said he has confidence in Lewis' abilities and his determination to re-establish himself in charge for the Heisman.

"Darren's working hard everyday in practice," he said, "I think he's starting to see his picture in the Heisman race."

A&M head coach R.C. Slocum said he believes Lewis has become more serious about his play and Lewis is becoming a better player every week.

"He's running hard," Slocum said. "In the last several weeks, he has run with some authority."

Lewis running with authority is definitely a concern for opposing defenses. He's not a player to run around defenders, he's a player that runs through them.

"Darren's 213 pounds now and he's a thick-hipped, thick-legged type of guy that runs through a lot of arm tackles," Slocum said. "He's not one of those backs where people can just reach out and tackle him."

As a senior, Lewis has just five games remaining on the A&M team. Replacements are waiting in the shadows, but not many can replace a player who coaches count on when the team gets in a bind. Not many can replace a Heisman candidate.

"You miss those guys," Slocum said. "You become accustomed to them just rolling out there, getting those yards and making it look easy. Darren gets out there and runs for 10 yards, and it looks like it's nothing. It's his style."

So the Tank will be let loose Saturday against Rice. If the offensive line and Wilson continue paving the way for Lewis' commanding runs, the road to the Heisman race may become a little clearer. And despite a disappointing junior season, Lewis may be dusting his mantle for a new addition. But even if he doesn't get it, Lewis won't mind.

"That's life — you have a lot of ups and downs," Lewis said. "That's one of the things you have to go through with football."

"It's been a long road."

dp 1990

SWC STANDINGS

TCU	W	L	T	O
TCU	3	0	0	1
T.U.	2	1	1	1
BAYLOR	2	1	1	1
AS-M	1	1	1	1
RICE	1	3	0	0
TECH	1	4	0	0
ARK.	0	3	0	0
SMU	0	3	0	0

1990 dp CHART
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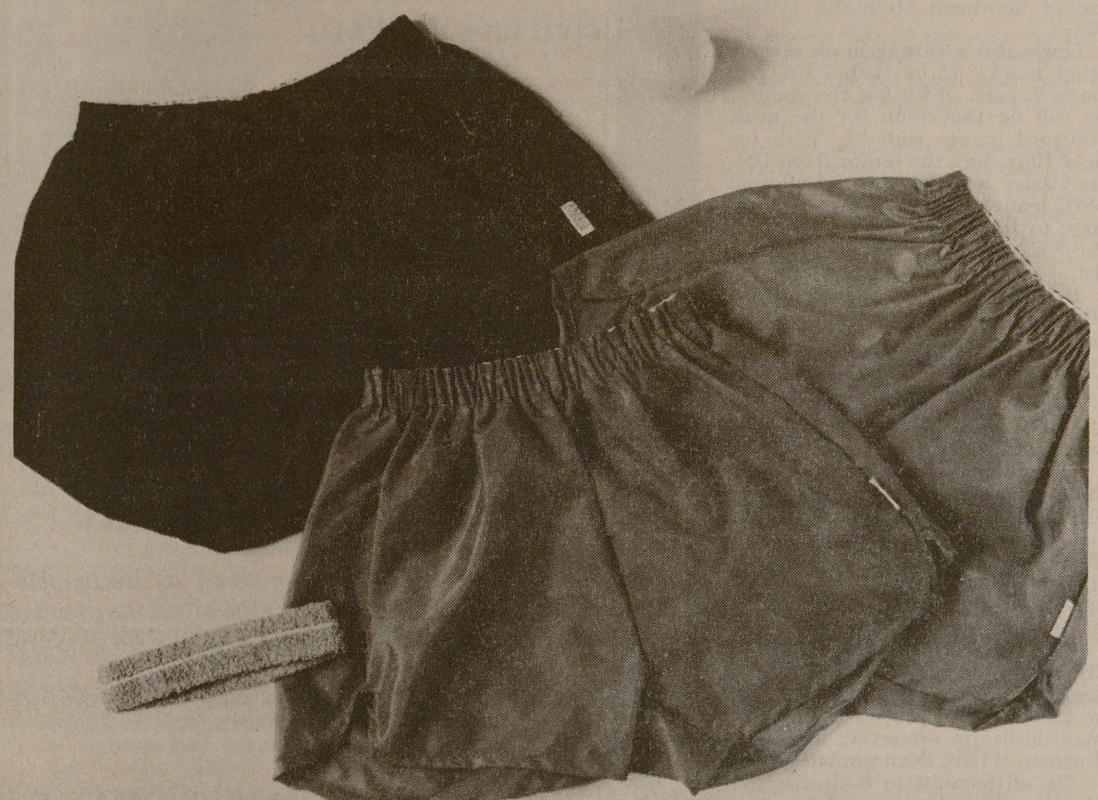
FINAL STANDINGS

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BAY	3	3	5	0
RIC	2	2	7	0
TECH	1	4	0	0
ARK	0	3	0	0
SMU	0	3	0	0

Cartoon characters and speech bubbles:

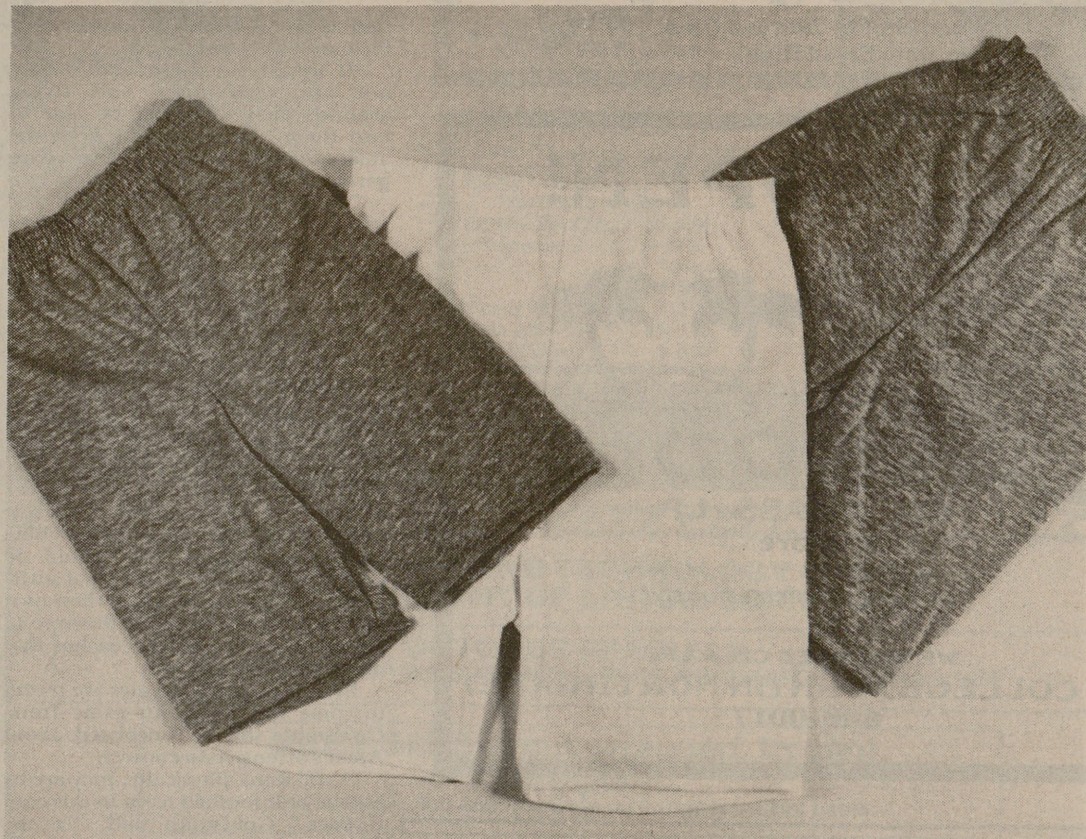
- "THERE! I'VE INSTALLED THE BATTERIES THAT THE RABBIT BROUGHT... YOU'RE READY TO GO!"
- "IT'S GREAT TO BE ON TOP AGAIN!"
- "HOOK 'EM!"
- "LOOK OUT AGS! HERE WE COME!"
- "HEY, PIG! I HEAR THE S.E.C. WANTS TO SEND YOU BACK!"
- "HELP THE FLOOR SAVE THE PIG!"
- "WHAT ABOUT THE COOGS?"
- "THEY DON'T COUNT THIS YEAR!"
- "I DIDN'T KNOW COOGS COULD COUNT!"
- "I SAID OCTOBER WOULD BE SCARY BUT I MEANT WE WERE TO SCARE THE OTHERS... NOW WE'LL HAVE TO USE THIS CHART!"

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