



**John Wilson**  
Chronicle staff

## UH has fared poorly in getting production from top blue chips

In the normal course of events Darrell Shepard would have been starting at quarterback for the University of Houston against Texas Saturday night. Lionel Wilson would have been a redshirt sophomore. That is the Bill Yeoman program: Red-shirt as a sophomore (the freshman year counts as one of your four years of eligibility regardless of whether you play or not) and finish up in your fifth year.

But sophomore Wilson is starting for Houston out of necessity. Injuries left Yeoman no alternative. And Shepard played Saturday for Oklahoma instead of Houston.

Mainly, Yeoman builds his program on high school players who are not the most highly recruited in the state. They are good athletes with much potential but they are not the ones who have 25 and 50 and 100 schools seeking their services. Only a few from the blue chip lists compiled by high school experts wind up at Houston.

But Shepard was an exception. My judgment and memory is that in UH's 36-year football history, the school successfully recruited only four widely heralded and unanimously acclaimed blue chip backs. They were Claude King, who came out of Mississippi in the mid-1950s; Warren McVea, who in the early 1960s at San Antonio was the most exciting high school player in Texas history; Jeff Bergeron of Port Neches-Groves, the outstanding running back in the state in 1972, and Shepard, a blue chip quarterback at Odessa in 1976.

King had a notable career at UH although he never fulfilled the dreams of Kingdom come. McVea went on to the pros and although there were some people who thought he did not achieve in college what his high school career

had promised, there are many factors to be evaluated. McVea was a key player on the teams that at long last broke Houston out of its bondage as a second tier team into one that commanded respect on the national level. Yeoman has said that if McVea was a failure he would like to have a lot of such failures every year. Bergeron left school in his freshman year and transferred to Stephen F. Austin. The reasons for his actions have been speculated about ever since, possibly even by himself. Shepard transferred to Oklahoma following one of the most unusual penalties in NCAA history.

In the spring of 1976, Shepard told Texas coach Fred Akers he was going to sign with the Longhorns. On the opening day for high school signings, Akers showed up at Shepard's house in Odessa with pen in hand. Shepard told Akers he had changed his mind and was signing with Houston.

It turned out to be a costly acquisition for Houston. The University of Texas was not going to take this sitting down. And make no mistake about it, Texas has the power to exert its influence in the NCAA, in the conference, in Houston, in Dallas, or wherever.

In Shepard's sophomore year at Houston, the Dallas Times-Herald published a story that a University of Houston assistant coach had told Shepard's mother about a certain bank where she may try to get a loan to buy Darrell a car. She had been turned down by the banks in Odessa (after Darrell had signed with Houston). That a member of the university had pointed her to the right bank was a violation of NCAA rules, the Dallas paper pointed out.

The NCAA investigated and Yeoman admitted UH's action just as he had to the Dallas reporter.

J. Neils Thompson of the University of Texas was the president of the NCAA that year. Law professor Dr. Charles Allen Wright of the University of Texas was one of the five members on the NCAA infractions committee. The NCAA does not divulge what goes on be-

hind closed doors, but a story widely circulated has it that Wright made the presentation and cast the deciding vote on a 3-2 decision for the penalty against Houston. The penalty was that Houston could not play in a bowl game that season and could not be on television the next year. As for Shepard, it was ruled he could never participate in a bowl game for Houston. Now, get that. He wasn't made ineligible for any time and there was no penalty against him at all unless he remained at Houston. And the unique part of the penalty was that he would be immediately eligible if he transferred to another school and would be able to play in a bowl game at any school to which he transferred.

Shepard transferred to Oklahoma. Yeoman said he couldn't blame him and made no attempt to talk him out of it. Texas had won its victory. As the little boy explained the moral of his story to the teacher: "It doesn't pay to mess with Roy Rogers."

About the same time, Texas had an almost identical situation, in which a Fort Worth high school player had a car financed by a Texas alumnus. No penalty was assessed to Texas, the player was sent away and the alumnus was told to sever relations with athletes but the story was essentially covered up. Then there came the reports (not from the sports pages but from the news pages) that Texas athletes had been paid to perform state jobs and had not even shown up for work. The university was allowed to investigate that itself, neither the Southwest Conference nor the NCAA choosing to get into it. You will be surprised to learn that the Texas investigation found that there had been no wrongdoing so far as athletics were concerned.

A non-NCAA related investigation of a banker in West Texas last year revealed that he had been paying excessive amounts for football tickets sold him by a Longhorn player. This is a clear violation of NCAA rules. So far as I know, there was little conference or NCAA interest in the incident.



Shepard