

Mcneese football field upgraded nicely

Joe Kazmar, The Record Newspapers
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Absence may make the heart grow fonder, but for this Korner missing the McNeese State University Cowboys home football games for a season and one-half, we were in for a pleasant surprise when we decided to utilize our press credentials and go to the McNeese-Sam Houston State game Saturday night at Cowboy Stadium.

We reached our lofty perch at the top of the luxurious McNeese press box just in time to watch the three military skydivers land with the American flag and the game football on the gorgeous new artificial surface that was installed for last season.

Emblazoned on the southwest side of the gridiron was "Louis Bonnette Field" honoring the university's long-time sports information director who took over the job not too many years after our baseball playing days were over for the Cowboys in 1963. The center of the field has the McNeese logo.

Bonnette, who still handles most of the sports information chores, was his old personable self and seemed as happy as he was surprised to see us walk into the working press facility.

The action started off slowly enough between the two Southland Conference opponents but it certainly heated up quickly. The Cowboys' featured back and All-American candidate, senior Toddrick Pendland from Newton, was doing his thing early and already had 102 yards in the first period and four touchdowns shortly after halftime.

Saturday night's performance marked the 11th time Pendland has gotten 100 or more yards in a game for the Cowboys during his career.

Pendland, who rushed for 2,300 yards as a Newton High School junior, added 1,180 yards his senior year as an Eagle and was a finalist for the Willie Ray Smith offensive award after the 2005 season.

He immediately became instrumental in the McNeese offense, playing in all 11 games as a freshman in 2006 and in the Cowboy's 11-0 regular season in 2007. He became a force to be reckoned with last season when he rushed for McNeese single season record 1,431 yards on 219 carries, scoring 12 touchdowns and adding another three on pass receptions.

He has already bettered last year's touchdown number despite getting hurt in the fifth game of the season in the 16-13 loss to Stephen F. Austin Oct. 10 and missing the next game against Northwestern State and playing only in the first quarter of the Nicholls State game last week.

Pendland is closing in on the McNeese single-season record for touchdowns rushing of 18 shared by Buford Jordan in 1981 and Tony Citizen in 1998 and has exceeded the single season all touchdown school record of 19 set by Jessie Burton in 1998.

Pendland appeared to be at full strength Saturday night, helping the Pokes destroy the Bearkats 63-42 for their fourth straight win in the tight race for the automatic berth in the NCAA FCS playoffs that goes to the Southland Conference champion.

There was a four-team tie for the top spot in the SLC between McNeese, SFA, Southeastern Louisiana and Texas State and all four teams won last week, keeping the race tight.

Also starting for the Cowboys' defense at right cornerback was former West Orange-Stark defensive back and true freshman Seth Thomas, whose brother Earl plays safety for the undefeated Texas Longhorns and is being strongly considered for both All-America and the Jim Thorpe Award that goes to the nation's top defensive back.

Seth registered a sack of Sam Houston quarterback Blake Joseph on a cornerback blitz and played a solid game Saturday night. Seth is among seven Texans that start for the young McNeese defense, which has only one senior in the starting lineup.

Seth's best game came against Tulane Sept. 26 when he picked off a pair of Green Wave passes and was named the McNeese Team Player of the Week, the Southland Conference Player of the Week and was the College Sporting News' National Player of the Week.

Matt Viator was promoted to head coach of the Cowboys four games into the 2006 season and promptly went 6-2 the rest of the way, winning the Southland Conference crown and earning the Pokes a bid into the NCAA

0-2 the rest of the way, winning the Southern Conference crown and earning the Pokes a bid into the NCAA FCS championship tournament.

After an outstanding career (81-37) as a high school head coach at Vinton, Jennings and Sulphur, Viator joined the McNeese staff as the offensive coordinator in 1999 before taking over the head coaching position in 2006.

Since then he has posted an outstanding 31-9 record with the Cowboys and his teams have lost only seven regular-season games.

His offenses have led the league in scoring five times and the Cowboys have ranked among the national leaders in offense for seven of the past nine seasons and is regarded as one of the top Division I offensive minds.

The Cowboys will have to keep their offense clicking this week as they travel to San Marcos Saturday at 6 p.m. to battle Texas State, with the loser probably out of contention for the SLC title.

KWICKIES...The Texas state high school football playoffs begin this week with three Orange County teams earning berths. The West Orange-Stark Mustangs will once again meet Coldspring in the bi-district round with kickoff set for 7:30 p.m. Friday at Huffman. The winner will play Rockdale (8-2). The Bridge City Cardinals will be in action at Pasadena Memorial the same time Friday against Cleveland, with the winner taking on Caldwell (8-1).

Vidor plays Dayton 7:30 Saturday at Bowers Stadium on the Sam Houston State University campus in Huntsville. The winner meets the Lockhart vs. Waller winner in the next round.

For those of you who like to plan ahead---the Houston Astros open the 2010 major league baseball season at Minute Maid Park against the San Francisco Giants on Monday April 5 for a three-game series. They are off on Thursday and then remain at home with the NL Champion Philadelphia Phillies for the weekend before leaving for St. Louis for a night game Monday April 12 and day off and then two more games against the Cardinals.

If a person in Las Vegas bet on all 12 NFL games Sunday and took the underdog in each game, he or she would have won 10 of them, losing only the Atlanta-Washington and Detroit-Seattle games. The Redskins were getting 10 points and lost 31-17 and Detroit was getting 10 points and lost 32-20. Cincinnati, Tampa Bay, Arizona,

Tennessee, San Diego and our own Dallas Cowboys all won outright without the points.

Local NFL fans were treated to some great games Sunday on the tube as the Houston Texans hung in with the undefeated Indianapolis Colts until the bitter end when usually-reliable Kris Brown missed a 42-yard field goal as time expired that would have sent the game into overtime. But the Peyton Manning-led Colts survived 20-17. The undefeated New Orleans Saints overcame two early turnovers and Carolina's 17-3 lead to battle back and win 30-20 and raise their record to 8-0. At the same time the struggling New York Giants watched a 20-14 lead disappear as the San Diego Chargers scored with 21 seconds left and handed the Giants their fourth-straight loss 21-20. And our Dallas Cowboys used new-found hero Miles Austin's only reception of the game as the game-winning touchdown as the Pokes downed the Eagles 20-16 in Philadelphia Sunday night to take over sole possession of the NFC East Division.

JUST BETWEEN US...Nearby Delta Downs in Vinton quietly had a big horse racing program Friday night with \$1 million in purses offered on its 10 race program. It didn't get as much attention from racing fans as it did horse owners. We found a two-year old Kentucky-bred horse named Rule that is trained by Todd A Pletcher, who's had several horses entered in the Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont over the years. None of the tip sheets even mentioned Rule (6-1) in their picks, yet the horse not only won the one-mile Jean Lafitte Stakes race, but broke the Delta Downs track record of 1:37:52 set March 10, 2002 by better than one second.