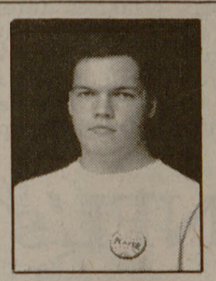


Pardee getting too conservative with offense

Throughout the past 12 years, the overwhelming majority of the American voting public has continually concluded that conservatism is a good thing. Today, we'll find out whether they still feel the same way.



DON NORWOOD
Sports Writer

But there is an ever-shrinking group of people in Southeast Texas called Houston Oilers fans who have already made up their minds - conservatism stinks. At least on the football field.

The Oilers' 21-20 loss to Pittsburgh Sunday did more than make a martyr out of kicker Al Del Greco. It showed that conservative football is bad football, especially when your offense is the run-and-shoot.

Why Jack Pardee has suddenly made a right turn in his offensive philosophy is anyone's guess. The run-and-shoot is not an offense that lends itself to playing things safe. It's a risky offense that is at its best when the one who calls the plays takes what the defense gives him, but then takes chances to squeeze out a little more. Pardee should know this, judging from the offensive output he was responsible for with the USFL's Houston Gamblers, as well as the University of Houston. Those two offenses were more liberal than George McGovern ever thought of being.

Seriously, the final drive of Sunday's game was a microcosm of what is quickly turning into a desperate season for the Oilers. Offensive coordinator Kevin Gilbride mixed things up well for quarterback Cody Carlson, who filled in admirably for Warren Moon after Moon suffered a third-quarter concussion. A Lorenzo White draw play here, a first down pass to Haywood Jeffries there. The offense was clicking.

But when the Oilers crossed midfield, things turned ugly. They made no attempt to stop the clock and go for a touchdown. They simply drained the last minute and a half, setting up another heartbreaking missed field goal and another lost opportunity.

Although Halloween was over, there seemed to be an eerie presence on the field as Del Greco trotted onto the field. Maybe it was the ghost of Ian Howfield or Teddy Garcia. Maybe it was just fear of the in-

See Norwood/ Page 8

SWC race already down to A&M, Texas

By K. LEE DAVIS

Sports Writer of THE BATTALION

With four games left in the regular season, the race for the Southwest Conference crown and the Cotton Bowl trip that goes with it has narrowed down to Texas A&M and the University of Texas.

Again. There is nothing unusual about the two schools facing off against each other on Thanksgiving Day to decide who goes to the Cotton Bowl on New Years Day. In fact, the conference representative to the Cotton Bowl has come from one of these two schools 37 times in the 77-year history of the SWC, and six times in the last decade.

Such consistency and dominance by two programs in one state is unusual.

The fifth-ranked Aggies are one of only four unbeaten and untied teams in the nation at 8-0, 4-0 in conference play.

The 20th-ranked Longhorns have recovered from an 0-2 start to post five consecutive victories and a perfect 3-0 record in conference play. Texas started the season with losses to now 19th-ranked Mississippi State and 10th-ranked Syracuse.

Every other school in the conference has two losses or more, and only one team in the history of the conference has won the championship with two losses, so every other team is virtually eliminated from the race, but they could still play important roles as spoilers.

The road ahead for the Aggies has two minor speed bumps, coming against Louisville Saturday and Texas Christian on Nov. 21, and two teams capable of giving the Aggies a loss, Houston on Nov. 12 and Texas Nov. 26.

For the purposes of the Cotton Bowl, the Louisville contest is insignificant since the outcome does not affect conference standings.

The Longhorns' four remaining games

are roughly similar in the level of challenge to those of A&M, but all four are against conference foes, TCU on Nov. 7, Southern Methodist on Nov. 14, Baylor on Nov. 21 and the Aggies on Nov. 26.

Senior offensive lineman John Ellis said his teammates will not need much to get excited about the matchup between the two teams.

"After the TCU game the electricity is going to start building, like it does every year, but this year will be extra special," Ellis said. "This is the kind of game you dream about playing in."

Junior tight end Greg Schorp said that he expects the game to be extremely tough given the stakes riding on the outcome.

"It's going to be a hard fought game, and they will give it their best shot but hopefully we can just play our game and come out with a win," Schorp said.

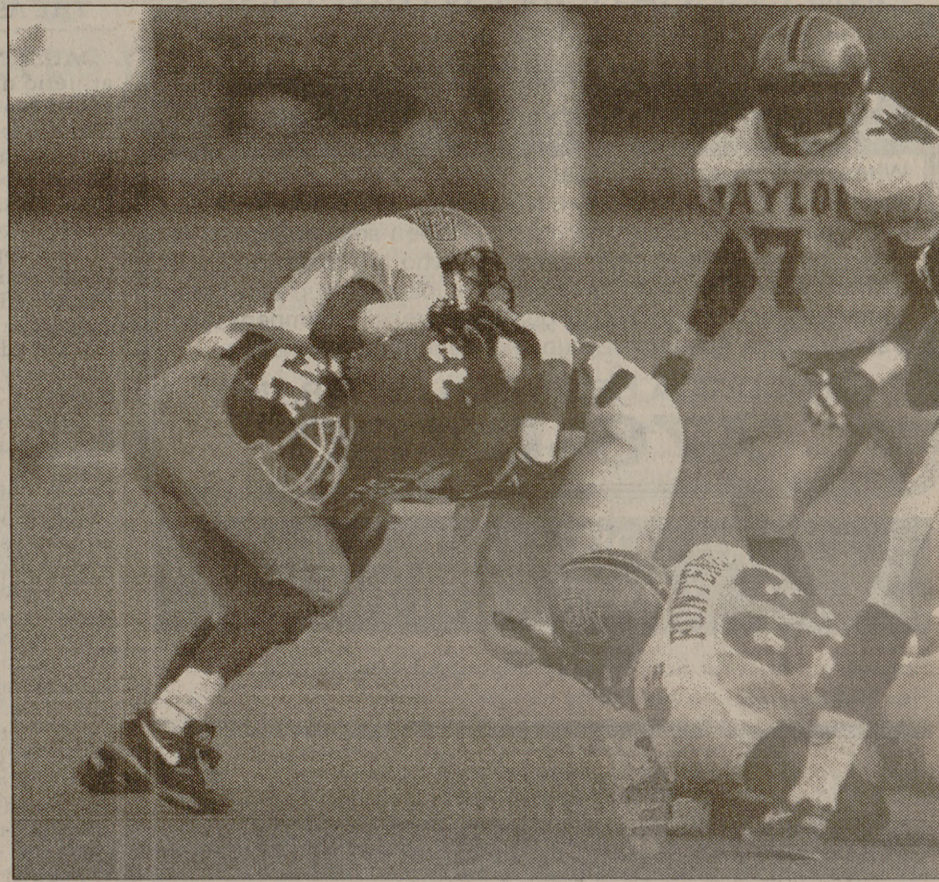
Either team could lose one game before the Thanksgiving Day matchup and still go to the Cotton Bowl by beating the other one, but a loss did not hold much appeal for junior inside linebacker Jason Atkinson.

"We don't want to lose any games," Atkinson said. "We're trying as hard as we can one game at a time to win every one of them, but we have to keep in mind that we can't go out and win all four games at once, you have to win the next one."

One scenario that has been the topic of unfounded rumors has A&M remaining undefeated for the season but Texas going to the Cotton Bowl.

With the confusion stemming from an alliance among the major bowls known as the Bowl Coalition, that promises to put the best teams, whenever possible, against one another on New Years Day, rumors have abounded.

As the theory went, the Aggies would win all their games including the Texas



DARRIN HILL/The Battalion

A&M fullback Doug Carter tries to fight his way through two Baylor defenders during the Aggies' 19-13 win Oct. 24. With every team but the Aggies and the Texas Longhorns having two Southwest Conference losses, A&M and Texas are on path to clash for the conference championship on Thanksgiving.

matchup, and Miami would lose to Syracuse allowing A&M to jump ahead of the Hurricanes in the standings setting up a showdown in the Sugar Bowl between undefeated Alabama and the Aggies, who would be ranked just behind the Crimson Tide.

In that scenario the conference runner-up would go to the Cotton Bowl to represent the SWC, and that, if A&M was undefeated, would be the Longhorns.

But that will never happen, at least not according to Don Bernstein, Information

Director of the Bowl Coalition.

"That is absolutely untrue," Bernstein said. "If the Aggies go undefeated they will be in the Cotton Bowl."

Bernstein added that he does not see teams foregoing their home bowls for any other matchups because of the Bowl Coalition.

"You can't do it under the rules of the Bowl Coalition," Bernstein said. "A&M would have to stay in Dallas, because the conference champions are never going to leave their conference bowls."

Vikings crush Bears to extend NFC Central lead

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — They called the old Minnesota Vikings the "Purple People Eaters."

Jim Harbaugh and the Chicago Bears must think of the new Vikings as the "Purple Pass Eaters."

The Vikings beat Harbaugh and the Bears 38-10 Monday night to take command of the NFC Central race as journeyman linebacker Jack Del Rio turned the game with an 84-yard interception return for a touchdown and picked off another Harbaugh pass to end a Chicago threat and set up a Minnesota field goal.

Another linebacker, Carlos Jenkins, added the final insult by returning an interception off Peter Tom Willis 19 yards for a touchdown.

It was the second time this season that

the Bears were done in by Minnesota interceptions. The Vikings won the first meeting 21-20 when Todd Scott's fourth-quarter return for a TD began a run that erased a 20-0 Chicago lead. Scott's TD at the Metrodome a month ago came on an audible that drove coach Mike Ditka to verbally assault his quarterback on the sideline.

The combination of the two wins over Chicago left Minnesota at 6-2 and effectively three games ahead of the Bears (4-4) in the division. That's because if the two teams tie, the Vikings get the first tiebreaker by virtue of the two victories.

The worst home loss in Ditka's 11 seasons as coach of the Bears was a career game for Del Rio, who entered the game with just three interceptions in 7 1/2 NFL seasons with New Orleans, Kansas City, Dallas and the Vikings. Last week, he just

missed a game-saving interception two plays before Washington's Chip Lohmiller kicked the deciding field goal at Minneapolis.

And it overshadowed three sacks of Harbaugh by John Randle, who led a pass rush that dropped Harbaugh four times.

The Vikings led 14-3 at halftime on 1-yard touchdown runs by Roger Craig and Terry Allen, the second following a fumble by Darren Lewis at the Chicago 32.

On the first play of the second half, Allen fumbled and Shaun Gayle recovered at the Minnesota 21. On the next play, Harbaugh aimed for Tom Waddle over the middle.

Waddle was slowed when he ran into umpire Neil Gereb and Del Rio dove and grabbed the pass just before it hit the ground. Then he got up and rumbled down the left sideline, breaking tackles

before cutting back for the end zone.

So just 20 seconds after Chicago seemed ready to close the deficit to 14-10 and 36 seconds into the second half, it was 21-3 and the rout was on.

Later in the third quarter, the Bears drove methodically to the Minnesota 29 before a motion penalty set them back to the 34, where they faced a third and 10. Once again Harbaugh threw, and once again Del Rio jumped in, returning the ball eight yards to the 31.

Eleven plays and 58 yards later, Fuad Reveiz kicked a 28-yard field goal that made it 24-3.

Then Rich Gannon, who was 7 of 15 for 157 yards, hit Steve Jordan for 60 yards early in the fourth quarter and Jenkins, a second-year linebacker, iced it with his first career interception with 8:24 to go in the game.

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