



BOOM!

Well into the fourth quarter at Owen Field on a dismal Saturday afternoon in early November with an icy rain pelting a sodden, discouraged audience of 36,700, the valiant Kansas State Wildcats, who hadn't beaten Oklahoma since the Great Flood, after recovering an OU fumble stood ankle deep in mud and chewed turf only 25 yards from the Sooner goal. Trailing 28-20 after a fierce struggle which had continually frustrated a curiously sluggish OU team, the Wildcat players (and numerous daunted Sooner fans) could envision a tie, and thoughts of even a more miraculous development were conceivably pulsing under their silver helmets.

Their opponents, on the other hand, were quite possibly tormented by the darkest foreboding of a discomfiting season. Hopes for a superlative campaign like 1967 seemed all but buried under a sputtering start. At the halfway point OU's record was a depressing two victories and three defeats. Tottering on the slippery edge of an egregious year, the Oklahoma Sooners appeared ready to be washed overboard. Already 1-1 in the conference, a tie or defeat to Kansas State would mean more than mere ignominy—it would eliminate the defending champions from the Big Eight race. As the unawesome defensive platoon slogged onto the field, few maniacs would have given a French franc for Oklahoma's future. And if anyone had predicted that OU would be playing in a bowl this winter, he probably also would have been selling sunshades on this day.

But something happened. The defense held, and the offense hammered away with resolve, scoring on the final play of the game. All was not lost, but the imposing hulks of Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska loomed ahead. In the Sooner dressing room at Lawrence a week later, a calm, confident Eddie Hinton said quietly to photographer Ned Hockman, who was taking the pictures which accompany this article, "I feel we can beat Kansas and so do my teammates." Hinton's rather surprising statement was vindicated two and one-half hours later. The Sooners became one of the nation's best teams in November, defeating nationally ranked Kansas (No. 3) and Missouri (No. 6) on successive weekends, despoiling Nebraska, 47-0, on national TV the next Saturday, and ending the season as co-champions with the Jayhawks and as one of the nation's top ten teams by demolishing OSU. Along the way, the offensive stars—Steve Owens, Bob Warmack, and Hinton—gathered enough records to keep a computer busy for a week, and the defensive platoon became downright impressive. The Astro-Bluebonnet Bowl beckened, and the Sooners accepted. It was a magnificent comeback for a talented team of young men with the character to refuse to give up. A recap of the year will appear in a forthcoming issue of SOONER NEWSMAKERS, an account which should make for pleasurable reading for anyone who enjoys a story with a happy ending. □

In these photographs taken by Ned Hockman in the Sooner dressing room before the Kansas game, the voltage of expectancy and determination can almost be felt. The solemn concentration and the unavoidable tension of the players and coaches evaporated into unrestrained joy in less than three hours. From left to right at the top is a quiet, calm Eddie Hinton, a nervous Bobby Warmack holds his head in his hands (Jim Burgar in glasses), coaches Barry Switzer and Galen Hall go over a play on the blackboard, and tailback Bobby Thompson is lost in his thoughts. At left center, Steve Owens reads the game program in the hush of the locker room while tackle Dick Paaso stares silently ahead. Below Pat James talks with Don Pfrimmer and then worries before making a final check with Fairbanks (center). At right below, Coach Buck Nystrom has a last word with offensive tackle Jack Porter.

