Economics Vs. Humiliation: State Teams Weigh the Cost

If you remember one rare week last fall when the Big 5 football schools went 5-0, you'll surely want to tune in this Saturday when the state's best teams go toe-to-toe.

The schedule confronting Virginia, Virginia Tech, VMI, William and Mary, and Richmond rivals like a who's who of college football.

Oddly, VMI has the best chance for a victory at Army, a team of yeesteryear.

But Virginia at Texas, William and Mary at Pittsburgh, Richmond at North Carolina and Virginia Tech opening its season at home-to-Texas A&M give little hope of victory.

Virginia Coach Dick Bestwick isn't happy at all with the schedule makers who chose to give the Longhorns their biggest game after they routed Boston College 44-0 Saturday.

While the odds look bad for William and Mary's Jim Root and Richmond's Jim Tait, they say it's good for college football in Virginia as it helps the state with other parts of the country.

Thalman isn't about to claim Army as being a Texas-type team, but his VMI squad faced Georgia Tech a few years ago when the Engineers were rated in the Top 20. And Thalman, like Tait and Root, feel games against the best are good for state football.

It is obvious that Virginia scheduled a game with Texas for revenue purposes. "You can never make enough money," said Bestwick, "to offset how a game like this will affect your program when you're trying to build.

"I see Navy playing Citadel Saturday and Connecticut this week. Their situation is like ours. We'd be better off to play Davidson or Furman at home. We'd make as much money.

Bestwick says that a game against Texas is one that can affect more than just this week's game to the Cavaliers. "A game against Texas can lose the next two or three games. That's what it can do," charged Bestwick. "It can put you in a bad state mentally and physically.

"We've got Florida and Georgia back-to-back and a game against Tennessee in the future. They are ridiculous. I don't mind a tough game once in awhile, but I'd rather it be against Penn State or someone nearer home.


Bob Tettlebaum

Bestwick is obviously thinking about the Longhorns trying to rack up a big score and impress the home fans. That might have happened in the rout of Boston College.

The old standard line of football being next to godliness at Texas doesn't even phase Bestwick.

"It's above godliness," said Bestwick. "They'll sell their soul for football. They do it all the time according to the Houston coach (Bill Yeomans) and Darrell Royal (former Texas coach and now the athletic director).

"There's more cheating going on in that conference, though I'm not saying Texas is cheating. But Root sees it differently, though he'll be playing a Pittsburgh team that is quite capable of humiliating the Indians.

"We (Root and Bestwick) don't see eye-to-eye on a lot of things," he said without offense.

"It's not out of line to play a football power every year or two. I think it's a great opportunity. Every kid dreams of playing in a big stadium no matter where he goes to school. This is one of those opportunities.

While North Carolina is an area team, Richmond later takes on Georgia. Two years ago the Spiders almost upset the Bull in Athens, Ga., losing 28-24.

"You're just kidding yourself if you don't play them," said Tait. "You have to play nationally ranked teams. We've played Navy, Maryland and Georgia and we still don't do things as they do them.

Tait indicates that this might be the reason football in Virginia trails that of other sections.

When I came here and East Carolina wanted to come into the Southern Conference, they felt that was a step up.

"After a while they (East Carolina) won in the Southern Conference so they knew what to do and went beyond that (by leaving the Southern as did Richmond). Now they've beaten North Carolina State and Duke on successive weekends.

Tait says he feels better when Tech plays Texas A&M, another Southwestern Conference school like Texas, fans from this state want to see Tech in different geographic areas and in the Top 20.

"We have to upgrade our schedules. We have to get better to play Texas.

Thalman agrees. "The Tech (Georgia) game was prestigious for us (in 1975). I've been in the same situation before as Coach Bestwick. It's a game we want to win.

"I've always regarded it as an opportunity. It's great for state schools to play the ones we are like this from good competition brings out the best in you."

While Army might not be in the Top 20, Thalman says, "To win a game like that would mean a lot to our total program."

Aside from the feelings on next week, the highlight of the first round of college football in the state was the place kicking of VMI's Craig Jones.

Root marvelled at the Jones made five straight field goals without any trouble in spite of all the kicks coming from between 35 and 50 yards away.

"We tried to recruit him," confessed the William and Mary coach about Jones, a Norfolk native.

"We had no idea how good he'd be. We took him in on scholarship because we couldn't give a kicker a whole one. I don't believe any other coaches would be honest if they said they didn't worry about how they felt on Craig in high school.

"I know I'd offer him a full scholarship today, but that's like being a Monday morning quarterback."

Root says Jones is the "best kicker I've ever seen as a player or a coach." That is quite a mouthful since Root played in high school and was one of the scholastic football hotbeds in J阐et area.

Injuries this past Saturday were at a minimum, William and Mary middle Kruise, who missed almost three quarters against the Keydets, is expected to be ready for Furman Saturday.

The real question of injuries will come Saturday when state football puts its reputation up against a good of teams.