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Horned Frogs, Golden Eagles battle for chance to play A&M

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (AP) — Houston or bust.

TCU and Southern Mississippi play the second-to-last game of the Division I-A regular season Friday night with a bid to the Galleryfurniture.com Bowl in Houston going to the winner.

For the loser, the offseason begins.

"It's kind of like high school football in the playoffs," said Southern Miss quarterback Jeff Kelly. "You win, you keep playing. You lose you go home."

And for seniors such as Kelly, who knows when their next football game will be.

"To have the opportunity to have such a big game to end your career is great," he said.

Both teams also have streaks on the line.

Southern Miss (6-4) has been to a bowl game four straight seasons. TCU (5-5) is looking for its fourth straight winning season, something it has not done since the 1950s.

The Golden Eagles hoped they would have a bowl bid locked up by now. Had they beaten Alabama last week they would have received a bid to the GMAC Bowl in Mobile. Even with a loss, Southern Miss was expected to land in Houston.

But when the Golden Eagles lost, they were left empty handed.

"This is the best scenario," Southern Miss safety Chad Williams said. "If you want something real bad you have to go out and get it."

TCU's 37-22 victory over Conference USA champion Louisville two weeks ago put a wrinkle into the league's bowl picture.

Having the Horned Frogs play Texas A&M in the Astrodome on Dec. 28 became tempting for the two-year-old bowl game, looking to match former Southwestern Conference rivals.

TCU and Southern Miss met last year in the GMAC Bowl, when the Horned Frogs were a member of the Western Athletic Conference.

Kelly threw two touchdowns in the fourth quarter, including the game-winner in the closing seconds, to lift the Golden Eagles to a 28-21 victory.

It was a tough way for Gary Patterson to begin his head coaching career. He took over when Dennis Franchione was hired by Alabama.

"As a new head coach you wouldn't want to lose your first game on a deep vertical route with 8 seconds left," he said. "The biggest thing to me is to have a winning season and go to a bowl game, not revenge."

Under Patterson, TCU has some new names, but a familiar look.

The biggest change has been on offense where the focus has shifted to quarterback Casey Printers with running back LaDainian Tomlinson now in the NFL.

"The quarterback is the most dangerous player on that team," Williams said. "They're running the same offense just with a little more passing."

The mobile Printers has thrown for 1,[illegible] yards and 12 touchdowns, but the offense has been unable to find balance without Tomlinson.

The running game finally got revved up against Louisville with 178 yards.

"My hats off to the offense. They have taken a lot of criticism all year," Patterson said. "We were able to run the ball and control the line of scrimmage."

The Golden Eagles have had a similar season offensively, looking sharp at times and sloppy at others. But they rank first in the league in scoring defense and second in total defense.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Two Aggies on All-Central team

Outside hitter Michelle Cole and setter Jenna Moscovic, both seniors, were named to the All-Central Region team.

Cole and Moscovic were also All-Big 12 selections and have started for A&M for four years.

The appearance on the All-Central team is the third-straight for Moscovic while Cole was named to the team for the first time.

Cowboys streak continues at 95

IRVING (AP) — The Dallas Cowboys again managed to avoid a local television blackout.

The Cowboys (3-8) sold enough tickets by Thursday to keep Sunday's game against the New York Giants on local television.

It will be the 95th straight sellout at 65,639-seat Texas Stadium. That streak, which includes playoff games, dates to Dec. 16, 1990.

NFL rules state that if a home game isn't sold out 72 hours before kickoff, no TV station within a 75-mile radius can broadcast the game.

Home Depot buys Atlanta Falcons

FLOWERY BRANCH, Ga. (AP) — Atlanta Falcons president Taylor Smith has agreed to sell the team to Home Depot co-founder Arthur Blank, a source close to the team said Thursday.

Blank is paying "a little more of $500 million" for the Falcons, according to the source who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Blank and Smith did not return several messages left at their offices Thursday. The deal is subject to approval by NFL owners, with at least [illegible] votes required.

The sale is to be announced Friday, the source said.

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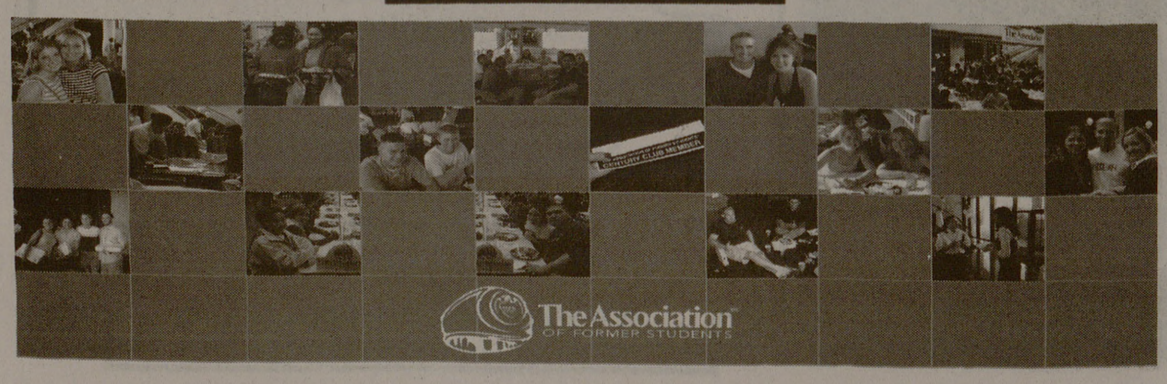
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