

SMU: School for Scandal

Football, and its uncontrollable boosters, have blackened the reputation of Southern Methodist. Can the school overcome this shameful legacy?

They gathered 600 strong on the landscaped lawns of Southern Methodist University, brandishing their placards and chanting "Truth, truth, truth." By the militant standards of the '60s protest songs that were playing, last month's SMU teach-in might have seemed a trifle polite. Many of the posters confined themselves to such inflammatory statements as "Let people know we're a *real* school!" And, when one spellbinder did manage to exhort students to their feet, he was quickly outflanked by the leader of the Mustang Spirit Committee; after he reminded everybody that they'd promised the campus police they'd behave, the demonstrators respectfully sat down.

Still, by SMU's establishmentarian standards, it was a *helluva* revolutionary act. And if the demonstration somewhat resembled a football rally, well, that was entirely appropriate. Because it was football that finally roused these students from their normal complacency—specifically, the worst football scandal in the history of college sport. The SMU football program, with a rich legacy of great players and

winning seasons, had been caught upholding an even more celebrated, if less prideful, legacy. For a record seventh time since 1958, the National Collegiate Athletic Association had uncovered rule violations by SMU officials and alumni, this time involving payments of \$61,000 to 13 football players by an overzealous booster.

To make matters worse, these infractions came when SMU was already on probation. Stung by frequent charges that it is lax on policing violations, the NCAA responded in late February with one of the strongest weapons in its arsenal: for the first time, it imposed a "death penalty" on a school's football program. The action canceled SMU's entire 1987-1988 season, and all home games the next year; effectively, because of recruiting sanctions, it also meant that the program might be crippled for five years or more.

More bad news: The students had almost gotten used to that blow, as well as a fusillade of resignations: since the time the bad news started to break last fall, the school's president, athletic director and football coach had all quit. But then came the revelation that Bill Clements, the recently re-elected governor of Texas, had known about the improper payments to players and allowed them to continue while he was chairing the SMU Board of Governors. That bombshell infuriated even the most phlegmatic SMU students, and they rallied to press the Board of Governors, meeting nearby, to rid their school of scandal. "You begin not to trust what any of the leaders are saying," declared sophomore Victoria Clarke.

Just how did a scandal so wide occur at SMU, a prestigious liberal-arts school established 76 years ago by the Methodist Church? To under-

stand, you've first got to try to comprehend how important football is in Texas. This is a state where some high schools have more lavish sports facilities than many colleges. And this is a state where former governor Mark White was voted out of office—and replaced by none other than Clements—in part because White backed a law that required high-school athletes to pass their courses in order to play.

There's a saying in Texas that football is Friday-night religion. Caravans of fans will drive down the long, straight-arrow roads of West Texas, for example, to attend a high-school game 350 miles away. (It takes that much territory to get enough boys to field an 11-man team in the red dirt.) The eight Texas colleges in the Southwest Conference fight hard for local talent—and so do other Texas schools and out-of-state recruiters. Violations are not exactly unknown: Texas Christian and Texas Tech are now on probation, and the NCAA is investigating Houston, Texas A&M and the University of Texas, Austin as well.

Still, even among the roughneck competition, SMU stands out—and to understand that, you must grasp the power elitism of the place. Brochures will tell you that SMU is in Dallas, but the school actually is located in "the bubble," as they call the two small upper-crust communities of Highland Park and University Park. Completely surrounded by the city of Dallas, the Park cities are home for many of the most



Death penalty: NCAA's Bercut announces sanctions