



Air Power: The Sooners at last have a passing game, providing balance to the offense. Most reliable was above Warmack-to-Hart combination.

A GOOD BEGINNING

Our astute football writer, after assiduously sifting through file cases full of statistical data, perusing the analysis written by the seers of the Norman, Oklahoma City, and Tulsa newspapers, studying thousands of feet of game film, viewing the Jim Mackenzie Show, querying the leading football experts of the Western world (most of whom, handily enough, live in Oklahoma), and meditating with the thoughtful pertinacity of an Oriental guru, has arrived at a few tenuous conclusions about Jim Mackenzie's first season. These he audaciously advances on pages 14 and 16. Complementing the text are a number of splendid photographs of the 1966 edition of the Sooners.

Photographed by J. P. Smith

If we hadn't have been quick,



Warmack (above with ball) proved himself at quarterback, showed signs of potential greatness.



Shotts (above) and Jackson were steady at tail; Hinton (below) at wing was often spectacular.



It's been a successful debut for Jim Mackenzie and company. The 1966 Sooners recovered from the worst season in school history (3-7 in '65), played better than anyone expected, and displayed unmistakable signs of strength which portend bright tomorrows. Going into the last two games of the season against Nebraska and OSU, the Sooners could finish no worse than 5-5, as high as 7-3.

Excepts for two bitterly close 3-point defeats by Colorado and Missouri, the nationally televised Nebraska game would have been for the Big Eight title. The Sooners were in every ball game except one, and they played with youthful exuberance and drive. Boners, the inevitable fruit of inexperience, cost them dearly at times, as did their size, or rather lack of size. The Sooners were smaller than every team they met, often impressively so—as a sports car is to a Detroit sedan—and this is a handicap that can only be overcome through quickness. If a small team isn't quick, it could be dead. Big football players tend to run right over small football players.

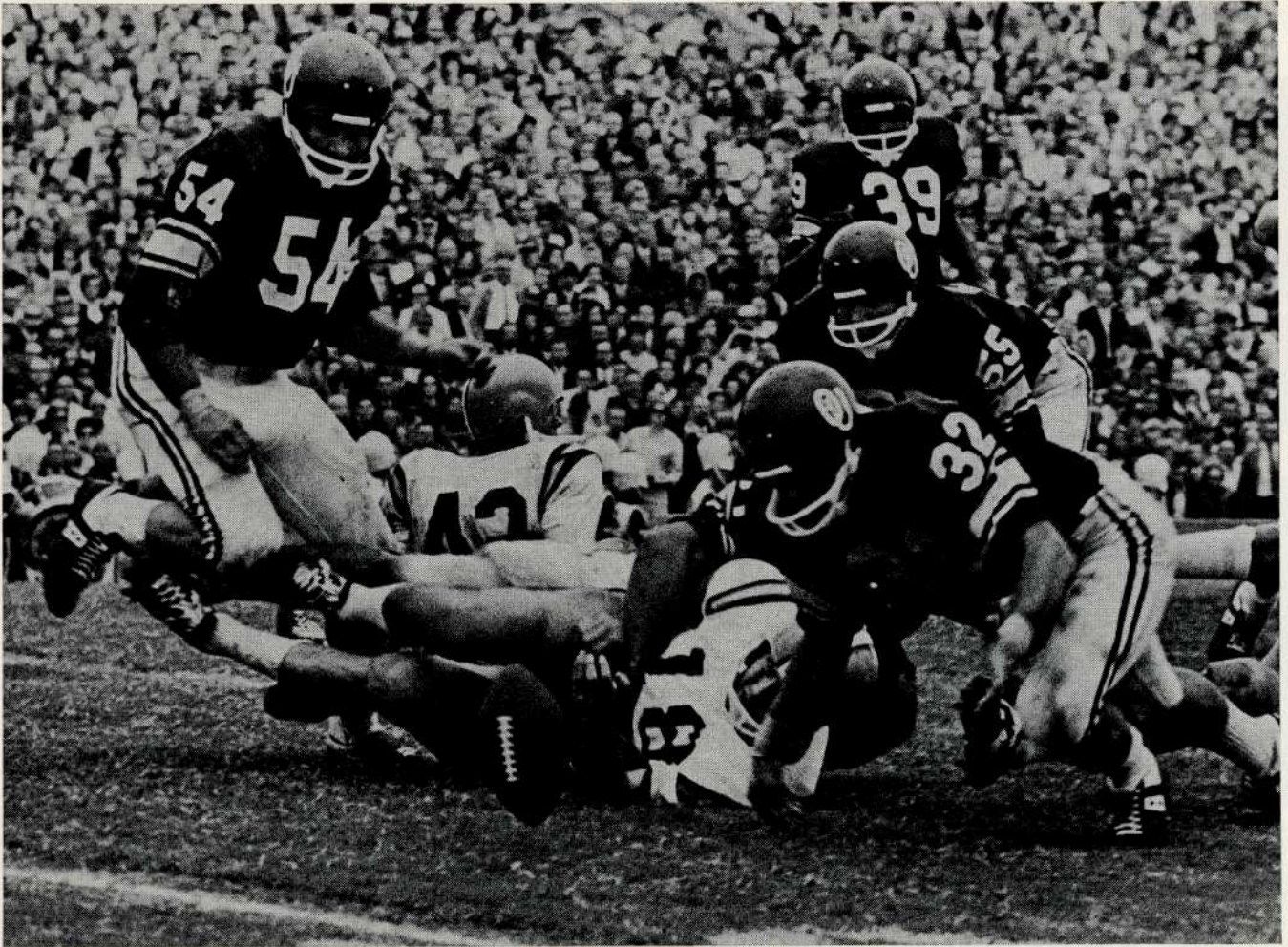
The Sooners worked hard at being quick, and they achieved an appreciable degree of agility, though Coach Mackenzie felt they could have been considerably more sudden. Says he: "We are not very big, we are not very strong, and we are not very quick. The opposing coaches tell their players all week before a game that we're quick to get them worried, so they naturally say in the dressing room after a game that we're quick. I don't feel we have much quickness in the line. If we are, we need to be a lot quicker."

Unfortunately, the Sooners were as inexperienced as they were small. Most of the newcomers were sophomores, though there were a number of upperclassmen who blossomed into regulars under Mackenzie and his assistants. Two seniors who heretofore had seen little action, Bobby Robinson and James Ray Jackson, ended their careers with strong performances. The gutsy 175-pound Robinson played his defensive end position with skillful abandon, and the fleet Jackson was the team's leading rusher after eight games, though he started only three, and tenth in the conference with 426 yards. Another new face belonged to linebacking junior Harry (The Name) Hettmannsperger, whose 15-letter surname may never make a headline because of space limitations.

A raft of sophomores underwent vital seasoning. On the defensive team, tackle John Titsworth, linebacker Rickey Burgess, and safety Steve Barrett played well all season. On the offensive unit were tight end Randy Meacham and three-fourths of the backfield—Bob Warmack, Eddie Hinton, and Gary Harper, plus capable back-up quarterback Jim Bugar.

The veterans provided the consistency and reliability that held the team together. Tackle Ed Hall was probably the best blocker on the team. Sugar Ben Hart at split end caught practically everything Warmack kept in the stadium and broke practically every school receiving record. Nose guard

we would have been dead



Blend of rookies, veterans made defense go. New were Burgess (54), Robinson (32), The Name (65). Old were Ross (39), Crutchmer (55), Liggins (66).



Granville Liggins, a delight to watch, deserved all of the many superlatives thrown his way, and tackle Jim Riley and monster Eugene Ross played like the old pros they've become after three years as starters. Ron Shotts was effective at tailback, giving his customary total effort on every play.

The Sooners began the year rippingly. It seemed about as likely as Ann-Margret playing Queen Victoria, Harold Robbins receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, or a Democrat being elected governor of Oklahoma. There they were though, just before facing the nation's number one outfit, perched precariously—and a bit self-consciously—on a pedestal among the top ten teams. With a deeply satisfying victory over Texas included in OU's 4-0 record, visions of conference titles and bowl games were epidemic among Sooner partisans. With the shock of a slap in the face, Notre Dame awakened us, and Colorado and Missouri shook us out of contention for the league title.

It is apparent, however, that OU is back as a football power, the best looking newcomer since Raquel Welch and her bikini. A number of preseason uncertainties are no longer cause for concern. OU now has a quarterback, two as a matter of fact, and a passing attack. No kidding. The wispy Warmack, described by Mackenzie as a fine stumbler, proved himself at quarter. He will finish third, maybe second, in total offense in the Big Eight and third in passing (with a 55 percent completion record.) More im-

portant is his ability as a team leader. He's got it. Burgar, too, is a capable man-under who has always delivered when called upon. He will continue to help Warmack with his competition.

Another bright spot was the emergence, expected as it was, of Eddie Hinton as a home-run hitter at wingback. Hinton could be one of OU's greats if he keeps improving.

Though inconsistent and sometimes ineffective, the ground game was good enough to rank OU behind Colorado and Nebraska in the Big Eight (though we trailed the Buffs by more than 50 yards per game and the Huskers by more than 20). Against the first eight opponents Oklahoma rushed for an average of just better than 160 yards per game. (Against Oregon—149, Iowa State—216, Texas—131, Kansas—143, Notre Dame—39, Colorado—218, Kansas State—283, Missouri—116). The Sooners were outrushed in five of their first eight games. The passing attack was indispensable. OU ranked (again, after eight games) second, behind Iowa State, in the conference through the air with a 128-yard average each game. (Against Oregon—104, Iowa State—146, Texas—220, Kansas—146, ND—119, Colorado—42, KSU—177, and Missouri—76). OU outpassed five of eight foes, ranked first in pass defense with 91.8 yards per game. The rushing defense was seventh in the conference. The big teams didn't hesitate in running straight toward OU's small defenders. If Oklahoma is to beef up its performances in both rushing offense and defense cate-

gories, it seems they'll have to have some beefier players.

The Sooners will contend again next season, and the odds are they'll be improved. So any dreams of glory you may have had this season shouldn't be discarded. They may have been a bit premature, but they are by no means far-fetched.

The 1966 Sooners were a gallant, lovable bunch. Their tenacity and courage elicited pure admiration from men, and their size brought out the maternal instinct in women. They really were pretty small. Getting off the team bus, they could easily be mistaken for an average-sized glee club. And Warmack resembled a coxswain more than a football quarterback. They made believers out of you when they stepped on a field. They hustled, they fought, they tackled in droves—like a swarm of skinny red locusts—and they never quit. They had this kid who couldn't make the team at his position, quarterback, so he worked at being a place-kicking specialist. Mike Vachon did all right at it, too. He was good enough to win two games with his toe and set a school record for field goals. They had a fine punter, Tom Stidham Jr., who booted the ball consistently well all season, continually getting the Sooners out of trouble and putting their opponents in a hole. This was a team that didn't quit after the big loss or after the two tight ones. It's a team that worked hard all season and earned everything it received. It's a team to be proud of. And pound for pound, it was the best around.

Action on the Sideline

The sideline is the site of contemplation as well as restoration, and the emotions range from elation to dejection. These shots, taken at the annual Cotton Bowl pressure cooker, are of some of the scenes at the periphery of the battle. Top row, left to right, shows

Warmack resting, Mackenzie beseeking, Hinton staring as Harper watches, and Trainer Ken Rawlinson examining Liggins. Bottom row, left to right, shows Riley cooling off, Coach Galen Hall counseling Hart, Liggins, Koller, and Stephenson reviving with oxygen.

Photos by Joseph Gutel

