SPORTVIEW
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Cause and Effect

VIRGINIA TECH LINEBACKER Tom Shirley and two-three Gobbler linemen don’t know it, but they’re the cause for Southern Methodist University’s firing its coach, Hayden Fry, despite SMU’s 7-4 record for the past season, after a 4-7 record in 1971.

That deduction was made by the Nashville Banner’s Fred Russell, who says Fry was a victim of economics. The Mustangs play their home games in the Cotton Bowl (Dallas) which seats more than 72,000. Despite its best season in years, and with a squad dotted with sophomores. SMU averaged only about 25,000 in the Cotton Bowl.

SMU’s athletic treasury is not only depleted: there is a deficit of several hundred thousand dollars. According to Russell, Fry requested an increase in the deficit at the time the big-givers “down town” and university officials wanted to cut back in spending. Economy became a barrier between coach and employer.

Now go back to the afternoon of Sept. 30 and the SMU-Virginia Tech game at Lane Stadium. The Gobblers led the Mustangs, 13-10, with SMU on the Tech one facing a fourth down with only 13 seconds remaining on the clock. SMU quarterback John Blackburn elected to try for the winning touchdown himself, rather than hand the ball to his fine junior running back, Alvin Maxon. Blackburn was hit at the line of scrimmage by two or three Gobblers and then Shirley came up to hit the ball carrier and drive him back.

If, reasons Russell, SMU had scored on that final play of the game, the Mustangs would have wound up the season 8-and-3 instead of 7-and-4. An 8-3 record would have meant a bowl bid for SMU, providing a big piece of money to be applied against the huge athletic deficit. There would, then, never have been any question about Fry’s contract being renewed.

Ah, those big ifs. Half of a coach’s (life).