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Want a Winning Basketball Team?

There are two steps:

1. Hire John MacLeod as coach.
2. Tear down the Field House.

By Paul Galloway

Look for new coach John MacLeod to field an aggressive, talented squad. Also look for the antiquated albatross of a Field House to keep Oklahoma from winning consistently

For long-suffering OU basketball fans, who have endured a succession of bleak, frustrating seasons over the last couple of decades, there are now two reasons to hope. One is new coach John MacLeod (pronounced *MacLoud*), an intelligent, tough, determined young man with the ability to be a great one in his profession, and the other is the group of players, some promising, some proven, inherited from Bob Stevens, who resigned under pressure in April after five disappointing seasons (*News-Makers*, April).

MacLeod, however, like Doyle Parrack and Stevens before him, faces a chronic, some would say insurmountable problem which impedes the basketball program so completely that the program will never be totally sound and OU will never have consistently winning teams until it is corrected.

The problem, of course, is the Field House, the place the Sooners have to play when they are at home. It is, to put it simply, obsolete, and thus an enormous hindrance to recruiting. Built in 1926 when Calvin Coolidge was president of the United States and before students had figured out what *in loco parentis* means, the Field House today is too small and its facilities are too old to compete equally with the larger, newer, more resplendent basketball structures which other schools, particularly Big Eight schools, use to attract the best players. When it is full, though it seldom is for basketball, it is said that 4,500 human beings can be contained within its walls. It is not claimed that such containment is comfortable, and it isn't. Besides the narrow bleacher seats which afflict everyone, those in the upper reaches must contend with nose-bleed and vertigo. Only Missouri, of conference schools, has a gymnasium as bad, and, not surprisingly, over the past several seasons the Tigers have built a record to go with it.

None can match OU, however, in its Field House or its won-lost mark. OU has reigned supreme in its inability to win. The members of the last team to claim the conference title are today pushing forty. Not since 1949 has OU won the league championship, and only once since then have the Sooners been close. In the past 16 seasons,

only three teams have won as many as they have lost. For the last eight seasons, the Sooners have failed to reach .500. In six of those 16 years OU teams finished dead last in the conference, and the rest of the time they were usually fighting it out for the cellar, right down to the last intercepted pass of the season.

There *have* been better days. The first Sooner team started as a winner with a 4-3 mark in 1907-08 under D. C. Hall, who coached only that year. Bennie Owen, of football immortality, followed Hall and proved to be as successful at basketball as he was at football. In 13 seasons, 1908 through 1921, his teams won 113, lost 49, had two undefeated campaigns, and only two losing ones.

OU's third coach was Hugh (Scotty) McDermott, a member of the basketball Hall of Fame who served long and well, compiling a 17-year record of 185-106, with only two losing teams and a number of truly memorable ones.

In 1938 McDermott turned the job over to one of his most brilliant former players, Bruce Drake, who held it for the next 17 years. The Sooners always had been conference contenders under McDermott; under Drake they continued to be the team to beat. In his first eleven seasons, Drake's teams won six championships, finished second three times, third once, and fourth once. The 1946-47 team, led by All-American Gerald Tucker, went to the NCAA finals before losing to Holy Cross and a kid named Bob Cousy.

Drake's final six years were less successful. It was during this period, the years immediately after World War II, that OU basketball began to ebb. It is significant to note that at this time many schools were beginning to replace their old gymnasiums. OU began falling behind, structurally and competitively, and from 1950, except for a second- and two third-place finishes, OU became mired deep in the Big Eight's second division.

Drake resigned with a 204-180 lifetime mark and entered business in Norman in 1955, and Doyle Parrack, who had developed a winning program at Oklahoma City University, succeeded him. Parrack survived a shaky rebuilding start in the first two years and produced the only

New coach John MacLeod forgets where he is for a moment and manages a smile. His smile would be larger if OU had a new Field House.

winning teams OU has had since the year Twiggy was born. From 1957-58 through the 1959-60 campaign, the Sooners were 13-10, 15-10, and 14-11, finishing second in the middle year. Things soon worsened, and Parrack, after seven years and a 71-97 record, packed up and returned to his alma mater, Oklahoma State, as an assistant to his former coach, Henry Iba. His ties with OSU had worked against Parrack. His teams were too slow and deliberate on offense for many people—it smacked too much of Stillwater—and it was said that when Parrack beat Iba for the first time, it noticeably upset him. This story rankled some people who believe that no Sooner should ever, *ever* become noticeably upset after administering Oklahoma State a defeat.

The disenchantment with Parrack's slow motion attack prompted OU's athletic council to seek a coach with a more wide-open offensive approach. Bob Stevens, who had performed a notable reconstruction job at South Carolina, was the man.

Stevens' first year was his best. The Sooners finished 12-13 for the season and 8-6 for third place in the conference. But though his teams always scored a lot of points, the opponents usually scored more. An engaging, enthusiastic gentleman who has remained on the faculty, Stevens developed a potent offense but neglected defense. His teams guarded the other team's basket with the effectiveness of a woman driver changing a tire. Though they broke practically every school scoring mark and were always at the top in the league's offensive categories, they consistently finished last or next to last each year in defense. In the Big Eight, this is not advisable; lately the title winner has invariably been a top defensive club.

Stevens, whose final mark was 46-79, was hurt by an inadequate Field House even more than Parrack or Drake, for in the five years he was coach, the facility gap widened considerably, not only nationally but sectionally. It would be incorrect to lay all the blame for Oklahoma's woes on an inanimate, apparently immovable object, for there have certainly been human factors involved. Yet unquestionably the Field House has contributed in a large degree to the decline of OU basketball. Some believe, and they may be right, that it is the major cause.

Whatever its effect, the Field House continues to outlast the coaches who have tried to replace it. And unfortunately, there are no firm plans to build a new basketball auditorium. There is plenty of talk, but it is vague and tentative and ill founded as a rule. Bob Stevens says he was promised a new field house, and he waited in vain. John MacLeod says the line he gets is "fill the one you have now and then we'll get you a new one."

At first glance this appears to be perfectly reasonable. It isn't though. The attendance is poor because the team loses, and the team loses because it doesn't have as many good players as the teams it plays, and it doesn't have as many good players because the better players are more likely to attend schools with sounder programs which mean winning teams, and schools with winning teams and sounder programs have guess what? Right. Big sparkling basketball auditoria or gymnasias or arenae or whatever you choose to call the facilities.

The sensible thing for OU to do would be to build a new field house, which is commonly known as putting the horse before the cart. Basketball at present costs the

athletic department between twenty and thirty thousand dollars a year to subsidize. It will continue to be a drain unless OU begins winning, and the best way to ensure success is to provide the environment for it.

Like a son's crocheting, the Field House is something one doesn't brag about. What was once a showplace is now an anachronism, a built-in disadvantage to the program. Top-flight prospects, some of whom have performed in larger *high school* arenas, may well wonder which came first—Dr. Naismith's peach baskets or the Field House.

To interest recruits in OU MacLeod and his staff have had to talk around the Field House, emphasizing the young staff, the possibilities of the program, an appeal to pride, the chance to be a part of something new and exciting, the potential for the future. MacLeod, his top assistant Bud Cronin, who served all five years under Stevens, and freshman coach Ray Thurmond, despite a delay in recruiting because of Stevens' late resignation, signed a number of good freshmen over the spring and summer months, but there are no first-order standouts among them.

What MacLeod must do is absolutely clear and decidedly difficult: He must win with substandard facilities, and he must do it soon. It's a big, pressurized order; two men couldn't make it before the axe fell. Don't bet that MacLeod can't. He's good enough, and Stevens was successful enough to leave the roster in the best shape it has been in for years. If OU is to make a move, this is the year.

The Sooners return a number of good ball players, most conspicuously Don Sidle (6-7), OU's first All-American in 20 years, and his friend and fellow Dallasite, talented Willie Rogers (6-5). They are the best offensive tandem OU has ever had. They averaged 23.7 (a school record) and 16.5, a game, respectively, last season, after 17.6 and 16.0 their sophomore years. Sidle cracked eleven single game or season records in 1966-67, including most points in a season (592), most in a game (42), and highest field goal percentage (55.1). Both are hard workers with unselfish attitudes, and Sidle has developed into a team leader with Rick Kersey (6-7), a senior forward and fellow co-captain this year. Kersey has not been impressive his first two years, but he has improved tremendously over the spring and summer. Also returning after a year's absence is a former letterman and another senior, Howard Johnson, (6-0), an superbly quick guard who promised great things before he was dismissed from the team in the midst of the 1965-66 season for a bad attitude. Johnson is back and it appears that his former attitude is not; he has displayed renewed commitment to the game.

The other senior is a starting guard from last year, Terry Due (6-3), who will play quite a bit. Rogers, however, has been moved to guard and will start the season with Johnson. Sidle is set at center, and Kersey will hold one forward slot with the fifth starter probably being Garfield Heard, a 6-7 sophomore, who has good ability. He will likely suffer from inexperience, and much will depend on how fast he comes along.

There are four juniors on the squad—Gary Kizziar (5-10), a guard who had his moments last year; Joe Holaday (6-2), another guard who saw action last year;



THE 1967-68 SQUAD: Top row, from left are MacLeod, Willie Rogers, Landy Watson, Tom Hampson, Don Sidle, Jim Heitz, Garfield Heard, Rick Kersey, Larry Robertson, Cronin. Front row, from left are Terry Due, Rick Gaither, Gary Kizziar, Steve Ayers, Harry Brown, Howard Johnson, Robert Wooten, Joe Holladay, and Paul Cloar. Team leader Sidle last year became OU's first All-American in 20 years.

Landy Watson (6-5), a dandy jumper but lacking as a shooter, and transfer Larry Robertson (6-4), who comes to OU from Ranger (Tex.) Junior College which finished third nationally last year. Robertson will probably play more than the other three.

There are a bevy of sophomores from MacLeod's fine freshman team of last year. In addition to Heard are top guard prospects Paul Cloar (6-4), a good outside shot, and Steve Ayers (6-2), aggressive and a good rebounder. Tom Hampson, a 6-7 forward, is strong but slow, and could develop. Jim Heitz, the biggest man at 6-11, was redshirted last year and may play some this year though he needs more strength and he has the misfortune to play behind Sidle. The other squad members are three quick guards, who will probably get a year of seasoning: Rick Gaither (5-11), Bob Wooten (6-1), and Harry Brown (6-1).

The most serious deficiencies the team have are defense, rebounding, and outside shooting. Strong defense and rebounding is what characterized MacLeod's freshman team which was 7-1 last year, and MacLeod is concentrating on these aspects of the game. "We're not tough enough on the boards," he says, "but we're getting more aggressive every day." The defense after the first three weeks of practice was still bothering him. "Everybody needs to improve, and some have a long way to go. Sidle, for example, needs to improve 80 percent on defense or we're not going to win," he says. "Sidle, though, is a great ball player, and he can do it." The outside shot deficiency may not be overcome, though the shifting of Rogers will help—he has a good eye and soft touch—and Johnson may alleviate the problem, though he is more a driver than an outside threat. Last year opposing defenses let OU loose outside and only Jim Johnson, who graduated, ever damaged a team from more than 15 feet. Most of the time, the defense sagged on Sidle, which makes his scoring average all the more remarkable. He was under great pressure in every game; this year perhaps some of it will be removed.

When you see the Sooners this year, you will watch

a disciplined, well controlled club, which is being coached to cut down on its mistakes. Errors continually plagued last year's team. The Sooners will be very, very aggressive, and they will be quick and in marvelous condition. And they will be able to score.

Also in the plus column is the team spirit which has never been higher. MacLeod and staff have instilled a real sense of pride and determination in the club, and hopefully a note of urgency, too. The Sooners will, to a large degree, reflect MacLeod's personality, for the new Sooner coach is proud, aggressive, and committed.

He also has the knack of being in the right place at the right time, which helps. Two years ago he was coaching high school basketball in Indianapolis when one of those unexplainable chain of events began to unfold, like a game plan from Lady Luck, eventually placing him today as head coach at age 30 of a major college basketball team. In June 1966 Bob Stevens, in Louisville, Ky., attending the Kentucky-Indiana all-star high school basketball game, called upon MacLeod, whom he had never met but who had been recommended by some of Stevens' coaching colleagues. Stevens was looking for a freshman coach. Gordon Stauffer, Stevens' top assistant, was moving to take the Washburn University head job, and Stevens was promoting Bud Cronin from freshman coach to Stauffer's spot.

Stevens was impressed with MacLeod and invited him to visit OU. MacLeod looked at the campus in July and accepted Stevens' offer. His one year at OU as frosh coach was a highly successful one, and everyone who watched was as impressed with the young coach as Stevens had been. When Stevens decided to step down, OU's athletic council decided on MacLeod, betting that he was as good as he had looked and would develop into a top head coach.

So 1967-68 is the Year of the Yearling at OU, and hopefully MacLeod will discover success as rapidly as his rookie counterpart in football, Chuck Fairbanks. He just may, though the challenge he faces is different and in many ways more demanding.

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