The Referee

By Bill Millsaps
Executive Sports Editor

As an itinerant sports writer, I have covered athletic events in some press boxes that are so bad as to be totally unworthy of the name. I have avoided writing about them in the certain knowledge that the general reader doesn’t give two cahoots about the trying conditions under which a reporter sometimes gets his information and writes his deathless prose.

Clint Murchison, who has made a little bit of money in oil, must have been in some awful press boxes, too. For without a doubt, when he spent $30 million to build Texas Stadium in Irving, Texas, he created the world’s greatest press area.

For starters, the box is enclosed and air-conditioned, with crowd noises piped in. At each place along press row is a Sony television set so writers can see instant replay of key action. All seats are high-backed, leather swivel chairs, the kind that carry the top price tag at Everett Waddey. Thick carpet? Naturally.

There are two spacious lounges, luxuriously appointed, and each has its own color television set. The food and drink are outstanding.

In addition, micro-skirted, maxi-endowed young ladies circulate around inquiring as to the needs of the various typewriter-toting wretches.

Fred Russell of the Nashville Banner once wrote a book entitled, “Bury Me In An Old Press Box.” They can inter me in the new one at Texas Stadium.

BILL PETERSON, coach of the woeful Houston Oilers, is fast acquiring a reputation as the National Football League’s Mr. Malaprop.

No wonder, if you believe the following story relayed by an ex-Oiler.

It seems that, late last season when the Oilers were bottoming out, Peterson found it necessary to deliver a stirring, pre-game pep talk. When he reached the peroration of his stem-winder, he raised his right fist and shouted, “In the words of that great American, Henry Patrick, let me live or kill me!”

GIL BRANDT, the Dallas Cowboys’ player personnel chief, remains very high on Virginian Larry Robinson, the rookie running back from Appomattox who “stuck” with the Cowboys despite no college football experience. “He’s a super,” said Brandt, “and he doesn’t yet know what he’s doing on the football field.” Brandt is even higher on Robinson as a human being. “I would not be surprised if Larry Robinson became the first black President of the United States,” Brandt said…Personal to S.W. of Richmond: Somebody used your name and your stationery to write me a letter that was a monument to illogic…Since its record is 0 and 4 it’s obvious that Virginia Tech has some pressing problems. None, however, are more serious than a defense that is remarkably porous against the run. SMU’s bag of 500 yards overland Saturday raised the Hokies’ rushing yield to 313 yards per game. And if SMU can get 500, what do you think Alabama is going to get when it meets the Hokies Oct. 27 at Tuscaloosa?…The next president of the University of Virginia, Dr. Frank Hereford, was sports editor of U.Va.’s student newspaper in 1948. He wrote a column entitled “Sideline Slants.” It’s always nice to see a sports writer make good…When William & Mary beat Virginia Tech, a very active U.Va. alumnus sent the W&M Educational Foundation his thanks and a check for $100. The contribution put the Tribe’s athletic fund raising effort past $100,000 for the year.

SMU HAS A 3-0 record, but the Mustangs haven’t proved very much in the process of getting it. All three victories have been achieved over teams—Santa Clara, Oregon State and Virginia Tech—that are collectively 0 and 10.

Except for the fact that it has won its first three games by shutouts, Richmond is pretty much in SMU’s boat. That may be the reason UR coach Frank Jones is avoiding giving his team the fulsome praise it may wind up deserving. Spider victims are collectively 2 and 9.

Both the Mustangs and the Spiders should, however, be well-tested this Saturday. SMU is home against unbeaten Missouri, and UR will play a decent Furman (3-1) team in Greenville, S.C.

The way it looks now, the game between Richmond and W&M (3-1) Nov. 17 in Williamsburg is THE game of the year in the Commonwealth. For certain it will be one of the best games ever staged between the two old rivals.

At the moment, there are plenty of seats remaining for that encounter. That situation will not endure for long if the Spiders and Indians continue to conquer.

As for crowd attractions, what if Richmond is still undefeated, untied and unscored-upon when it plays Oct. 20 at City Stadium against West Virginia and explosive Danny Buggs? Considering how excited this area gets about college football, a game like that might draw, oh, thirteen or fourteen thousand.

AND THEN THERE was the girl who was so ugly that Gwaltney kicked her out of their holding pens.