

Owls gunning for SWC title, Cotton Bowl

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Asst. sports editor



Whoa. Two days after the closest Rice-Texas A&M game since the Owls' last victory over the Aggies in 1980, the inhabitants of Kyle Field are probably still catching their breaths after a defensive grudge match with undoubtedly the best 3-3 college football team in the nation.

Although many people still didn't believe Rice was for real after their stunning triumph over Texas last Sunday night, after the Owls' showing against the Aggies on Saturday, there can be no doubt of a statement that hasn't been uttered in conjunction with the residents of Rice Stadium in about 35 years....

Rice is for real. Not just for real, but, with the win over Texas and Baylor's recent faltering in conference play, Rice is in the pole position of this year's wide-open Cotton Bowl 500.

A bowl appearance would be the Owls' first since December 16, 1961, when they were smeared by Kansas in the now-defunct Bluebonnet Bowl. Even worse, a Cotton Bowl berth would be the Owls' first in 37 years, the last such occurrence coming on January 1, 1958 against Navy (who hasn't been to a bowl lately, either).

As the 1957 Southwest Conference champions, Rice compiled a 7-3 overall record (5-1 in the SWC). 1957? That's horrible! How can a program go 37 years without winning the conference again?

True enough, Rice has always prided itself on education first and athletics way down on the totem pole of importance at the university. But still, some decent players have come across the campus that somehow once hosted a Super Bowl. Through the years, Tommy Kramer, Trevor Cobb, Courtney Hall and Bert Emanuel have passed through Rice with nary a post-season appearance among them.

Since that 1961 bowl game, the Owls have compiled a record of 95-240-8, a meager .289 winning percentage, easily the worst in the SWC over that time period.

In the last two seasons however, the Owls have put together back-to-back years of 6-5 records. With two winning seasons at such an underachieving program, former Owl coach Fred Goldsmith became a valuable commodity around the nation, and he jumped ship to Duke, where his Blue Devils are now 7-0.

Enter Ken Hatfield, master of the option attack. After two disappointing losses at the beginning of the season to Tulane and Kansas State, the Owls have come together, especially on the defensive side of the ball. Through seven games, the Owls are allowing only 17 points per contest, including only 15 points per game in the SWC against the usually-potent trio of A&M, UT and Texas Tech. Rice is beginning to rival A&M in the linebacker department. Larry Izzo, one of the stars in the upset of UT, recorded seven tackles against the Aggies to run his season total to 52 tackles, including nine for losses.

See **Georgandis**/Page 6

Wrecking Crew shuts out Owls' option attack

Thomas' 60 yard score enough for victory

By Nick Georgandis
THE BATTALION

Never has a unit's moniker been more misleading than that which juniors Dennis Allen and Ray Mickens, sophomore Donovan Greer and senior Michael Hendricks were referred to on Saturday afternoon. By turning in so many hustling efforts and clutch plays, it was easy to see that Texas A&M's secondary was nothing less than the primary reason behind the Aggies' 7-0 Southwest Conference win over Rice at Kyle Field.

The secondary made its presence known on Rice's first possession of the game. After A&M fumbled the opening kickoff away, Rice was set up in good field position at the Aggie 42-yard line just seven seconds into the game. On a second-down fumbled option pitch, Greer fell on the loose ball.

"I was really proud of our secondary today," defensive coordinator Tommy Tuberville said. "They did everything they could to get in position and make the tackle."

On the Aggies' first play from scrimmage, it looked like Rice was geared up to stop the might A&M rushing attack, as they swarmed Rodney Thomas for a loss of two yards. But on the next play, the Aggies took to the air on a play-action fake. Suddenly, Thomas had the ball in the flat, with enough running room to drive an 18-wheeler through. Thomas turned on the speed and scampered 60 yards for a score.

With Rice gearing their offense almost totally towards the run on Saturday, the secondary unit was mostly concerned with tracking down big runners instead of tailing fleet-footed wide receivers. Greer tied for second on the defense with nine tackles, while Hendricks recorded eight, and

both Allen and Mickens each added five. When Rice's senior quarterback Josh LaRocca did chance the airways at Kyle Field, he did so with almost zero success. LaRocca was a meager 4 of 11 passing for 19 yards.

Despite racking up 395 yards, the Aggie offense could never get back into the end zone and during the second half, the defense was called upon to keep the Owls from tying the score or getting ahead. When Rice's offense drove into the Aggies' "Red Zone", the secondary twice ended the rallies.

Hendricks turned in the game-saving play for the Aggies with just 57 seconds remaining in the ballgame. On a fourth and four from the A&M 31, LaRocca spotted senior wide receiver Jimmy Lee, uncovered, at about the Aggie five-yard line. But just as LaRocca's pass reached Lee, Hendricks cut just in front of Lee and batted the ball to the ground, sealing the victory for A&M.

"I thought he (Lee) would go on a curl route, but, instead he went up the seam," Hendricks said. "I got a great break on the quarterback's shoulder, and even though I usually get excited when I make a big play, but this time I just said thanks to God for letting me be there."

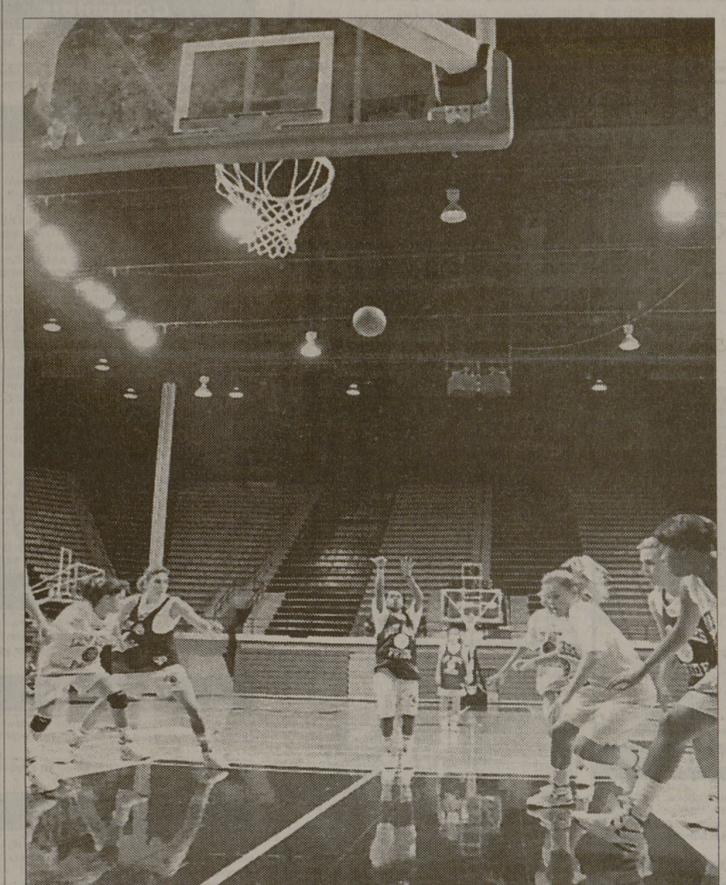
Hendricks' play wouldn't have been possible however, if it had not been for a similar play by Allen midway through the third quarter. Allen's leaping interception in the back of the end zone snuffed out a seven-play, 40-yard drive by the Owls.

As Hendricks explained, both his play and Allen's were expected, by virtue of the position they play.

"We're playmakers, that's what we do," Hendricks said. "It's like Antonio Armstrong always says, somebody is going to come up with the big play for us."



Carrie Thompson/THE BATTALION
Running back Rodney Thomas runs down the field for the game's only score.



Stew Milne/THE BATTALION

Lady Aggie basketball gets rolling

Lady Ags kick-off the season with practice 7:30 Saturday morning at G. Rollie.

Women's soccer retains title

By Stewart Doreen
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M women's soccer team dominated Northern Illinois University 3-0 Sunday to defend their Post Oak Mall Soccer Classic title this weekend.

"The girls put a little more emphasis on perfection of technique," head coach G. Guerrieri said. "We talked before the game about how winning wasn't going to be enough to impress the people who are going to determine our getting into the playoffs."

The Aggies, 11-2-2 and ranked eighth in the South region, took the aggressive attitude into the game and converted on their offensive opportunities looking to score early and often. Freshman forward Bryn Blalack, the tournament's offensive Most Valuable Player, opened the scoring in the first three minutes with a header off a crossing pass from sophomore forward Yvette Okler, the first of Okler's three assists.

"We need to score as many goals as

we can," Okler said. "That's why we came out wanting to score. It's the only way we'll get recognition."

From there, the defense held their ground limiting the Huskies to minimal opportunities for shots. The tournament's outstanding defensive player, senior defender Kristi Dillinger, said the Aggies used a total "team effort" to shut down the Huskies.

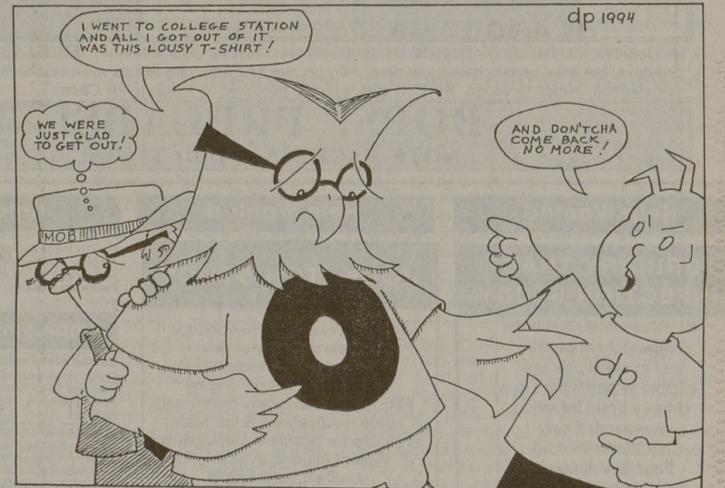
"Our defense really worked as a team this weekend to get the job done," Dillinger said. "If one person in your defense is off, the defensive system doesn't work."

Guerrieri said the strength of the defense will determine the fate of the team for the rest of the season.

"When it comes down to crunch time how well we defend as a team is going to be a big part of our success," Guerrieri said.

The Aggies continued to keep the pressure on the Huskies, who regis-

see **Soccer**/Page 6



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