

Big 12 South has question marks

Texas A&M, Texas lead way once again in division

BY JASON MERRIHEW
Staff writer

The Big 12 South is full of question marks heading into the 1999 college football season.

Oklahoma and Baylor will begin the season with new field generals. Both Texas and Texas A&M lost key team leaders.

Texas A&M goes into the 1999 season as Big 12 champions. Last year the Aggies went 8-1 in the Big 12 and 11-3 overall.

Head Coach R.C. Slocum doesn't feel the pressure is on A&M to repeat.

"It would be a heck of a challenge to do that," Slocum said. "In the league so far, you have three years, and no teams have been able to do that."

Offensively, Slocum is optimistic the Aggies will be productive.

Senior quarterback Randy McCown is expected to be completely healthy for the start of the season. McCown missed parts of last season with injuries. The backfield returns Dante Hall and Ja'mar Toombs.

The defense returns nine starters from the year before. The Aggies lost defensive leader Dat Nguyen to graduation.

Texas will try to live life without Ricky Williams. Williams won the Heisman Trophy last season and ended his career as the all-time Division I leading rusher.

"(Williams) was also our best

defensive player," UT Coach Mack Brown said. "He kept the opponent's offense off the field."

Junior Hodges Mitchell has the big task of following Williams' footprints. Fullback Ricky Brown will help out Mitchell with the rushing duties.

Major Applewhite will be the Longhorns' starting signal caller this fall. Coach Brown has the luxury of having the top prospect in the nation, Chris Simms, to back up Applewhite. Simms is the son of New York Giant great Phil Simms.

Texas Tech had a successful season last year, going 7-5 and making a trip to the Independence Bowl.

Offensively, the Red Raiders are experienced. Senior quarterback Rob Peters will be the starter, while Kliff Klingsbury will be his backup.

Texas Tech's Ricky Williams will lead a potent ground attack. Last year, Williams rushed for 1,667 yards and 13 touchdowns. Williams averaged 5.1 yards per carry.

The Red Raiders will need to gel at the offensive line early if they want to improve from a year ago. Tech lost two linemen to graduation. Steve McFadden and Dan Martin are likely to fill the gaps.

Defensively, Tech will be inexperienced because they lost five starters. Middle linebacker Kyle Shipley and defensive end Taurus Rucker will lead the defense.

"Our first goal is to win the first ball game," Coach Spike Dykes said.

"We want to contend for the South and maybe win the Big 12."

Dykes added, "But I don't know how realistic our goals are."

Oklahoma goes into the 1999 season with a new head coach. Defensive specialist Bob Stoops replaces John Blake at the helm.

Stoops was Florida's defensive coordinator. Stoops brought former Kentucky offensive coordinator Mike Leach with him to Norman.

Unfortunately, the Sooners don't have a Tim Couch as a starting quarterback. Oklahoma was ranked 107th nationally in passing.

Jake Sills is the only returnee from the platoon of quarterbacks the Sooners used a year ago. Junior college transfer Josh Heupel and a couple of incoming freshmen will compete with Sills for the starting position.

Running back De'Mond Parker bolted early for the NFL, leaving the Sooners yet another hole to fill. Seniors Michael Thornton and Johnnie Balous will compete for the starting job.

The offensive line is one of the very few bright spots for Coach Stoops. The Sooners return all five linemen.

Defensively, the Sooners will greatly improve with the presence of the defensive-minded Stoops and his brother Mike, the defensive coordinator.

Oklahoma State had a disappointing season last year, finishing 5-6.

Talented Tony Lindsay will return

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SPIKE DYKES
Texas Tech coach

as the starting quarterback for the Cowboys, while Nathan Simmons will return as tailback.

Although OSU lost three starters on the offensive line, it expects to be better. Jeff Machado, Bryan Phillips, Jason Rannebarger and DJ Grissom will compete for the three open spots.

Linebacker Kenyatta Wright will return to terrorize the opposing offense.

The Cowboys will need redshirt freshmen Kevin Williams and Thomas Glapion to step up for the departure of last year's defensive line starters Andre Waddle and Alton Weaver.

If the offensive line works together, Oklahoma State can contend in the Big 12.

Baylor had another awful season last year. This year, the Bears hope to

change their past by bringing in new Head Coach Kevin Steele.

Steele, a former Nebraska assistant, recently worked as an assistant for the Carolina Panthers.

Steele brought in former Husker quarterback Tommie Frazier as a graduate assistant. Frazier is responsible for tutoring the quarterbacks.

Odell James is likely to be Baylor's starting QB. Jermaine Alfred and Michael Odum will battle James for the starting job.

Although they lack experience, the young Bears should have a tough offensive line, headed by Greg Jerman. Jerman is considered to be the next all-conference lineman from Baylor.

Defensively, the Bears are experienced. Nine starters from a year ago will return for BU.

Replacing quarterbacks difficult

QB from page 10

passing efficiency last season.

The Bruins, who went 10-2 last year, might be the most hard-pressed, considering their passing-oriented game. It's competitive in Pasadena, too. Bennett heads the group, but there's two redshirt freshmen and a sophomore in tow. That doesn't even include recruit J.P. Losman, who enrolled early and many consider to be a top prospect.

"It seems like Cade was the starting quarterback forever," UCLA Coach Bob Toledo said at his press conference. "But it's a new era, and we are looking forward to it with all our young quarterbacks."

Diplomatic stuff, but with young quarterbacks, coaches have to be. There's an entire offense to learn. Leadership to be developed. And there's the opportunity to see the difference between holding the clipboard and running the show.

Even Ohio State's John Cooper, who's usually good for a job or two, stays glib and conservative on the subject of trying to replace Germaine, who played all or part of three seasons at OSU.

"With having two quarterbacks do all the repetitions, they will get better," Cooper said of Moherman and co-No. 1 quarterback Steve Bellisari. "We are not in a position, and we don't have to be, of putting one above the other."

Most coaches concede quarterback races will extend into the fall. Such is the case in systems when many players never had a chance to play, with the starters chasing Heisman Trophy honors, among other things.

Smith said that bringing a quarterback along slowly is the key. In Missouri's case, that means running fewer options and playing to the rest of the offense's strengths. For the Tigers, that's an experienced wide receiver corps, which equals more passing.

"We're still going to run the ball," Smith said. "We're not going to stop running the option. But you have to play to the quarterback's strength. You don't change what you do, but mold it a little."

The biggest pressure situation might be Kentucky's. Gone is Couch, the quarterback who rewrote the UK record books and carried the team to a

bowl on the strength of his right arm.

Bonner, a sophomore, and Mike Scipione, a redshirt freshman, must master Wildcat Coach Hal Mumme's complicated system of reads and progressions which he established at Brigham Young.

But Mumme had a good teacher for replacing quarterbacks in former boss and current BYU Coach LaVell Edwards. Over a 10-year span in the late 1970s/early 1980s, Edwards had Gifford Nielsen, Marc Wilson, Jim McMahon, Steve Young and Robbie Bosco are in succession at quarterback. That's a national championship and couple Super Bowl titles among those five players.

"Boy, we really looked like we knew what we were doing, didn't we?" Edwards said in an interview with the Daily Nebraskan. "But really, you don't know. You hope you recruit the right guy, but the whole thing is managed like a crap shoot."

Edwards, who said he had no idea Bosco could lead the Cougars to a

national title in 1984, equates the importance of quarterback at most schools with what happens at NU concerning the I-back. Which means the spotlight is always on.

"It's the same thing," Edwards said. "The guy that comes in next is ultimately going to be compared to the guy that just left. Whatever that guy does or doesn't do isn't as important as how he compares."

With BYU currently holding a veteran in Kevin Feterik, Edwards said he doesn't have to worry about another signal caller. Yet.

"Every coach has to deal with it," Edwards said. "It's just how they deal with it. The talent has to be in line. You just hope that it's there when it's their time."

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Saturday, April 17
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