

Red River Rivalry hinges on trash talk

Jimmy Burch

Knight Ridder Newspapers
(KRT)

AUSTIN, Texas — What we have here is a significant difference of opinion.

On one side of the Red River, Texas football coach Mack Brown gushes about the improvement of quarterback Chris Simms, who is prepared to make one of the defining starts in his college career when No. 3 Texas (5-0, 1-0) meets No. 2 Oklahoma (5-0, 1-0) at 2:30 p.m. Saturday at the Cotton Bowl.

On the other side of the river, Oklahoma coaches wonder how much of Simms' stellar completion percentage (56.1) and improved touchdowns-to-interceptions ratio (10-3) should be attributed to a schedule that has yet to see the Longhorns face an opponent with a winning record.

Asked to gauge Simms' progress since throwing four interceptions in last year's 14-3 loss to the Sooners, Oklahoma co-defensive coordinator Mike Stoops said: "It's hard to tell. They haven't seen a lot of quality defenses this season. A lot of pressure is reduced in those situations because (Simms) hasn't had to

force anything. When you play against good people, you're forced to try and make bigger plays when your running game isn't working."

"People wanted to comment that we weren't sincere, but we were."

Bob Stoops
Oklahoma coach

In Brown's estimation, Simms has more than acquitted himself during victories over five opponents with a combined record of 10-17. He cited a laundry list of areas where Simms is better in 2002, including leadership, judgment, mobility and mental toughness.

"He's only made one bad throw all year," Brown said, referring to a potential interception that was dropped by a Houston defender. "He's really stepped up his game in all areas."

Despite an enviable pass-efficiency rating (132) that places him 47th nationally among major-college quarterbacks, Simms knows he will never be judged by what he does against North Texas or Tulane. Not

after balancing 12 turnovers against one touchdown pass in his past three appearances against top-10 opponents (all losses).

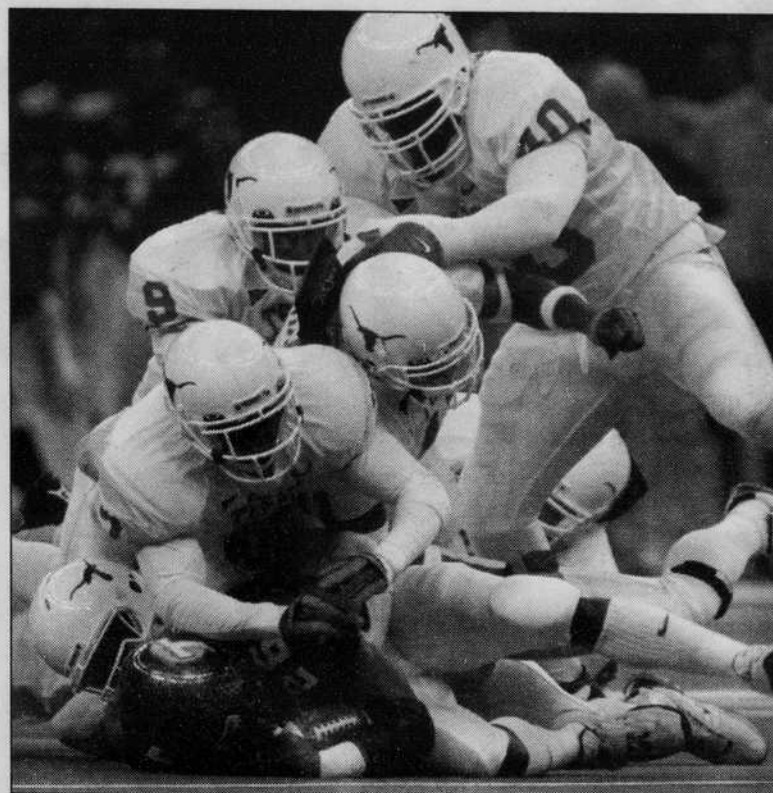
In many ways, Simms' legacy as a college quarterback figures to be shaped by what happens Saturday at the Cotton Bowl. The senior from Franklin Lakes, N.J., said Monday that he is ready for the scrutiny.

Color the Sooners skeptical. After offering pregame praise for Simms last season and having Brown dismiss it as possible gamesmanship, Oklahoma coaches are not tossing verbal bouquets this season.

Asked if Simms is less error-prone in 2002, Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops said: "That's hard to say. I never thought he was careless with the ball. ... Our comments (last year) that he was better went unnoticed. People wanted to comment that we weren't sincere, but we were. We don't lie. We say what we mean."

This time, the Sooners are saying Simms must prove it to them on the field.

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Michael Mulvey Dallas Morning News (KRT)

The Texas defense will hope to swarm the Oklahoma offense at the Cotton Bowl.

Texas Tech, Iowa State QB's face off in 'other' Big 12 battle

Keith Whitmire

The Dallas Morning News
(KRT)

DALLAS — The little border skirmish at the Cotton Bowl won't be the only battle of Big 12 heavy-weights Saturday.

The Texas-Oklahoma game will settle a lot of differences and have far-reaching consequences. So will the quarterback battle between Iowa State's Seneca Wallace and Texas Tech's Kliff Kingsbury.

Only one quarterback can come away a winner Saturday. Similarly, only one can ultimately carry the label of the best quarterback in the Big 12.

So far, Kingsbury and Wallace are making convincing arguments to be the first-team All-Big 12 quarterback.

Kingsbury is stereotyped as a "system" quarterback who puts up huge numbers because he throws so many passes. Wallace is labeled an "athletic" quarterback because he's capable of making plays with his feet as well as his arm.

Kingsbury's numbers are astounding, and they are only going to get bigger. He's thrown 22 touchdown passes when no one else in the Big 12 has more than 10.

He's passed for 2,134 yards in half a season. The next-best in the league is Wallace's 1,653.

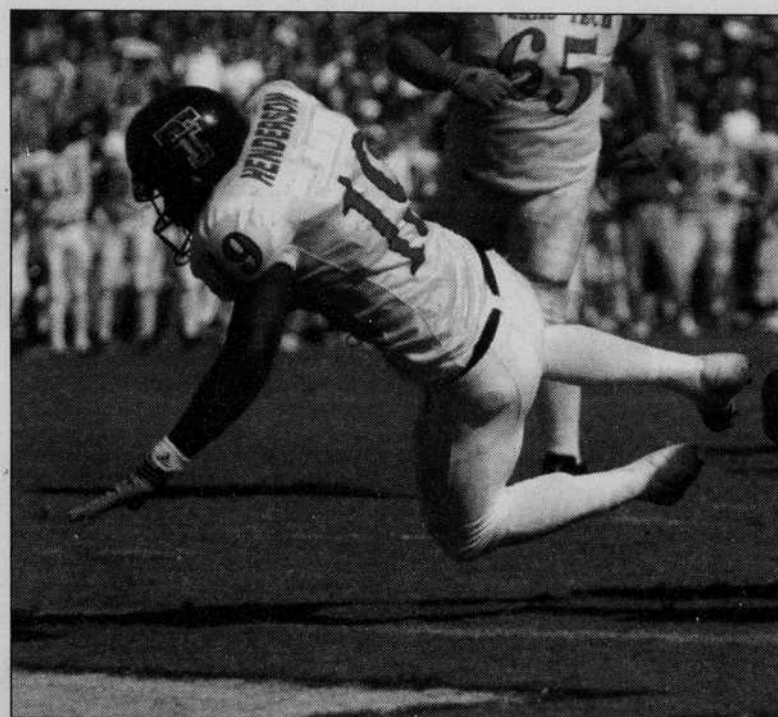
Wallace has rushed for 115 yards, but his own coach will tell you he could have much more if he wasn't always looking to make a jaw-dropping throw.

If the deciding factor is whose team is performing better, you might give a slight edge to Wallace. The only blemish on Iowa State's record is a 38-31 loss to Florida State. Wallace dazzled the Florida State defense as he nearly led the Cyclones to a huge upset.

More recently, Wallace led Iowa State to a historic win over longtime power Nebraska.

Kingsbury can boast of a win over Texas A&M at Kyle Field. He also led a furious comeback in an overtime loss to North Carolina State.

You could probably start a fight in certain parts of Ames, Iowa, or Lubbock if you said the wrong quarterback was better. Fortunately, Kingsbury and Wallace have a chance to settle the issue on the



Mitchell Mulvey Dallas Morning News (KRT)

Taurean Henderson and Texas Tech have a showdown with Iowa State on Saturday.

field when they meet Saturday at Iowa State.

No Big 12 coach is going to say publicly whether Kingsbury or Wallace is better, especially if they have to face either one. You can't even get them to choose which style of quarterback is tougher to face.

"You can probably count on a slow death one way or another," Kansas State coach Bill Snyder said.

One thing Snyder will take a stand on is the issue of Kingsbury being a "system" quarterback. Kingsbury doesn't have a rifle arm, and many of his passes are thrown either behind the line of scrimmage or just over it.

But Kingsbury's touch, accuracy and ability to find weaknesses in a defense more than make up for any shortcomings.

"I'm convinced that Kliff is a talented, talented guy," Snyder said. "Everybody can have a system, but you've got to have somebody to make it work."

Overlooking Kingsbury's skills because of all the dink passes he throws is the same as painting Wallace as an "athletic" quarterback because he can make plays on the run.

Just because Wallace can make

defenses look silly with his scrambling ability doesn't mean he's not an accomplished pocket passer.

Wallace is the Big 12's highest-rated quarterback with an efficiency rating of 158.2, eight points better than anyone else, including Kingsbury who's third at 147.8.

Wallace has attempted 129 fewer passes than Kingsbury, and his completion rate is 64 percent to Kingsbury's 67 percent.

And by the way, Sooner fans, Nate Hybl is rated the No. 2 quarterback in the Big 12, thanks to a 60 percent completion rate and no interceptions.

That all still leaves unanswered the question of who's better, and how you measure the difference. Maybe, like Kansas coach Mark Mangino said, it's better to put the issue aside for now and just appreciate both quarterbacks.

"Let me tell you this," Mangino said, "with both of those guys playing against each other, that will be a fan's delight."

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