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Sports Editor

SWC Cotton picks for 1991

Texas A&M will spend New Year's Day in Dallas this year — maybe.

This year's Southwest Conference Cotton scramble is the most unpredictable one since the Aggies stole the brass ring way back in 1986. Four teams — Texas, Houston, Baylor and A&M — each have Cotton Bowl quality, and Rice (yes, Rice!) and Texas Tech could make it to a minor bowl.

While A&M should win the conference, it's not because the Aggies have the best talent. The defense is there, and Randy Simmons should help Bucky Richardson get the running game going, but the offensive line is very green. The schedule is A&M's biggest ally this year, with LSU, Houston and Texas making the trek to Kyle Field. The Aggies must play Baylor and Tech on the road, though, and the boys will lose at least one of them. Projected finish: Tie for first, 10-1 (7-1) with the 12th Man.

Houston should tie A&M for the championship. Their offense is nearly unstoppable, but the Cougar defense is the exact opposite. Early road trips to Miami and Illinois look like at least one mark in the loss column, as does the trip to Kyle Field. Fortunately for Houston, Texas goes to the Astrodome, which should result in a Cougar win. Projected finish: Tie for first, 9-2 (7-1).

Texas will be dangerous, though they won't be the juggernaut they were last year. With the best linemen in the SWC, they will be close to winning every game they play. Trips to the Astrodome and Kyle Field are all that stand between them and an undefeated season, Auburn and Oklahoma notwithstanding. Projected finish: Tie for second, 9-2 (6-2).

Baylor should be in first place. Solid recruiting has given Grant Teaff the most solid SWC team on both sides of the ball, but lack of depth and a schedule that gives A&M, Texas and Houston a week off before facing the Bears' veer offense equals two losses. Look for Baylor to pull the upset of the year against Colorado, though. Projected finish: Tie for second, 9-2 (6-2).

Of the remaining teams, Trevor Cobb plus a cushy non-conference schedule could give Rice their first winning season since Moses parted the Red Sea. Tech's offense will produce if Jamie Gill stays healthy, but the Raider defense is pathetic. The same goes for TCU, only more so. Arkansas' farewell tour will be even worse than last year without Quinn Grovey, to the point that SMU might finally get that elusive first SWC win.

Heisman Club to honor A&M

By Jayme Blaschke
The Battalion

John David Crow won the Heisman Trophy in 1957, becoming the only Aggie ever to do so, and in 1991 both he and Texas A&M will be honored for that accomplishment.

This season, the recently founded National Heisman Trophy Club will induct Crow and A&M as honorary members. James P. Crimmins, Director of Member Services for the National Heisman Trophy Club, said it was only natural to include Heisman winners' schools as members.

"From the outset of this project we decided the schools were going to be an integral part," Crimmins said. "One of the ironic things about the Heisman is that the Downtown Athletic Club, which awards the trophy, is in New York, where college football is not very big. Schools like A&M, with their great fan support, never get to be involved."

Alan Cannon, the sports information director at A&M, discussed the project with Downtown Athletic Club representatives at the Sports Information Director Convention in San Francisco earlier this year.

"We discussed the different possibilities of presenting an award to John David Crow before a game this year," Cannon said. "Basically they wanted to see what



we thought of their ideas for the program."

Dave South, assistant athletic director-marketing and promotion sales, has been working to organize the presentation.

"It looks like the Heisman Trophy Club is going to come here for the SMU game," South said. "We've been working with them on the schedule for a while, and right now the presentation is going to be during the pre-game ceremonies."

Crimmins said the Downtown Athletic Club began thinking about creating a na-

tional organization years ago, in response to the wishes of college football fans.

"The club was created out of necessity, because of the many inquiries we get about membership each year," he said. "Different ideas have been kicked around, but this concept was presented to former Heisman winners at a Heisman Foundation golf tournament at Hilton-head (New York) in May. We had fantastic response, and the National Heisman Club was formed."

The club, with open membership nationwide, offers the opportunity to attend the Heisman Awards Banquet. Before, only members of the private Downtown Athletic Club could attend. Other benefits will be available to members, however, voting for the Heisman Trophy winner will not be one of them.

"The response so far has been phenomenal," said Crimmins. "We started late, and were only able to place an ad in Street & Smith's (football preview magazine), but the calls come in steady every day, and in the mornings I have 10 to 15 messages on my answering machine."

"We envision setting up Heisman chapters at each of the 34 schools that have won Heismans," he said. "We expect about 200 from A&M, and they would organize into the A&M Chapter, and we would make the Heisman name available for use in club fundraising events in support of the school."

Palmeiro swinging for batting title

ARLINGTON (AP) — Rangers coach Davey Lopes said it best about the Texas Rangers' hitting machine: "Rafael Palmeiro could hit in a room without any lights."

Palmeiro is definitely hitting lights out with perhaps the sweetest swing in the big leagues, aside from old Mississippi State teammate Will Clark of the San Francisco Giants.

Palmeiro led the major leagues with 191 hits last year and is on pace for 250 this season as his quick bat spews out line drives to all fields.

"When he's hot, he just gives pitchers fits because they don't know how to pitch to him," said Texas hitting instructor Tom Robson. "He's not a dead-guess hitter. He'll hit an inside pitch whether it's a fastball or a slider. He'll take an outside pitch to the opposite field."

Palmeiro was tops in the league with 143 hits and 32 doubles through Monday's game in which he went 0-for-4 to lower his batting average to .345. He was near the top in runs scored with 79, total bases with 233, and extra basehits with 52.

Thanks to heavy off-season work in the weight room, Palmeiro has a career-high 18 homers with more than two months left in the season.

Robson said work in the weight room means "you're going to maintain stamina longer. Rafael has stamina."

Can he win the batting title? "He's got to stay away from the 0-for-15s because those will burn him," Robson said. "Good hitters will go 1-for-5, but he's got to avoid long slumps."

Palmeiro's current average is the highest ever for a Ranger this late in the season.

"I just visualize my at-bats and it's fun playing baseball when you get into that groove, that zone where you see the ball well," he said. "I just try to stay in that groove because you know sooner or later the mini-slumps will come."

When Cleveland's Eric King put the collar on Palmeiro Monday night, breaking a 15-game hitting streak, Palmeiro was so upset he didn't want to talk about it.

"He's a perfectionist," Robson said. "All great hitters are."

The greatest threat to Palmeiro winning the batting title could come from one of his own teammates, Julio Franco, who was hitting .332 after Monday night's game.

"I hope Rafael and Julio battle down to the end," Robson said. "I think that will be great race. But there are a lot of great hitters in the league and it's still early. Come September we'll see."

Palmeiro, 27, was obtained from the Chicago Cubs in 1988 and hit .275 and .319 the last two seasons. The most homers he hit for the Rangers was 14 last year.

"The weight training has helped, but I haven't tried to hit homers," he said. "They've just happened."

Texas Tech relishes dark horse role

LUBBOCK (AP) — Texas Tech coach Spike Dykes chuckles when he hears the so-called "experts" have picked his team to finish out of the running in the Southwest Conference for another year.

"They pick us fifth every year it seems like," Dykes says in his deep, mesquite-grilled West Texas drawl. "But that's OK. We'll just go about our business."

Dykes' casual dismissal of the experts' forecast might surprise some considering his team is coming off a 4-7 season, Dykes' worst record in four years at Tech.

But Dykes' relaxed attitude comes not so much from his brand new 10-year, \$1 million contract as it does from the feeling that he may have something brewing on the South Plains this season.

The 53-year-old coach has always played down his team's chances. But his players aren't quite so shy.

"The seniors want go out with a bang," said linebacker Matt Wingo. "We are not just talking about a winning record. We are talking about Cotton."

As in Cotton Bowl. More than 75 players put themselves through voluntary workouts during the summer and there have been extra wind sprints for everybody. The seniors have grabbed the team by the throat and have mandated that no slacking off will be tolerated.

"The seniors have control and we are not going to be putting up with anything this year," said senior quarterback Jamie Gill. "So far, everyone is working hard so it's been a unified effort."

Tech returns eight starters on offense, including super talent at most all the skill positions.

Gill, who was nominated "most likely to suffer an injury walking to practice" by one publication, will attempt to stay

healthy after finishing only four of seven starts last year due to knee, jaw and finger injuries.

Dykes has said Gill and sophomore quarterback Robert Hall, who each threw for more than 1,000 yards last year, will both see action "every Saturday."

Rodney Blackshear, who led the Southwest Conference last year in receiving yards (973) as a junior, will be joined by slippery sophomore Lloyd Hill at wide receiver. And Anthony Lynn, a 6-foot-3, 210-pound senior, will share duty with sophomore speedster Donald Marshall at the I-back position.

"Offensively, we have a chance to be a great football team," Dykes said. "I think these guys will really blossom this year."

Dykes says the defense, which returns five starters, is the team's question mark.

The Red Raiders yielded 32 points and 420 yards per game in 1990. And they will depend on junior college transfers and some unseasoned underclassmen to fill voids in the trenches and in the defensive backfield.

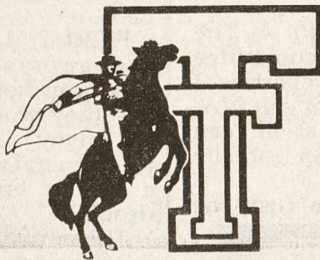
In order to utilize the team's speed and better defend against the onslaught of run-and-shoot offenses in the SWC, Dykes switched from a 4-3 to a 3-4 defense this spring.

Tech's kicking game received a much needed boost when punter Mark Bounds transferred to Lubbock from West Texas State.

But the Red Raiders greatest improvement may be their schedule.

This year the Raiders play five of their first seven games at home with a non-conference schedule that includes Fullerton State, Oregon and Wyoming.

"The thing we have to do this season is try to get on a roll," Dykes said. "If we can get off to a good start and get some confidence by stringing a few wins in a row, we have a heckuva chance to be competitive in the conference race in October and November."



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