

# The Cornerstone

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE RICE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOL. 12, NO. 2

## Rice Spirit

*A Story about the 1957 football game between Rice Institute and Texas A&M College  
(Ranked Number One in the Nation)*

By James Greenwood III, BA, Class of 1958 (Originally written 1981, revised 2007)

This is the story of the 1957 Rice Institute football team's historic meeting with the Texas A&M team that was ranked number one in the nation. On that warm November Saturday, the Aggies were just two wins away from the national championship that their flamboyant and controversial coach, Bear Bryant, had promised them four years earlier when he recruited them to the storied (and title-hungry) citadel on the Brazos River. The Owls had been drawn to the tree-lined South Main campus to play for shrewd southern gentleman, Jess Neely, in his second decade as Rice head coach, who had promised them only that they'd receive a "superior education." It's the story of the collective will of a 1,600 member student body uniting with the will of its football team, exploding into school and team spirit that for a week, for a Saturday, empowered them to take on the Aggies' legendary "Twelfth Man," match the vaunted "Spirit of Aggieland," and...well, here's the story.



*The 1957 Rice Institute Football Team*

### **Saturday Morning**

Saturday morning, November 16, 1957. The sun came up over Rice Institute at 6:47 a.m. Dwight Eisenhower was in his second term as President. The complacency-shattering orbit around the earth of Soviet satellite, Sputnik I, was slowing down. Scandalous Brigitte Bardot's titillating motion picture, *And God Created Woman*, was

coming to the Tower Theater, while angelic Pat Boone's untitillating "April Love" provided a tame rebuttal at the Majestic. The Dow Jones Industrial Average had closed the week at 439.35, down from July's 520.77 peak. Those phenomena were on the back burner.

For the undefeated number one ranked Texas A&M Aggie football team was in town to play the Rice Institute Owls, ranked 15th and 20th in different polls.

### **The Aggies**

Less than a mile from the Rice campus, the Aggies had spent the night at the luxurious Shamrock Hotel. They were 8-0, led the conference in defense, allowing more than one score in only one game. They had an 18-game

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# The Rice Historical Society

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*Victory over A&M, 1957*

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*If you would like to give that hat or banner or dance card to the Rice Historical Society to be preserved at the Woodson Research Center or in the RHS archive collection, please contact Joyce Nagle, RHS archivist, at 713-782-0703.*

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undefeated string going back to the start of the 1956 season.

The Aggie line was anchored by all-American, Charley Krueger. Its backfield was led by John David Crow, 6'2", 210 pounds, bigger than most of the Rice linemen who would have to tackle him. Crow's running, defense, power, and speed made him a favorite to win the Heisman trophy.

Four years earlier, an incoming freshman had scrawled on a meeting room blackboard: "Conference Championship-1956—National Championship-1957," and they were right on schedule. Last year they'd been 9-0-1, a tie to the University of Houston the only blemish. This year they had only 4-3 Rice and 5-2-1 Texas in their path. They could taste it!

If the Aggies had a weakness, it was lack of depth. Ten starters had averaged 50 minutes per game and their last two games were very close. Were the Aggies getting tired?

Texas A&M football players had special memories of their three-year mastery over Rice. As sophomores they had engineered the most miraculous comeback in the history of the Southwest Conference, there in Rice Stadium. The heavily favored Ags trailed 12-0 with just over four minutes to play in the game. Crow had been knocked out of the game. Led by sophomores Lloyd Taylor and backup passing phenom, Jimmy Wright, the Aggies scored, recovered an onside kick, scored again, then intercepted a desperation pass to score once more, all in about three minutes, prevailing 20-12, and demonstrating an invincibility and refusal to lose that confirmed that the "miracle Aggies" were on their way.

## "Bear" Bryant

If John David Crow was to be the Joshua who would lead the Fighting Farmers into the promised land of a national championship, their Moses, who had etched in stone the rules by which they would prevail, was their tall, dark, raw-boned, gruff, slow-drawling, stormy, head coach, Paul W. "Bear" Bryant. Forty-three years old, from Fordyce, Arkansas, he had been hired away from the University of Kentucky four years earlier precisely to bring the Aggies a national championship, a coveted prize they had won in 1939.

Many in the southwest considered Bryant to be just a hired gun, a bully, a ruffian with a win-at-all-costs philosophy that made the genteel old timers feel more than a little uncomfortable. His first year at Aggieland enhanced the rough and tumble image. He took more

than 75 players, remnants of a losing team, to a Devil's Island of a training camp at Junction, Texas, in August. He drilled them brutally, two and three times a day, "finding out just who wanted to play football." When the smoke cleared, only 29 players had stuck it out. As Gene Stallings, one of the survivors, said, "we went out there on two buses, but it only took one to bring us back."

Bryant's 1954 freshmen were among the most prized high school athletes in America, recruited (too) aggressively as the foundation for the national championship team. It had been expensive—two years NCAA and Southwest Conference probation. Though the Aggies had won the conference championship in 1956, they'd been ineligible for the Cotton Bowl. But that penance had now been served, and this year's team was to fulfill the prophecy. Those 1954 freshmen were now seniors. This is what it had all been about.

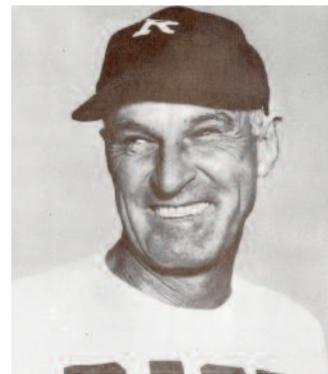
Bryant's players were tough, well-conditioned, grounded in the basics. They played "hard-nosed" football—ram it down their throats offense and defense.

But, even in the midst of nailing down the national championship, controversy haunted Bryant. It was rumored that he would leave College Station at the end of the season and become head coach at his alma mater, the University of Alabama. Jack Gallagher broke the story in the *Houston Post* on the morning of the Rice game, along with Bryant's evasive quasi-denial: "I have recommended a coach for Alabama, and it isn't Bear Bryant." It was a fascinating distraction.

## The Owls Coach, Jess Neely

By comparison to Bryant, Rice's quiet, graying Jess Neely was rather dull copy. He'd been at Rice since 1940. His recruiting had always been conducted without fanfare. When high school seniors visited Rice, Neely didn't promise gridiron championships, but talked about the education they would receive. He was

regarded as a southern gentleman, a man of class and character, genuinely genteel, traditionally traditional. He suited to a tee the image Rice wanted its coach to have, reserved, humble, quiet, scholarly. He had a law degree



Coach Jess Neely

from Vanderbilt. Neely worked under a year-to-year gentleman's agreement, for an undisclosed salary. Bryant, on the other hand, had a highly publicized pact with seven years left, at a high salary with a fringe benefit package. Yet Neely seemed more permanent, almost an institution, Bryant ephemeral, like a truck driving through town in the middle of the night.

Neely's teams were never picked to win the conference title. But they were steeped in fundamental skills, adhered to conservative game plans, relied heavily on the kicking game, developed slowly during the season, generally with a nucleus of seniors. They played their fiercest, best football during the month of November. Since his arrival on South Main, the Rice Owls had won or tied for the conference championship with relentless regularity, in 1946, 1948 (tie), 1949, and 1953. Neely's championship teams always had big quarterbacks who could run as well as pass, and a cadre of tough, usually unheralded, linemen.

Despite some October disappointments, Neely's 1957 Rice team had lost only one conference game; was characterized by a crew of tough quick linemen; had two of the best running and passing quarterbacks in the country (King Hill and Frank Ryan). The team was mostly seniors. It had been four years since the Southwest Conference champion had worn the blue and gray of Rice. Could this be another "Neely November?"

## The Owls

Twenty-five miles away, at the Houston Yacht Club, Rice football players began to rise. Although rain had forced indoor workouts on Monday and Tuesday, they had scrimmaged hard, until dark on Wednesday. The team was healthy for the first time since early September and the week's drills had been the best of the year. They were fit and ready.

Based on line coach Joe Davis's excellent scouting report on the Aggies, Neely had installed a nine-man line defense to slow the Aggie power. He installed a run-based offense using an unbalanced line and an overshifted backfield.

Although Rice and its starting quarterback, King Hill, led the Southwest Conference in total offense and passing, the Aggies had not allowed a passing touchdown all year, intercepted 14



*Line Coach, Joe Davis*

enemy aerials in their eight wins, and shut out four opponents. Rice would live or die with its running game and tough defense.

Neely housed the team out of town after Friday's practice, acknowledging the student and team "spirit right now is as good as any since I've been at Rice." He wanted to preserve that exploding enthusiasm until game time so it could feed on the Aggies, not on itself.

Many thoughts ran through the minds of senior tri-captains, King Hill, Matt Gorges and Larry Whitmire as they prepared to face A&M for the last time. Most aggravating was the fact that they had never beaten the Aggies. They lost by two touchdowns as freshmen, were humiliated as sophomores by the miraculous Aggie finish in 1955, and last year's 21-7 thumping by the (9-0-1) Aggie team that won the Southwest Conference had never been close.

Then there was the grating awareness that their Rice careers were winding down without having challenged for the conference championship. The 1957 season had been a roller coaster ride with promising wins over LSU and Stanford followed by three losses in the next four games. Against Clemson they seemed to have run out of gas and will, and some said that 20-7 defeat was the worst game ever played in Rice stadium. Morale had seemed nonexistent.

But that had changed in the last two weeks with exciting, almost miraculous developments on campus that had transformed the team from a group of hang-dog pessimists into fierce, proud, hungry, fired-up football players who believed in themselves; in their ability to beat the number one team in the land and win the conference championship. They were on fire!

## The Spirit

In the malaise that had followed the Clemson debacle, some of the players had complained to the cheerleaders, Carolyn Dearmond, Harvin Moore, Mike Smelley, and Homer Spencer. They accused the rest of the students of not caring about the team, revealing feelings of separation, isolation. The cheerleaders responded, putting up posters in the men's residential colleges, with pictures of the college's football players. The players were introduced and warmly cheered at evening meals.

The Homecoming bonfire on the Friday night before the Arkansas game had been spirited and the team beat a strong Razorback eleven, 13-7. The team's conference record was 2-1, good enough for second place. Though the Aggies were favored by 6½ points, the Owls had a shot at the title.

Then it happened. Spurred by the Arkansas victory, inspired by A&M's number one ranking, the student body came alive, caught fire. Around ten o'clock on Tuesday night the misty campus was shattered by the blast of bugles. The rousing "Aggie War Hymn" blared from the Hanszen College quadrangle. Young men came running, from Baker, Will Rice, and Wiess Colleges, books and bull sessions abandoned, summoned by the sound.

The first rumor was that an Aggie had been caught on campus. Not true, but to cheerleaders Moore and Spencer, and to team captain Gorges, the hundreds of milling students cried out for a spontaneous pep rally. Gorges held high a broomstick, like a scepter, and loudly proclaimed what the Owls would do to the Aggies on Saturday. All cheered wildly.

As the roar subsided, a vulgar four-syllable chant about Aggies and what they "eat" (not appetizing or complimentary) began, and the catchy epithet was soon being hurled skyward off the tongues of 400 male voices, loudly, fiercely, defiantly.

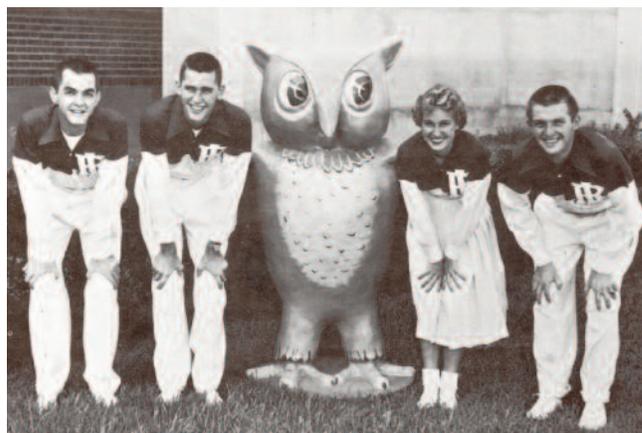
Moore and Spencer led more Rice cheers, members of the band played the fight song, and the rally broke up around 10:30 p.m. Students wandered back to their rooms, adrenaline flowing.

The next day there were mock graves between the men's colleges and the library, mounds of earth bearing crosses with the names of different Aggies: Crow, Bryant, Krueger, Taylor. "Beat the Aggies," ubiquitously began to appear on chalkboards in every classroom, on bulletin boards, on walls, posters, everywhere.

Separation and apathy disappeared, replaced by encouragement, cohesiveness, and an overwhelming sense of school pride and unity. A song was composed, a letter appeared in the *Thresher*, from the student body to the team. The students considered the Aggie Corps' legendary "twelfth man" to be a challenge to their own school spirit and were ready to yell their lungs out.

Nightly rallies were heralded by the piercing blast of the "Aggie War Hymn". The roaring enthusiasm that permeated the campus attained new heights each night, reaching a crescendo on Thursday. Coaches Davis and Neely, the full band, and the entire football team turned out for that one. Players were introduced, coaches spoke. The senior football players were singled out and those who were not overcome with emotion gave short, fiery speeches about Saturday's impending fight. Cheers followed cheers, lusty songs led to fervent chants.

Never had cheers reverberated through the cloisters of this beautiful campus with more intensity. Some who were there believe that no Rice student body had ever felt more at one with a team about to defend Rice's Honor on the gridiron than that student body, going into that November contest with Texas A&M. And perhaps no



*Cheerleaders, Homer Spencer, Harvin Moore, Sammy Owl, Carolyn Dearmond, and Mike Smelley*

Rice football team ever felt closer to a student body than that football team did as they prepared, and looked forward to their greatest gridiron challenge. Perhaps as no other Rice team before them had, they felt that they represented their school, realizing that their classmates were really behind them, supporting them, and the students feeling that they shared the challenge with the team on the field. It was awesome. Palpable.

## **Game Day**

Red candles left burning in the Commons and in dormitory windows through Friday night to ward off evil (Aggie) spirits had burned down.

A banner across Main Street proclaiming, "Texas Ags—National Champs," was now hanging from the top of the Fondren library, saying "National Chumps."

An estimated crowd of 50,000 watched the Aggie Corps and its impressive band march down Main Street, while students on the Rice campus tried unsuccessfully to concentrate on classroom lectures.

At noon, as fans of both schools moved toward Rice stadium with moist palms and heightened pulse rates, the temperature neared 80 degrees, the humidity stood at a wilting, 74 percent.

This was it! Tomorrow was here! Rice students, athletes and non, felt butterflies in their stomachs—all were peculiarly, intensely, and magnificently involved. They were all in it together! Hyped!

Within the hour 72,000 screaming partisans would occupy the double-decked concrete oval west of the Rice campus. Fans carrying binoculars, chair backs, programs, and pennants streamed toward the concrete battleground that would hold its largest crowd in history. Campaign hats at a jaunty angle, visitors from College Station in chocolate-colored boots, gray-flared trousers and olive jackets, khaki shirts and ties, swaggered toward the game



*Tri-captains Whitmire, Gorges, and Hill with Coach Neely*

site as only Aggie seniors can. Their pliant dates with gleaming teeth wore maroon and white-beribboned, white chrysanthemums. Rice fans in wilting starched shirts, some in coats and ties, some already in shirtsleeves, with dates whose 'mums trailed blue and gray streamers, headed determinedly for the lower east stands. The stadium was full an hour before the scheduled 2:00 p.m. kickoff.

After the pre-game meal and the taping of knees and ankles by trainers Wojceki and Antill, the three dozen Rice athletes grimly filed into their dressing room beneath the south end of the stadium, to don their splendid uniforms: short-sleeved dark blue jerseys with steel gray numbers front and back, matching knee-length pants, with a gray stripe down each side; a white cord belt. Hard blue plastic helmets with a single, gray, front-to-back stripe, had single and double bar metal face masks and dark brown fitted chin-straps that were much sought after as souvenirs by the adoring moppets who flooded onto the field after games. Hard plastic, foam rubber and kapok pads composed the gladiatorial armor. White mid-calf socks matched the white laces of the freshly polished, cleat-soled, black shoes. They looked magnificent, noble, as they trooped down the dark ramp into the sultry, overcast daylight.

Inside the arena, 1,600 Rice students and dates were squeezed in tight with the blue and gray clad band, while hundreds of green and white costumed freshmen bowed to the blue and gray plastic owl, "Sammy," ceremoniously perched on the turf facing the field. The few, the proud, and this day...the *loud!*

There was no mistaking the Aggie section, either. A mosaic of khaki, interspersed with thousands of splotches of bright fall hues struck the eye in a kaleidoscope of color in the north end of the east stands. The gold of the brass trumpets, trombones, tubas, the glistening white of

drums, and the flashing silver of as many bugles, left no doubt as to the whereabouts of the Aggie band and their supporters, from the 50-yard line north, 40 rows deep, stretching halfway behind the north end zone, extending upward into the second deck. They were an impressive, noisy presence, representing well the nation's number one ranked team.

Blue and gray crepe adorned the south goalposts, maroon and white, the north. The soft green Bermuda carpet showed the wear of earlier games. White chalk lines and small red flags bound and measured the field and goal lines.

An ovation like they'd never heard before met the blue-clad Owls as they trotted onto the field first. They felt like they were a foot off the ground. There had never been a moment like it in their football lives. A rousing cheer greeted Jess Neely as he strolled onto the sunken stadium floor.

After about five minutes, the noise level lifted again, first like the sound of a roaring train, then like the thunder of a thousand storms. It rose from the northeast stands, then from the entire assembled throng, as the maroon and white clad Aggie football team emerged from the ramp, making another grand entrance into Rice Stadium.

They were a numerically smallish squad. They moved slowly, effortlessly past the Rice team and student section, ignoring both. The Aggies' white uniforms bulged with pads and muscle. They were huge.

Then, through the tumult of the Aggie welcome, there was suddenly heard the chant of the Rice students: "KILL CROW!, KILL CROW!, KILL CROW!" Loud. Louder than this group of students had ever yelled, amazingly audible over the Aggie din. Crow epitomized the enemy. He was the heart, mind, soul of the Aggie team; he was the roadblock, the Goliath who must be slain, the personification of evil who had to be destroyed. If the Aggies noted a volume they'd not heard from this group before, they didn't show it. They moved nonchalantly to the north end of the field for their warm-ups.

They'd been there before. They'd heard it all. Just like the old gunfighter in the west. The upstart Owls were standing in the middle of the street, calling them out for one more showdown. They'd have to be taught a lesson. The white-clad villains tightened their gun belts, adjusted their hats, and strolled through the swinging door into the blaze of the mid-afternoon sun.

And a few steps behind came the Aggies' paladin, their creator, their coach, Bear Bryant. Hat brim pulled low, tie loosened, white shirt unbuttoned at the collar, jacket open, grim, unperturbed by the uproar that met his

entry, Bryant strolled in the footsteps of his team, between the derisive Rice students and their team, towards the tumultuous welcome of his adoring, worshipping followers.

## The Game

Then the warm-up was over and the teams trooped up the ramp for their last minute instructions. Then they were back on the field, entering to earth shaking ovations. Then Hill, Gorges, and Whitmire were at mid-field, shaking hands with Crow and Krueger, the Aggie co-captains. The official was about to flip the coin when the Aggie band began to play and the khaki mosaic began to sing the moving "Spirit of Aggieland." Krueger and Crow doffed their helmets, followed by Hill and Whitmire. Gorges's head remained covered as he listened, jaw taut, eyes ablaze, fists clenched. He'd pay this foe no homage, nor temper his hate one whit. When Bryant had recruited Matt he'd told him that if he wanted to be on a championship team, he would choose A&M. If not, he ought to go to Rice. Gorges had chosen Rice, but if the Aggies thought they were champions, they'd have to prove it today.

As the last strains were rolling down, when the last "...Fight, Fight, Fight...Farmers, Farmers, Fight, Haaa!" had died to a mere rumble, the small Rice band struck up "Rice's Honor," and every student sang as loud as he or she had ever sung. Gorges's helmet was in his hand. He stood at attention. His lips moved softly. Alumni in the stands and Houstonians who had adopted Rice as their school joined in to produce a volume and strength to the anthem that has never been equaled. Tears glistened in the eyes of a few who realized the intensity and depth of the unified commitment of students and student athletes that met in this moment.

The Aggies won the coin flip and elected to defend the south goal, with the 20 miles per hour wind at their backs. Cheers from Rice—they'd get the ball first.

Then the teams lined up, and it all seemed to have developed so quickly, after building for so long. Four long years were winding down; a 10-game season was 70 percent done. An electrifying week was fused in a Saturday meeting; a highly charged morning had become an explosive afternoon. Seventy-two thousand people were on their feet, roaring. The referee's whistle blew, though no one heard it; his arm descended. Lloyd Taylor advanced toward the ball, kicking it end-over-end, floating northward, high in the breeze. The giants in white charged. The underdogs in blue grouped toward the center of the field, then threw themselves into the charging white mass. Bodies went flying. After a

respectable return, the receiver disappeared beneath an avalanche of white.

Rice put the ball in play in front of the noisy Aggie fans, but the clamor didn't seem to bother them. The Aggie team seemed troubled by the unbalanced line, but held as Rice played very conservatively. After several exchanges of punts, the Aggies mounted a drive to the Rice 35-yard line, relying on the sharp passing of back-up quarterback, Charley Milstead. As the Ags were exhorted by their partisans to go for a touchdown, the Rice students urged: "HOLD THAT LINE! HOLD THAT LINE!"

Milstead faded to pass again. He threw toward the Rice goal line, a beautiful spiral. At the last moment King Hill cut in front of the intended receiver, leaped, grabbed the ball surely at the Rice nine-yard line, and returned the interception to the twenty-one. The stands erupted.

The Rice first ("Gold") team headed to the sideline for a well-earned rest, and the second ("White") unit came in with Frank Ryan at the helm and three speed merchants, senior David Kelley, sophomores Gordon Speer and Sonny Searcy, in the backfield. Ryan masterminded an historic drive.

Kelley hit the line twice, gaining seven yards. Then Ryan faked a hand-off and rolled wide, eluding the end and scrambling for 16 yards and a first down at the Rice forty-three. The Rice stands went wild: "GO RICE GO!" The White unit was gouging out huge swaths of yardage against the number one team in the country!

Kelley hit the left side for four. Then Ryan pitched left to Searcy, and the speedster from Fort Worth raced wide for 12 yards. First down at the Aggie 41-yard line! Now the action was in front of the Rice students and they really let loose, quieting when the team reached the line of scrimmage. Chilton came in for Kelley who had suffered a deep cut on his face, and was tackled for a one-yard loss trying to run into the heart of the Aggie defense. Quiet in the Rice stands—joy in the Corps seats. On second down Ryan faked to Chilton and pitched to Speer, a 9.8 sprinter who cleared the vaunted Aggie left side, turned up field and sped for 16 yards before being knocked out of bounds at the A&M 26-yard line.

"GO! GO! GO!" thundered the Owl partisans, and go they did. The pitches to the outside had spread the Aggie middle, so Ryan handed the ball to the hard charging Chilton, who quickly burst up the middle past precision blocking. Crow made the touchdown-saving tackle, after a gain of 15 yards. First and 10 at the Aggie 11-yard line!

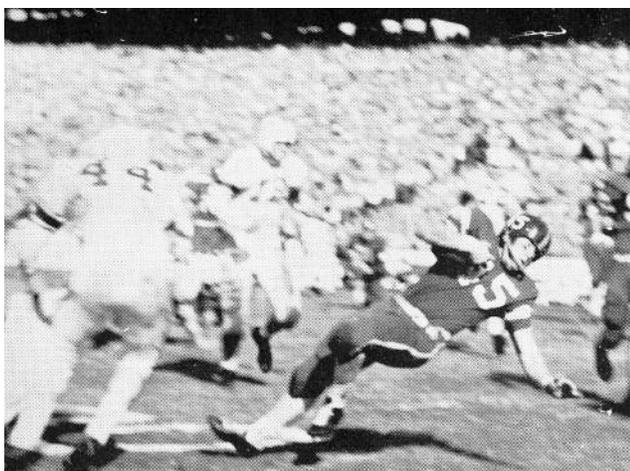
"WE WANT A TOUCHDOWN! WE WANT A TOUCHDOWN!" screamed the mob. Freshmen salaamed their blue and gray idol. Ryan barked the

signals, took the snap; Chilton leapt toward the middle of the line; Ryan stepped to his left, held out the ball, faking to Chilton who smacked into the regrouped Aggies' midsection; Ryan tucked the ball under his left arm, eluded defensive end, John Tracy, and headed into the secondary. Up came Crow, but a Ryan stiff-arm left the all-American sprawled on the turf. Ryan drove for the double stripes of the goal line, lunging, stumbling. He passed the five-yard line, leaning forward, reaching out with the ball as he dove for the end zone. The ball CAME LOOSE and bounced around the one-yard line. It lay there, a brown oval on a field of green, for an eternity—a fraction of a second. From a flock of blue-clad players, Lester Veltman, J.D. Smith and other blue-clad warriors pounced. Rice's ball! Pandemonium! Arguably, Ryan may have held the ball across the goal line before his knee hit the turf, but the referee marked the ball at the one-yard line, second down, inches to go for a first down; a yard to go for a touchdown, as time ran out ending the first quarter.

As the tired Aggies headed to defend the north goal, King Hill came back into the game. Ryan received a standing ovation as he moved toward the bench. Neely had deliberated whether to remove Ryan, but decided he'd need Hill in the game to kick the extra point if Rice scored, and under prevailing limited substitution rules this made sense.

As Rice went to the line of scrimmage at the Aggie one-yard line, yell leaders called for the Corps to make some noise and the chorus came down, drowning out thought, obliterating signals being called by Hill as he hunched behind his giant center. Hill took the snap and gained a few inches with a sneak up the middle. First down!

"We're gonna do it! WE WANT A TOUCHDOWN! WE WANT A TOUCHDOWN!" Gillis led the team to



*Speer, about to hit the ground!*

the line of scrimmage. Hill bowed under. Gillis snapped the ball. It popped into the air! It hung there, head high for an eternal instant, as the lines surged. Gillis, Gusler, Knight, Cauley, Smith, Veltman, Miller, the entire Rice offensive line, drove forward, pushing the charging Aggies back toward the goal line. Hill juggled the brown oval, then clasped it against his steel gray number 26, and dug his cleats into the spongy turf. He dove over his spent linemen, over the prone Aggie defenders, into the end zone! TOUCHDOWN! The crescendo was deafening. Rice students in the stands were delirious; those on the field were elated.

Neither Neely nor Bryant betrayed any emotion. The Aggies on the field looked downcast. It was only the second time they'd been behind all year.

Since the teams had changed ends of the field for the second quarter, Hill's extra point try was with the wind. Bobby Williams took the perfect snap from center, placed the ball squarely on the hard flat tee, Hill kicked true and Rice led, 7-0. The band tuned up and the Rice students sang.

After the kickoff and an Aggie punt, Milstead intercepted a Hill pass near mid-field. The Maroon and White passed to the Rice eighteen but Gene Jones downed Aggie quarterback Roddy Osborn for a 13-yard loss at the Rice 28-yard line. On fourth and 21, A&M tried a fake field goal, Osborne passing to Crow near the 15-yard line. But Ryan knocked him out of bounds at the 12-yard line, short of a first down. Delirium!

The half ended with the score still 7-0. The Aggie band put on its usual fine halftime show and the Rice band sounded unusually good following them. Thirty minutes of football to go.

The heat and intense action had taken their toll on both squads. Rice's rested and successful White unit started the second half with Hill at quarterback because Ryan had reinjured his knee tackling Crow on the fake field goal play.

A clipping penalty on the kickoff put Rice on its own five-yard line. A short Hill punt against the 20-mile-per-hour wind gave the Aggies excellent field position on the Rice 37-yard line. The Aggies drive was stopped by Chilton's jarring tackle of Crow at the Rice 16-yard line, a yard short of a first down. Another promising A&M drive came a cropper when Gillis knocked the ball loose from McClelland, recovering it at the Rice 11-yard line. Rice was holding on, but barely, as shadows edged across the field.

Relentless Aggie pressure finally paid off. On third down, Hoelscher was hit, fumbled, and the Aggies recovered at the Rice 14-yard line. The Aggie band played—the Corps roared—was the Aggie express train

getting back on the track? Three plays right in front of the khaki mosaic yielded eight yards. Could Rice hold again? Fourth and two at the six. Osborn slid to his right, faked a handoff up the middle, and bolted four yards to the Rice two-yard line. First down!

“HOLD THAT LINE! HOLD THAT LINE!”

Quarterback Osborn carried, once, twice, thrice. Rice held. The Aggies were still inches short of the goal line as the third quarter ended. The fourth down attempt would be made right in front of the Rice student section. They rose to exhort their tired blue-clad champions for one more valiant effort. But the number one team had its pride and courage too and this time Osborn's plunge was



*Owls on the Run*

good enough, though barely. Rice 7—A & M 6, try for point still to come. 14:58 to play in the game.

Intriguingly, the Aggie touchdown came right after a change of goals, just as Rice's had, but the Aggie try for point would be against the 20 mile per hour south breeze. Taylor stepped back to kick. He'd been automatic all year. The snap was on target, Osborn neatly placed the ball on the tee. Taylor's leg traced its familiar arc, swung through. The ball took off, spinning end-over-end, sailing, leaning, to the right! It's WIDE! “HE MISSED IT! HE MISSED IT!” The score remained 7-6.

Rice fans couldn't believe it. The Aggies couldn't believe it. Taylor couldn't believe it. He shook his head, looked down, looked at the 18½ foot span he'd just missed, then turned and trotted back up field for the kickoff. Bryant looked at the ground. Neely looked at the ground, then to his team. Rice freshmen salaamed their plastic idol.

Taylor, still shook from the missed extra point, twice failed to keep his kickoff in the field of play, giving Rice the ball on the 50-yard line. Buoyed by their good fortune and greatly aided by good field position, Ken and

Bobby Williams alternated with Chilton, gouging out yardage on the ground and minutes on the clock. But the drive for an insurance tally ended at the Aggie five-yard line when a fourth down pass from Hill to Ken Williams was broken up in the end zone by Lloyd Taylor.

With less than 10 minutes to go in the game, the Aggies again began to grind out yardage in small chunks. They had reached their own 40-yard line when lightning struck...again. Second team end Lester Veltman applied a crunching tackle to the much larger Crow and Crow coughed up the football, recovered by Ryan, who reinjured his knee on the play.

In came Hill to direct the team but several running plays gained little as the Aggie defense stiffened. As Hill dropped back to punt, the clock showed just over four minutes left in the game. He aimed for the left sideline. The kick was a high arching spiral that landed inside the 10-yard line, rolled end over end, bouncing to the left and toward the goal line, at last rolling out of bounds at the ONE FOOT LINE! The clock was stopped with 4:06 to go in the game.

Surely the Aggie fate was sealed with that mammoth, magnificent punt. Surely no additional fortitude or heroics would be required of the gallant Rice 11, this afternoon. Surely the Aggies would realize the game was lost, would surrender, admit defeat. But they didn't.

They remembered their own heroics of two years ago and tried for another miracle. The seniors knew this would be their last shot at the national championship they had signed on to win, four short years ago. The others knew that if the rumors about Bryant leaving were true, it would be their last chance too. So the Aggies weren't dead and they hadn't given up hope.

For Rice, whose minions had withstood so many assaults this day, it must have seemed that surely after four years of coming up empty against this maroon and white adversary, victory would at last be theirs. They had passed every test so far, but Rice's courage, determination, and heart would have to submit to one more, awesome, final examination.

Beginning at the one foot line, three Aggie tries netted only nine yards. Fourth and one at the Aggie 10-yard line. The Aggies had to go for it. Seven men in blue were nose up on seven men in white, with two Rice defenders wide to either side, just two defensive backs; the nine man front that had been so successful all day, that had contained the dangerous running game of Bear Bryant's hard nosed team. Rice's victory seemed so close. Just hold them one more down.

The Aggies gave the ball to Crow, of course, and their meal ticket thrust at the line with every ounce of his strength, every fiber of his young being insisting that

the first down would not be denied. He smashed into the open! Cutting to the outside, he headed up field with no one in front of him. As a roar filled the autumn air it looked for an instant, several instants, like he might go all the way. But, once again, there was King Hill, eluding a block, angling in, surely, securely, to make a game-saving tackle at the Aggie 31-yard line. Groans amidst the cheers from the Aggies; sighs of relief from the Rice faithful.

First and ten. Near the A&M bench, a player in a clean white uniform pulled on his helmet, received an encouraging slap on the rear from Bryant, and trotted purposefully to the waiting Aggie huddle. He was greeted by an avalanche of thunder from the khaki mosaic. It was Jimmy Wright, passing hero of the 1955 game. *Déjà vu.*

Everyone, including the Rice players, knew that with less than two minutes to go, Wright was in the game to throw passes—to move the football into scoring range—to pull out the victory as he'd done before—the victory that the Aggie ground game had not been able to secure this day; that the Rice defense had thus far thwarted. This was Rice's opportunity to wilt, to fold, to cave in. For mortals can't prevent miracles and everyone knew that Wright was the miracle worker himself. Gulp! Sinking feelings in the stands gave way to encouragement: "HOLD THAT LINE! HOLD THAT LINE!" The noise was overpowering, rolling in from all sides, echoing, rebounding, crashing. But it was lifting too, bringing out in both teams the extra measure of adrenalin, the special tolerance to fatigue and pain they would need to endure the final scenes of this already epic contest.

Wright's first pass was complete to Tracy for an eleven-yard gain to the 42-yard line. Then he crossed up everyone and ran the ball for a gain of six, to the Rice 48-yard line. Gillis pounded him out of bounds with 1:27 to go. Then it was Wright throwing complete to Taylor. Hill smacked him, but he broke free, racing down the sideline, losing his balance and stumbling to the Rice 23-yard line, a gain of 25 yards. Bedlam in the Aggie section. The clock ticked on.

The Rice cheers were to "HOLD 'EM OWLS, HOLD 'EM! HOLD 'EM OWLS, HOLD 'EM!" There was no sanity in the stadium except in the two huddles of players on the field, and, of course, the two stolid coaches on the sideline. There was terror in the Rice hearts. Would lightning strike twice?



*Rice's victory over Texas A&M, 1957*

Wright passed again. Incomplete. The clock stopped. Rice declined a procedure penalty even though the Aggies appeared to be in field goal range. "HOLD THAT LINE!" thundered the Owl student body.

Second down. Wright faded back to pass. Receivers sprinted goalward. Then suddenly Matt Gorges' blue jersey broke through the line of Aggie blockers; down on his knees, crawling, then up, lunging at Wright. Wright ducked, but Gorges came down on top of him, smothering him for a 12-yard loss! Out of field goal range, less than a minute to go, the clock ticking away the seconds, the Aggies moved slowly into their huddle. Pandemonium!

The Aggies were still in the huddle...still in the huddle...clock moving...time running out...finally they were at the line of scrimmage. Less than 30 seconds to go. Wright called signals, took the snap, pitched to Taylor, running to the left. He sped past the line of scrimmage, inside the thirty, inside the 25-yard line. There he was met solidly by Hill, and buried under a host of blue jerseys. He came down near the sideline, but in bounds. The clock continued to run. The Aggies were out of time-outs. Fifteen seconds...14, 13, 12...the blue jerseys slowly unplied off Taylor...11, 10, 9...the Aggies were trying to regroup, to line up. Linemen back up field were scrambling toward the new line of scrimmage. Now the Rice partisans were screaming, shouting... "EIGHT, SEVEN, SIX"... Wright was still not under center, the center wasn't over the ball... "We're gonna win!" "FIVE, FOUR"... Krueger was shouting, "Hurry up, line up!" but he was too late. "THREE, TWO, ONE... IT'S ALL OVER! IT'S ALL OVER! WE DID IT! WE DID IT!"

The officials ran in, but Matt Gorges had already claimed the game ball, for Rice. There was unbounded joy in the Rice stands. Students were hugging each other,

leaping in the air, making their way onto the playing field to swarm their winning team, to hoist their heroes on their shoulders, just as the players were lifting coaches Neely and Davis on theirs. The players on the field were jumping in the air, too. Bear Bryant made his way to midfield where he graciously shook hands with Jess Neely.

The white-clad Aggies, their uniforms bearing the soil and grass stains of Rice stadium, the sweat of combat in Houston humidity, the blood of scrapes with the upstarts in blue, walked slowly, heads down, back into the black gloomy tunnel and up the lonely ramp.

The Rice team members carried Neely and Davis on their shoulders into the happy tunnel, where they skipped up the joyous ramp, to the steamy dressing room where incredulous sportswriters were gathering to assemble the quotes for their stories—the story for this and for many years in the Southwest Conference.



While the Rice players gave their interviews in the sweltering din of the locker room, the Rice students and band made their way around to the stadium's south entrance and patiently awaited their heroes in the fast fading daylight.

The losing Aggie team finished showering and dressing first and began to file silently past the Rice partisans, their dreams of a national championship left glimmering on the soft turf of Rice stadium. The suddenly quiet Rice students offered no remarks, taunts, or wise cracks, allowing the Aggie players to leave with dignity and respect.

As the Rice team emerged each member was greeted with loud, sustained, hearty cheers. The loudest were reserved for the tough, gutty linemen who had performed so brilliantly, and, of course, for Hill.

Rice's heroes were many but basically it was a team effort that had won the victory. Six backs had gained 10 yards or more. Rice hitting had caused six Aggie fumbles. Gene Jones was credited with 11 tackles; Gillis with 10; and Dial, Whitmire and Gusler with nine each. Ryan's first quarter leadership had moved the Owls 75 yards to the lip of the cup in their touchdown drive. He had reinjured his fragile knee twice, on vital defensive plays.

King Hill had clinched all-American honors with his performance that day. He played 45 minutes; scored the Rice touchdown; kicked the winning extra point; intercepted two passes, one at the Rice nine-yard line; punted the ball out of bounds at the one-foot line to put the Aggies almost the entire length of the field away from the goal line with just over four minutes to go; then

tackled Crow when it appeared that he might break away for the winning touchdown; and tackled Taylor on the game's last play.

Hill was magnanimous in victory: "Crow, Osborn, and Krueger are all they say. They're great. But it was our line that brought us through." He added: "Don't forget to say something about the Rice students. They had a lot to do with the way we played. They were behind us all the way this week."

Neely confirmed this sentiment: "The boys won this one for the student body."

Homer Norton, a *Post* columnist who had been coach of the 1939 Aggie national champions said: "The Rice Owls demonstrated before 72,000 witnesses that there is no slide rule with which to measure heart, for that is what achieved Rice's 7-6 triumph Saturday."

## Epilogue

On Monday, the Rice students revived an old tradition, staging a lock-out, and declaring a school holiday. A noon pep rally boosted the team in its final push for the championship.

Victories over TCU and Baylor, coupled with Texas' Thanksgiving Day upset of A&M, clinched the conference crown and Cotton Bowl berth for the Owls, who wound up the year ranked eighth in the country.

When the Rice team returned to Houston after beating TCU, several hundred of their fellow students met them at the airport. A grinning(!) Jess Neely commented that that was the first time in all his years at Rice that he could remember such a greeting. Hill commented once again, "And the student body is sure behind us. They gave us a big boost when we had that mid-season slump."

At the end of the season, the team leaders met to award the game ball for each of Rice's seven victories. In a matchless gesture of unity and comradeship, the captains awarded the A&M game ball to the Rice student body.

Rice played Navy in the 1958 Cotton Bowl but was not able to regain its November form. The Midshipmen prevailed 20-7.

And then? Well, 1,600 students, including 36 football players, finished their Rice education and got on with the business of living their lives. Hill, Ryan, Gillis, J.D. Smith, and Buddy Dial were all successful in professional football, Ryan leading the Cleveland Browns to an NFL Championship in 1964. Gorges and Whitmire pursued careers in business and science, respectively. Jess Neely coached nine more teams at Rice before "retiring" to the position of Athletic Director at Vanderbilt University.

And after the Texas game, Bear Bryant confirmed the rumor about Alabama, saying he, "heard his mother

calling for help,” and accepted the head coaching job at his alma mater.

There is no song or poem to commemorate or praise the spirit on the Rice campus during November of 1957, that so inspired the play of the Owl football team. Nor to praise the “heart” of a football team that so inspired the student body. That spirit generated cohesiveness and unity. It brought committed involvement to a group of men and women who, perhaps, had previously been too cautious in their enthusiasm; too reserved in their support; too afraid of risking their feelings too freely, of daring to care too much.

That spirit and heart helped 1,600 students at times out-yell the legendary cheering section of a school with an enrollment of over 10,000. That spirit and heart helped a dedicated group of athletes and coaches defeat the number one ranked team in the nation.

Even the skeptical editor of the *Rice Thresher* paid homage to it in his November 22, 1957 editorial. “... We never believed much in school spirit until we saw it work last Saturday. Now we know what it can do.”

In 1981, Matt Gorges was asked if he remembered the week of the 1957 Aggie-Rice game. “Like it was yesterday,” was his instant reply. “It was unbelievable,” he continued, “For a fleeting moment, Rice captured a school spirit that had never existed until that moment, either at Rice or anywhere else, as far as I know. And that hasn’t been approached anywhere since then.”

Where did it come from? Where did it go? The only thing certain is that for that shining moment there was a oneness between students on the athletic field and students in the stands that generated an energy and a power that were very special; as unique in its own right as the Blue and Gray victory it helped create. IT WAS FABULOUS!

## FROM THE ARCHIVES—Have you ever wondered?

By Alan Bath



*When Rice Institute became a university?*

It was in 1960. The Board of Governors approved the change in April and filed the new name, “William Marsh Rice University,” with the Texas Secretary of State, to be effective July 1, 1960.

*About the first women’s dorm?*

It was in 1951. Located, not on campus but at 1100 Banks Street, it provided 20 furnished apartments for use by out-of-town women students. Each apartment consisted of a living room, two bedrooms, and a dining room “to eliminate the expense and drudgery of eating all meals out.”

*When the Journal of Southern History came to Rice?*

It was in 1959. Publication of the *Journal*, the official publication of the Southern Historical Association, was transferred to Rice from the University of Kentucky. Dr. William H. Masterson, Professor of History, was the first editor, with Dr. Frank E. Vandiver as associate editor.

*When tuition was introduced?*

It was in 1965. In May, the Board of Governors announced that the undergraduate charge for students

entering in September would be \$1,200 per year. The move followed a successful, but hotly contested, court case to amend the Rice Charter to permit both the charging of tuition and the admission of black students.

*When college stoles were first worn at commencement?*

It was in 1961. Since each university decides what academic regalia its graduates wear, a committee of Rice college masters ordered stoles for degree candidates to be made in colors signifying their respective colleges. They were worn for the first time at the 48th commencement on June 3.

*When the “Friends of Fondren” was first formed?*

It was in 1950. The organization was created for those interested in the Fondren Library in the hope of securing gifts and donations for it. In October 1950 the first issue of *The Flyleaf*, containing news of the library and edited by Dr. Alan D. McKillop, head of the English Department, was published.

*When the statue of William Marsh Rice was first unveiled?*

It was in 1930—but you would never know it from *The Thresher*. More than 30 years later, on October 16, 1963, *The Thresher* admitted it had failed to note the statue’s dedication, which had taken place at the baccalaureate exercises in June 1930.