
College Football Historical Society



By Rob Royce

©1990 College Football Historical Society

VOL. III, NO. III

MAY, 1990

'Swink Swirls On'

By Bernie McCarty

Pick your all-time Southwest conference backfield. Start with Sammy Baugh of Texas Christian and Doak Walker of Southern Methodist. Leave them off and you don't know what you're doing. The fun part is determining who to pair with Walker and Baugh from a roster of 50 genuine candidates dating back to almost the turn of the century. The conference featured wide-open play long before the "aerial circus" teams of the Thirties gained the southwest area national recognition.

This writer has favorite backfield performers he would like to see on somebody's all-time conference team. Joel Hunt and John Kimbrough of Texas A&M. Davey O'Brien of TCU who seems to be slipping into the "forgotten" class of old gridiron greats. Texas' Roosevelt Leaks, Earl Campbell and Bobby Layne. And the best of the defensive backs, Bobby Dillon of Texas and Arkansas' Clyde Scott. But then Baugh was their equal on defense. And Scott's national reputation was based on his blazing speed as a ball carrier. Name a squad of specialists who could actually operate as a unit on the field, and Baugh would top three categories: passer, punter and defender. And Walker would top no categories. Except as the conference's all-time handsomest glamor boy. Walker simply pulled remarkable stunts when it hurt the enemy the most.

Who was the conference's most explosive breakaway runner? This writer nominates Jim Swink of TCU. Swink was a three-year standout, 1954-1956. The 1954 Horned Frogs struggled to a 1-5 conference mark, but the potential was there, losing two games by one point and three others by a single touchdown. In 1956 TCU

finished second behind Texas A&M after losing 7-6 to the Aggies. Since A&M was ineligible, the Frogs went to the Cotton Bowl and nipped Syracuse and Jimmy Brown 28-27. This article reviews TCU's 1955 championship campaign, the year Swink earned the right to stand beside the most exciting runners ever to play the game, anywhere and anytime.



The headline danced across the page in giant block letters. "Swink Swirls On." The date was Nov. 12, 1955, and halfback Jim Swink had just completed the finest game of his brilliant junior season in TCU's 47-20 rout of Texas. No individual gridder, before or since, manhandled the Longhorns in quite the fashion Swink did that day. Four touchdown runs of one, 34, 57 and 62 yards; 235 yards rushing; two conversion kicks; and a key pass theft to thwart a Texas scoring threat. It was the performance that sealed Swink's claim to a berth on the all-time Southwest Conference team.

Swink was a cinch All-America choice in 1955 before the engagement with Texas. After the first six games of the season Dan Jenkins commented in the Sporting News, "Everyone has gone wild, simply wild over Jimmy (Home, James) Swink, the chauffeuring halfback from Texas Christian University who has lifted the Horned Frogs into national football prominence for the first time in 17 painful years. Setting grass fires from Lubbock to Miami, Swink helped coach Abe Martin's Frogs to their finest start since the national championship year of 1938." Swink "is being cheered as the most dramatic runner the conference has seen since SMU'S wonderful Doak Walker. Swink has the same Walker characteristic -- the ability to break for a long-gainer at any second."

After seven games, still before his monumental effort against Texas, The AP issued a feature article. "Football experts, in seeking to analyze Jim Swink's outstanding ability to carry a football, have reached agreement on one point: It's his great sense of balance. Steve Owen, the old pro coach who directs Baylor's defense, commented: 'He's simply one of those one-in-a-lifetime boys -- a runner with great balance and timing. One minute he's headed straight at you and the next minute he's gone. He's not exceptionally fast. He just instinctively fakes with every motion he makes.' Added to that, he's a top defensive player. He was credited with three 'saves' on Baylor passes Saturday."

Swink had plenty of talented support in 1955. Center Hugh Pitts was an All-America selection, and quarterback Chuck Curtis, tackle Norman Hamilton, and end Bryan Engram earned all-conference status.

Let's start at the beginning.

An "average" TCU club, expected to go nowhere in the Southwest loop, opened the season at home with a night game versus an "average" Kansas club. There was nothing average about the Frogs as they walloped Kansas 47-14. Swink reel-ed off 80 and 46-yard TD jaunts, the longer run busting the school record from scrimmage of 79 yards he had set the previous year.

Swink was no less potent the next week, scoring three touchdowns as the Frogs drubbed Border Conference champion Texas Tech (7-2-1) 32-0. His best TD dash covered 58 yards. "It was the most crushing defeat ever administered by TCU on its long-time football rival," reported AP. A solid Arkansas (5-4-1) outfit, the defending conference champ, was ready for Swink and friends Oct. 1. It didn't matter. NO long runs here by Swink, but he scored twice and teamed with halfback Ray Taylor to move TCU on the ground to a 26-0 victory.

Swink's reputation was cemented against winless Alabama. He was literally the

whole show in the 21-0 triumph, scoring all three TCU touchdowns in the second half and rushing 18 times for 139 yards. Swink's 65-yard scoring spurt broke the contest open early in the third period.

Texas A&M (7-2-1) jolted the Frogs 19-16. According to the AP, "The amazing part of the game was the way the fired-up Aggie linemen tore the TCU line apart. Before this game, it had been touted as possibly the greatest line in TCU history." Swink was "held" to 85 yards rushing and one TD when he "appeared out of nowhere in a jam of players to race six yards." The Frogs rebounded against rugged Miami (6-3) the following Friday at Miami. But just barely, 21-49. Swink scored on a nifty, twisting 24-yard pass reception, and shook loose for 59 yards to set up another touchdown.

Swink shattered TCU scoring and rushing season records as Baylor tumbled 28-6. He gained 158 yards in 14 carries and escaped for a typical 65-yard touchdown burst, running to the sideline, then skipping through a broken field. In his first seven games Swink earned 81 points, topping the old school mark of 79 set by Cy Leland in 1929. He wasn't the only TCU star. Curtis scored a pair of TD's, and Taylor raced 52 yards to the endzone. Two upsets occurred the same day. Arkansas tied Texas A&M 7-7, and Texas stopped SMU 19-18. Texas, next on TCU's schedule, would later stun the Aggies 21-6, handing the crown to the Frogs.

The Longhorns finished No. 3 in the conference with a 4-2 mark. They could have won the title by beating TCU, The UP noted, Swink "was a defensive hawk as well as one of the most brilliant runners ever seen in Memorial stadium. The 47 points was the largest point total ever made by a Southwest conference team against Texas." The Frogs picked up 523 total yards, also a record against the Longhorns. Curtis had his finest day in a TCU uniform, hurling touchdown passes of 36, 41 and 44 yards.

By now Swink was the moat feared runner in America and lowly Rice (2-7-1) geared its entire defense to atop the TCU galloper. Swink still rushed for 66 yards, top figure in the game, and one TD. Bill Rives noted in the sporting News, "... the Owl's a concentration on Swink cost them dearly. Other fine backs took over the burden and TCU crushed Rice, 35 to 0."

Swink produced his beat clutch performance in the regular-season finale, a 20-13 win over SMU. Swink scooted 30 yards for TCU's initial TD, but otherwise had been held in check and the Mustangs entered the fourth quarter with a 13-6 lead. Swink suddenly dashed 62 yards to paydirt. Clipping wiped out the run, but the psychological damage had been done. "Until Swink ignited a laggard TCU with his unsuccessful 62-yard run, it had begun to look as if an inspired Southern Methodist team was going to stage another of the day's big upsets," stated the UP report. "The fourth quarter was virtually all Swink." In the tying Frog advance Swink accounted for 33 yards rushing, caught a 15-yard pass, and scored from the three. And he rushed for 39 yards in the winning TD march.

Mississippi (9-1) nipped the Frogs 14-13 in the Cotton Bowl, "despite one of All-America Jim Swink's finest games." The Rebels utilized an eight-man front, but couldn't control Swink who rushed for 107 yards and both TCU touchdowns. The loss of Curtis with an injury on the opening kickoff was the difference in the game. The Frogs had no passer to replace him.

If the reader is still unconvinced concerning this writer's nomination of Swink to a berth on the all-time Southwest Conference team, here are his rather impressive stats. Swink was the nation's leading scorer in 1955 with 20 TD's and five PAT's for 125 points. And he rushed 157 times for 1283 yards, averaging a spectacular 8.2 yards per carry. Swink was a unanimous All-America selection and finished second in the Heisman Trophy voting.