

# First Down!

## Former official Red Cashion discusses his life in the NFL

By JAMIE BURCH  
THE BATTALION

**T**HIS FALL, as football fans ease back into their lazyboys to spend yet another Sunday afternoon in front of the television playing armchair quarterback, there will be something missing. The pigskin fanatics will still have a full slate of matinee action on the gridiron, all 30 National Football League teams will still play in the same cities, and the team to beat will still be the World Champion Green Bay Packers. But as the chains are moved to mark a new set of downs, the crowd will not have the pleasure of hearing the distinctive and piercing "First Downwwwn!"

After 25 years as an NFL official, Red Cashion decided to close that chapter of his life. He wanted to walk away from the NFL on his own terms. "I didn't want to get to the point where they (the NFL) told me it was time to quit," Cashion said. "I wanted to quit while I was on the top of my game. I don't have any question whether I could have officiated another year or two. But at some point, you lose it and I didn't want to get to that."

Known for his signature first-down call, Cashion said he is not sure how the cry originated. "I don't know," Cashion said. "I really don't know. I just wanted to tell people that it was exciting, so I ended up being a little more enthusiastic about it. It never occurred to me that it would become that big. But, there are very few days that go by that people don't ask me about it."

"I was in Lloyds of London one day and I heard someone holler first down all the way across the store. The salesclerk asked me if I knew what the gentleman was talking about and I said I was afraid I did. It happens all over the place. It's really funny."

Cashion began his long and illustrious officiating career in 1952 as a junior at Texas A&M University. "I started at A&M in 1949 and I was supposed to play football," Cashion said. "It's a good thing I didn't because I wasn't that good. About my junior year, I began to miss football, but by then it's too

late to go out for the team. "Somebody suggested I try officiating. It sounded like a good idea, so I got involved in the College Station chapter of the Southwest Football Officials Association and went from there."

After spending 21 years officiating at the high school and college level, Cashion was rewarded for his efforts by being selected as an NFL official. Although he never intended to climb to the professional level, Cashion said he was ecstatic about the recognition.

"I was flattered," Cashion said. "I never had any idea that I'd get the opportunity to go to that level. I was totally surprised."

**"I just wanted to tell people it (calling first down) was exciting, so I ended up being a little more enthusiastic about it."**

As an athlete or official, making the jump from the college level to the professionals is a difficult transition. Athletes say the speed of the game at the professional level makes it an arduous task.

Cashion said, for him, it was the speed of the athletes and the specificity of the rules.

"Two feet in bounds instead of one, to me, is much more difficult to call," Cashion said. "The other thing is the speed of the players. You used to see some fast players in college, but all these guys are fast and quick. And their quickness makes it more difficult to follow them."

Along with the rule changes, an official must learn just when to make a call. Cashion said this causes problems for a lot of rookie officials.

"You have to remember professional football is primarily entertainment," Cashion said. "As a result, whether you call a foul or don't call a foul has a whole lot more to do with the effect that the play has. It's difficult for some people trying to make the transition to not make every call.

"For example, if a receiver on the left goes out and the quarterback does nothing but look and throw right, then the hold on the left is not a foul. But that's the one that the TV guys will focus on and say, 'Gee whiz, what's the matter with that guy. Is he blind?'"

During his 25 years in the NFL, Cashion was witness to thousands of great players and hundreds of games. Two of the most notable games are Super Bowl XX and Super Bowl XXX. Cashion was selected as the head official in both the Chicago Bears 46-10 thrashing of the New England Patriots in 1986 and the Dallas Cowboys 27-17 win over the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1996. The veteran official said three games in particular stand above the rest.

"Certainly the two Super Bowls because that's a highlight for us just like it is for the players," Cashion said. "If you work the Super Bowl, it means you were graded No. 1 at that position. That's an honor."

"But there was a game a few years ago between Buffalo and San Francisco in which there were no punts in the game for the first time in NFL history. San Francisco won 38-35 and the two teams gained over 1,200 yards of offense between them. It was just an unbelievable game. (Jim Kelly and (Joe) Montana went at each other. Everything they put in the air was caught."

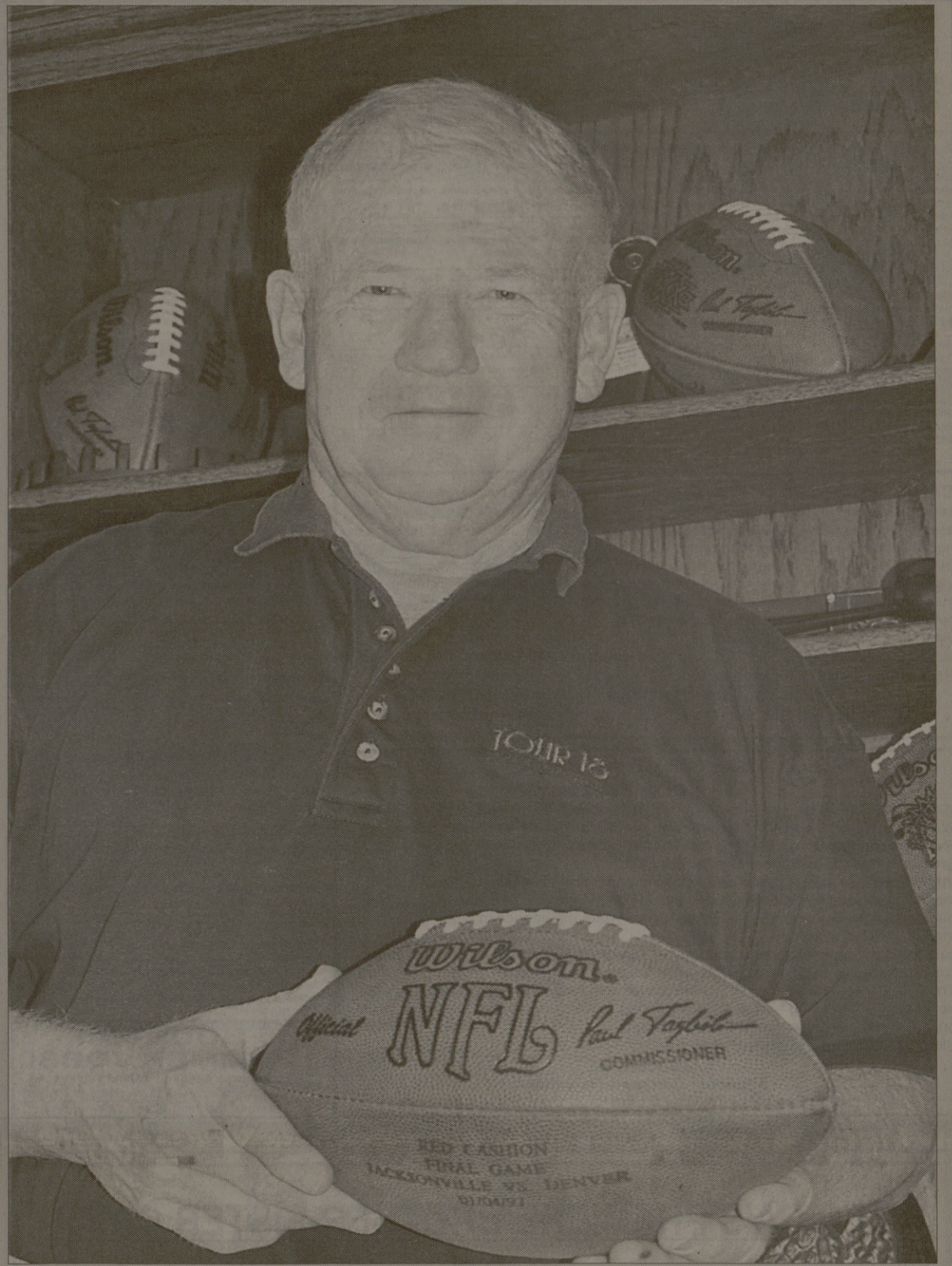
The Montana-Kelly showdown was one game that mesmerized Cashion. Ironically, that is the one thing Cashion said officials cannot do.

"One of the toughest things you have to do is not be a spectator," Cashion said. "If you get to watching these guys, which is so easy to do because they're so great, you forget what you're out there for."

Having spent a quarter century in the NFL, Cashion had the opportunity to see a metamorphosis of the NFL prototype. Other than an increase in size and quickness, Cashion said he does not see any major differences.

He said today's athletes are not anymore prone to cause trouble than players in the '70s.

"Part of it has to do with the significance of football," Cashion said. "These guys make so much money.



Robert McKay, THE BATTALION

Red Cashion, a former NFL referee, displays his ball from the final game he officiated. It was the 1997 playoff game between Jacksonville and Denver.

Everything they do is now front-page news. I don't think there are any more problems than there used to be. In fact there's probably less, but each one is focused on a whole lot."

"Dallas used to have a running back, Walt Garrison, who used to ride in the rodeo all the time. Nobody paid much attention to that. Could you imagine the publicity if Emmitt Smith rode in the rodeo? I think that's typical of the whole scenario."

While some athletes, who have retired after a long NFL career, cannot tolerate spending a Sunday afternoon watching football, Cashion said he now has a greater appreciation for the sport.

"I like watching football now more than I did when I started officiating," Cashion said. "I was having so much fun out there. That's the tough part about quitting. So far it hasn't bothered me because

I've been so busy. Come August, I'm not sure how I'll feel."

And even though Cashion said he enjoyed his time in the NFL more than life, he's not sure if he would make the same sacrifice.

"That was tough," Cashion said. "I watched all four of my kids grow up and missed a lot of time. It made the weekends difficult. If I had it to do all over again, I don't know that I would."

## Aggie tennis splits with SMU, Nebraska

By DENNIS RAMIREZ  
THE BATTALION

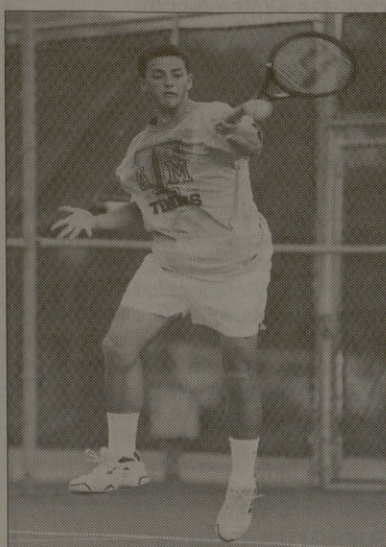
The Texas A&M Men's Tennis Team had a tough weekend when Southern Methodist University and the University of Nebraska rolled into town. The Aggies found themselves splitting matches and picking up their first Big 12 conference win.

On Friday, the SMU Mustangs stampeded into College Station and found themselves on top of the Aggie netters. After the Aggies pulled out the doubles point, they ended up on the short end of the stick in singles competition.

Head Coach Tim Cass said the loss was disappointing for the team, and because Nebraska was up next, it would be hard to bounce back and pick up the win.

"I know that the loss was very frustrating for the guys, but we need to just keep hanging in there," Cass said. "The main thing after the SMU match is not to be let down and not to underestimate Nebraska, because they are a really good team. We had to be professional about it and ready to play again."

As the conference match against Nebraska got underway Saturday, the Aggies were eager to pick up the elusive doubles point, but were unable to, and gave the Cornhuskers



Rory Angkriwan, THE BATTALION

Freshman **Juan Aramburo** plays against Nebraska Saturday.

an early lead. The doubles loss was tough as the A&M duo of Robbie Krause and Carlos Tori picked up their match, but were still unable to give the Aggies the win. Then Nebraska picked up the next two matches.

Carlos Tori said despite the loss of the doubles point, the experience gave the team a boost into singles competition.

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## New manager helps Astros

### HOUSTON ASTROS

Larry Dierker is exactly what the Astros need. This Houston team is too good to fold late in the second half every year and end up second. With Terry Collins' pressing managerial style gone, Houston should be able to relax in August and pull it out.

The core of the team is the same with Jeff Bagwell at first, Craig Biggio at second, Sean Berry at third and Derek Bell in left field. Those four should put up the same numbers again this year (80 home runs, 403 RBIs). Enter the newcomers, shortstop Pat Listach, right fielder Luis Gonzalez and catcher Brad Ausmus and you have a nice compliment to the "Killer B's."

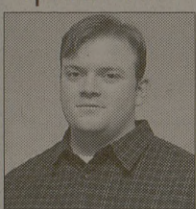
The pitching staff added veteran Sid Fernandez to their solid base of Darryl Kile, Shane Reynolds and Mike Hampton. Donne Wall and Chris Holt should battle for the fifth spot in the rotation. Houston did overhaul their middle relief, bringing in Ramon Garcia, Jose Lima and C.J. Nitkowski to carry the games into the ninth.

Closer may be the Astros' best bet. Southpaw Billy Wagner closed games for Houston last year, but righty John Hudek is back throwing hard again this spring. Dierker will have a nice one-two punch with these guys.

Dierker is the difference this year. Look for the Astros to fight it out to the end with the Cubs and Cardinals and come out on top. Bagwell will be healthy and challenge for the Triple Crown. **Projected Record: 85-77**

**Key Series: April 4-6 vs. St. Louis Cardinals:** Houston's biggest problem in the past few years (besides Jeff Bagwell's hand) has been their bad division record. This early season series against the defending Central champs is important for the confidence of the team and rookie manager Larry Dierker.

### Sportswriter



Jeremy Furtick  
Senior journalism major

### CHICAGO CUBS

The Cubs are again going to field a scrappy, never-say-die squad. The big difference this year is the improved pitching staff. Chicago signed Kevin Tapani and Terry Mulholland to beef up their starting rotation. Steve Trachsel and Frank Castillo are returning with hopes they will regain their 1995 form. If Amari Telemaco can step up and be a solid starter, the talk at the end of 1997 may be about Chicago's pitching staff. Turk Wen-

the infield of Ryne Sandberg and Mark Grace more experienced and more dangerous at the plate.

Former All-Stars Sammy Sosa and Brian McRae complete the outfield and Scott Servais is at catcher. The Cubs are a legitimate division threat if they can put this team on the field every day. **Projected Record: 85-77**

**Key Series: April 1-3 @ Florida Marlins; April 4-6 @ Atlanta Braves; April 8-10 vs. Florida Marlins; April 11-13 vs. Atlanta Braves:** The Cubs begin 1997 with 11 games in 13 days against two of the National League's best teams. Chicago has to be careful or they could wake up April 14 with a 1-10 record to start the season.

### ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

After spending 1996 rebuilding a team that paid off with a division title, the Cardinals didn't do anything significant to improve on last year's 88-74 record. This team is basically the same with Gary Gaetti at third, Royce Clayton at short (with no Ozzie Smith problems), and John Mabry at first. Delino DeShields was added at second to bring a true lead-off man to the lineup, but DeShields has consistently gotten worse every year since leaving Montreal. The solid Tom Pagnozzi rounds out the infield at catcher.

The Cardinals do have a sharp outfield with re-born Ron Gant in left, Ray Lankford in center and Brian Jordan in right. Lankford may miss the start of the season if his rotator cuff is not completely healed from offseason surgery. This would put former No. 1 pick Dmitri Young at first with Mabry moving to right and Jordan to center.

The pitching staff is a carbon copy of last season. The Benes brothers, Andy and Alan, joined by Todd Stottelmyre, Donovan Osborne and Danny Jackson. Tony LaRussa's traditional committee will hand games to veteran closer Dennis Eckersley.

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dell will move from the closer spot to set-up man, and Terry Adams and Bob Patterson should be the main middle-guys. Their jobs will be to get new fireman Mel Rojas to the ninth inning with a lead.

The lineup will be good again this year. Former No. 1 draft pick Brooks Kieschnick will take over in left and Arizona Fall League co-MVP Kevin Orrie will start at third. The return of Shawon Dunston to short is the biggest boost to the team. He makes