



NEW WAVE: ADDRESSING ATHLETICS

"It's not as hard to be a Tulane fan as some people think. It's entertainment. Those kids are trying as hard as they can and you've got to support them."

WALLY BORRIES, president, Ray Hester booster club president

"We've had a lot of lean times, but when the good times come around, that makes it more than with a good team that's always winning."

BRIAN ROBERT

"I wouldn't say attitudes about athletics here are not completely apathetic and they're not totally into it. It's somewhere in between. I think most people are pretty much cool with what we have, but it's not an overwhelming passion we have here. No offense to the football team but I didn't come here for it."

EMILY DADAKIS, editor, Hullabaloo

"It's pretty cool and there are lots of girls here."

ANDREW BERND, freshman, Tampa, Fla.



STAFF PHOTO BY MATT ROSE

"The level of interest in our community, especially our support base, has been dormant for decades. I think a lot of it ties back to the time we gave up our facility and with it a lot of deep passion and tradition."

RICK DICKSON, Tulane athletic director

Waning fan support tests Wave

TULANE, from D-5

total will only decline in future years.

And not all alums are sports minded.

"People don't come to Tulane for athletics," said Mac McCallom, a 1971 law school graduate. "You've got people who got to certain schools because they've got winning programs."

"I'm sure we don't attract those students."

Or, as Peter Katz, a current junior from New York puts it, "It wouldn't make any differ-

ence to me if we're in Division I or Division XII.

"I'm not interested in college football or any sport."

The school is making efforts to regain its "Streetcar Alumni," but it's a tough sell, given the competition for discretionary spending on sports, made even more so by the arrival of the NBA Hornets, but for other forms of entertainment as well.

A losing image in football doesn't help, nor does Tulane's image as a school that is beyond the price range of many

local people.

"I have a nephew at Tulane and one of his friends there once asked me, 'Why do people in New Orleans hate Tulane?'" said Danny Brasseaux, a longtime local fan. "That was the impression he had gotten from people here in the city."

"People feel they can't afford to go to Tulane, so they don't bother to support Tulane. I don't think they know how much Tulane contributes to the community, and I don't know if that's ignorance or Tulane not doing a good PR job."

The indifference is discouraging to many, including the players, who notice that even Tulane students don't turn out in force for home games.

"That bothers me. It's always a topic of conversation among the players," said kicker Seth Marler. "You wonder why you go to class every day, you associate with them and then you turn around on Saturday and they're not there."

Israel, the board of directors member, said the lack of a fan base — and lack of support from what should be the Tu-

lane fan base — remains a major issue.

"One of our biggest problems is apathy among students as well as the people of New Orleans," Israel said. "That really hurts us and to me it's terribly puzzling and frustrating."

"I hear that about 30 I-A schools are increasing the size of their stadiums and here we are talking about getting smaller."

To associate athletic director Scott Sidwell, it's a matter of context.

"What standard are you

holding us to?" he asked. "An NFL team that sells out the Superdome? A program up the road (LSU) that is one of the top five nationally and fills its stadium?"

"Take us for what we are and put us in the right perspective. We're selling a product and our product is approximately 300 student athletes. That's what we are."

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Wave withdrawal from SEC, de-emphasis took team toll

HISTORY, from D-1

It was expected to be a battle of titans, witnessed by legendary sportswriter Grantland Rice and a horde of his brethren from all corners of America eager to tell the story of what was clearly the national game of the week.

Tulane coach Henry Frnka's No. 4-ranked Green Wave were taking aim at the No. 1 team in the country. Fighting Irish coach Frank Leahy saw — even feared — Tulane as a formidable obstacle to his team's 31-game unbeaten streak. The winner of that game was widely perceived to be the odds-on favorite to win the mythical national championship.

These were two of the premier college programs of the time. Notre Dame had been No. 1 the previous two seasons. Tulane, a power of the 1920s and 1930s, was in the midst of a major football resurgence.

Green Wave football also enjoyed what was in those days strong fan support, having led the Southeastern Conference in attendance in 1948 with an average of 37,058 fans per game. The team was coming off a 9-1 season and entered the game on the crest of 11 consecutive wins. The Sporting News had selected Tulane its pre-season choice for the national championship.

But it fell apart quickly for the 3-0 Green Wave. The Irish scored four touchdowns in its first four possessions on their way to a 46-7 victory. And the magnitude of that defeat, despite an eventual SEC championship and a 7-2-1 record, cost Tulane a Sugar Bowl berth.

There was no SEC tie-in during that period, and a season-ending 21-0 upset at the hands of arch-rival LSU gave the selection committee a reason to bypass conference champion Tulane. Runner-up LSU, which gained national attention by beating three conference champions and earning a No. 8 ranking with an 8-2 record, was the surprise pick.

"The Sugar Bowl was against taking Tulane because of its miserable loss to Notre Dame that season," said the late Hap Glaudi, then the sports editor of the New Orleans Item, and the successor and confidant of Sugar Bowl founder Fred Digby, in George Sweeney's history of the Tulane football program. "But the Sugar Bowl was backed into a corner. Had Tulane won over LSU, the Greenies would have played Oklahoma instead of LSU." Green Wave athletic history likely was altered because Tulane didn't play a more competitive game against Notre Dame, didn't beat LSU, didn't finish the season ranked among the elite and didn't play in a major bowl. Had the Green Wave lived up to the expectations of a true national contender that season, the decision that most affected Tulane sports in the second half of the 20th Century —

a reigning in of athletics by university officials — may not ever have happened.

"Considering the popularity of the Green Wave at the time, and how good we had become on the field, that might have been difficult," said Ed Tunstall, who returned from World War II to go to school and work as Tulane's publicist and later became editor of The Times-Picayune.

Football first

Yet the seeds of Tulane's retrenchment were sown in the excesses of its success.

Tulane president Rufus Harris had long been an advocate of scaling back intercollegiate athletics. But he also hired Henry Frnka as Tulane's coach in 1946, and that brought in a major football upgrade. Respected national sportswriters considered Tulane under Frnka the epitome of a football factory. "Henry was a winner, and Henry really would do anything to win," Tunstall said.

In an era when there were no scholarship limits, Frnka typically carried close to 100 athletes on scholarship and tried to get in as many as 123. Those numbers were not unusual in the SEC, but they were high at a relatively small school such as Tulane, especially at a time when GI Bill benefits for World War II veterans were running out, leaving the university to pick up the difference.

Many of Frnka's athletes did not engage in the academic rigor Tulane wanted its students to pursue. According to the book, "Tulane: Evolution of a Modern University, 1945-1980," football players were often funneled into physical education, a curriculum that at Tulane required no academic major and allowed an exorbitant 50 hours of PE courses.

In 1951 Harris swung a heavy ax on the athletic department, slicing football grants-in-aid to 75, reducing staff and coaching salaries, and curtailing scouting activities. Physical education became a minor, and — for the rest of the decade — athletes were required to follow academic tracks leading to standard B.A. or B.S. degrees. Reformation may have been appropriate, but the extent of it set in motion events that would shape Green Wave athletics for the ensuing half-century. Over the next 14 years, the so-called period of de-emphasis produced just two winning seasons and got three coaches fired — excluding Frnka, who resigned shortly after Harris announced the new parameters.

Andy Pilney, an assistant under Frnka and head coach from 1954 to 1961, said the changes were impractical at a school that already had tougher admission requirements than most opponents.

"You had to be in the top half of your graduating class to even be considered for a scholar-

ship," he said. "It became ridiculous because the deans would turn down a boy who was in the middle of his class at a solid school academically, yet accept one at a school with a weak scholastic history because he was in the top half of his class. We would have to take these kids and some of them wouldn't make it in the classroom."

"Bob Whitman, one of my assistants, used to come into my office crying because we were losing players to other schools who wanted to come to Tulane, but couldn't meet the admission requirements. These same athletes were beating us."

"The thing is," said Whitman, who both played and coached at Tulane in that era, "some SEC teams like Georgia Tech and Ole Miss were recruiting twice the number of players we could, and then we were being asked to compete on an equal footing against them."

The cutback in scholarships left as few as 38 players on the varsity one year. "That would not have accounted for all the backs on some of Frnka's teams," sportswriter George Sweeney wrote.

Leaving the SEC

The cutbacks affected Tulane's ability to compete in the SEC and led to the most second-guessed decision in Tulane sports history: departing the conference of which the Green Wave had been a charter member.

During the period of athletic de-emphasis, 1952 to 1965, the Green Wave went 37-95-8, an average of 2.9 victories a season. It was even worse in the SEC, where Tulane was 16-71-5, a winning percentage of .185. Tulane produced just two first-team All-SEC athletes, halfback Tommy Mason in 1960 and linebacker Bill Goss in 1965.

From the late 1950s, there was growing talk that the Green Wave could no longer compete in the SEC.

A "Southern Ivy League" consisting of schools like Rice, Southern Methodist, Duke, Vanderbilt and Tulane was constantly advocated, but each of the other schools decided to stay in its league.

On June 1, 1966, Tulane withdrew from its athletic home of 35 years, ostensibly to play a national schedule against more like institutions. Some said Tulane could become the "Notre Dame of the South," an independent with the flexibility to meet quality opponents from all points of the college football map.

"That wasn't it at all," said Rix Yard, Tulane's athletic director at the time. "The purpose was to lighten the schedule. We had to have some relief on the field. Those were tough days. Remember we had an 0-10 season in 1962. I remember going to (then-SEC Commissioner) Bernie Moore and pleading to allow us to reduce our schedule. He wouldn't allow it."

So Tulane left the league, and for a while began to regularly play schools such as Stanford, Notre Dame and Michigan. The Wave had four winning seasons in the next eight after leaving the SEC, two each under former coaches Jim Pittman and Bennie Ellender.

Still, Pilney said in Sweeney's book, "I thought it was a mistake getting out of the SEC. You lose your identity as an independent. There's always that goal of shooting for the conference championship every year. It also makes scheduling in the minor sports very difficult."

It caused other problems in football. Tulane had no athletic port, no natural conference rivals, no share of television revenue. And of course, no one at the time envisioned the Bowl Championship Series, which pays millions of dollars each year to the top conferences, including the SEC. Vanderbilt, by comparison, never has won the SEC football crown, but each year cashes a multimillion-dollar check just for being in the league.

"Well, 20/20 hindsight is pretty good," said Yard, who said Tulane already was moving to leave the SEC when he came aboard in 1963. "I can't say it was a mistake because in those days conference membership wasn't what it is today, it wasn't lucrative, there was no real money in television. We had to lighten the schedule."

Perhaps the most telling statistic of Tulane football since it left the SEC is that four of six coaches who guided the Green Wave to bowl games then left for other jobs.

Saints march in

The dream of an NFL team in New Orleans and a domed stadium being built to house it came to fruition in 1966, further marginalizing Tulane football.

The announcement added direct competition to Tulane for the city's entertainment dollar, but it gave the Green Wave a windfall, since the Saints would rent Tulane Stadium for \$500,000 to \$600,000 a year until the new venue could be built. Ultimately, the Wave also would play in the new home, with a sweetheart lease and without the expenses of keeping up its own stadium.

New Coach Jim Pittman's first Green Wave team in 1966, the first season after the university officially discontinued de-emphasis, posted Tulane's first winning record in 10 years, 5-4-1. The excitement prompted an average attendance of 38,844 — buoyed greatly by 82,567 at the LSU game.

But the Saints were gearing up, and some at Tulane felt it was at the expense of attention that normally would have gone to the Green Wave.

"The impact of the Saints on Tulane football was tremendous," Yard said. "We had just gone through our first winning season in a long time, the players and coaches were recognized, and then the Saints came in and all of a sudden, we're the orphan on the street. All the publicity, all of the adulation went to the Saints. I think that was a blow to Pittman and more so to his players. They felt let down by all the attention given to the Saints."

It did not, however, affect attendance at Tulane football games. In the four years before the Saints' inaugural season of 1967, Tulane had an average attendance of 23,241. In the four seasons afterward, which also included one team

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