

An Oklahoma sports enthusiast recently noted that the football field is one area where things never change much. "Things aren't much different down there than they were 20 or 30 years ago," was the observation.

Too bad he was not speaking in the area of starting lineups. When Sooner coach Chuck Fairbanks led his team on the field for the first game at Wisconsin, the Sooners were 10 starters and one assistant coach different than they were a season ago.

That's a bunch, especially considering that quarterback Bob Warmack, who totaled a record 4,337 yards in three years here, and wingback Eddie Hinton, whose name pops up six times in the school pass receiving records, were among the departees.

The only other Big Eight team suffering more disappearances was Kansas, which tied Oklahoma for the conference championship in 1968. The Jayhawks lost 13 starters.

Another key figure in OU's lineup who used up his eligibility was all-Big Eight safety Steve Barrett, probably the calmest and coolest Sooner in '68. The one mistake he made during three years of duty was falling asleep in the labor room while his wife gave birth to their baby daughter. Fairbanks said he couldn't recall Barrett ever blowing an assignment on the field.

Also gone are guard Ed Lancaster and tackle Byron Bigby from the offensive line that freed Sooner backs for good yardage, plus defensive tackles John

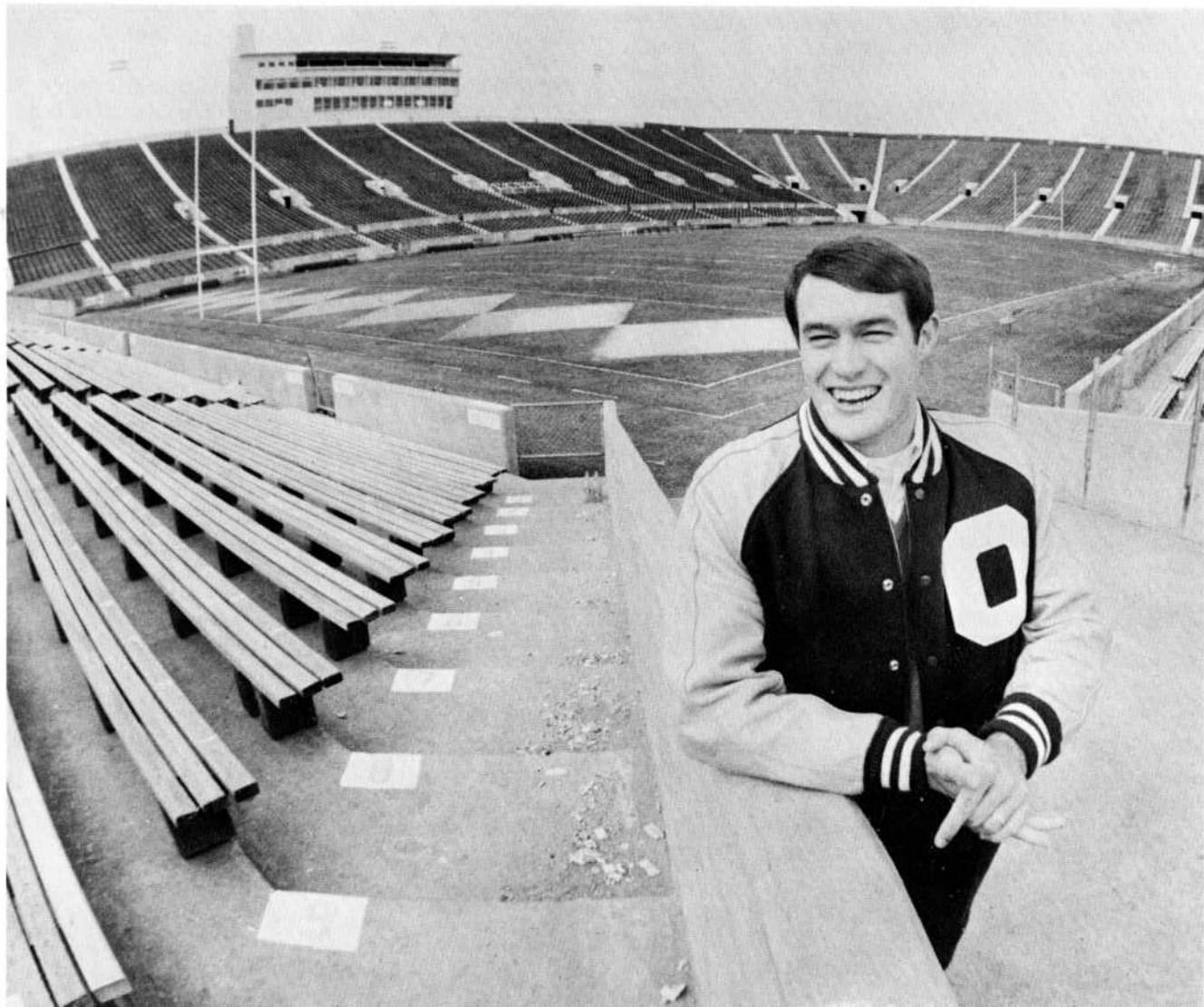
By John Keith

The Game

Photo by Louis Jarratt, Tulsa Tribune

Steve Owens—OU's bright hope for the Heisman Trophy

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Titsworth and Dick Paaso and linebacker Don Pfrimmer, who prevented gains by enemy runners.

Carl "Buck" Nystrom, Oklahoma's offensive line coach for two seasons, is gone as well. He resigned to enter private business and was replaced by Bill Michael, the able boss of OU's defensive ends last year. Larry Lacewell, Sooner assistant in 1966 under the late Jim Mackenzie, was re-hired from Iowa State to take up the slack at Michael's old spot.

Some of the people from last season's first unit are still hanging around. Most notable would be tailback Steve Owens, prime contender for the 1969 Heisman Trophy, already the holder of four new Big Eight records and the probable founder of some more this fall. Fullback Mike Harper, who blocks on 90 percent of Owens' runs, probable tight end Steve Zabel, split end Joe Killingsworth, tackle Jack Porter, guard Billy Elfstrom and center Ken Mendenhall return to hub the offense which, because of losses, will have difficulty averaging 31.6 points a game like last year.

Zabel might remain at defensive end where he performed the last half of 1968, stabilizing the defense and playing a super role in OU's 5-game winning streak that tied for the league title and pulled the Sooners into a number ten ranking in both major wire service polls. It's doubtful, however. "There won't be many bodies flying around his knees if he plays offense," grins offense coach Barry Switzer, hopefully.

Killingsworth's knee also was pierced by the knife after an injury against Missouri last fall and must cooperate by remaining healed. Both he and Zabel appear ready.

Also ready is Oklahoma's defense, which was impressive during spring practice. "It was way ahead of what it was after our spring drills in '67," states Fairbanks. "I'm encouraged." His optimism is based on the improved depth, speed, quickness and size of OU's defenders. It's all there.

Something else all there will be potential talent up from the freshman team that romped to four straight victories and created enough interest to lure 29,000 people to the Varsity-Alumni game last spring. That record gathering wanted to see how well the yearlings would blend with the veterans. A more positive answer will be forthcoming this fall.

The fellow creating most of the talk is quarterback Jack Mildren, Abilene, Texas, sophomore, involved in probably the most critical battle of all — the war for Warmack's old position. His adversaries are senior Mickey Ripley, who gained notoriety by subbing for Warmack in the Astro-Bluebonnet Bowl when the latter incurred a knee injury, and sophomore Mike Jones from Crooked Oak.

Ripley completed a school bowl record of 10 passes for another school bowl record of 153 yards and two touchdowns in leading Oklahoma to an Astro-Bluebonnet mark of 502 total yards against SMU. He was the best passer on the team at the end of spring drills, and, as Coach Switzer puts it, "whoever plays quarterback for us must be able to throw."

Mildren's passing wasn't exactly depressing his freshman year. He completed 49 of 79 for 876 yards

and 7 touchdowns. Moreover, he rushed 225 for a 5.5 average and scored 5 TDs. His speed and quickness afoot might set him apart from Ripley.

Jones must not be counted out even though he's listed third on the depth chart. His running ability and passing potential bear watching. And it must not be forgotten that he punted for a 34.7 average as a freshman and might someday be used in this category.

Other sophomores due a thorough observation are wingbacks Roy Bell of Clinton who has the speed and moves to worry enemy coaches; John Shelley, Oklahoma City Casady, possessor of the same; split end Geoffrey Nordgren, Covington, Louisiana; tight end Bruce DeLoney, Oklahoma City Douglass; fullback Lynn Hughes, Lomita, California; tackles Robert Jensen, Yukon and Ken Jones, Omaha, Nebraska; defensive ends Albert Qualls, Houston, Texas, and John Gorman, Texas City, Texas, and linebacker Steve Aycock of Midland, Texas.

It will make little difference how much talent the Sooners station on the field if the offensive line does not grow in stature. Offensive inconsistency and lack of protection for the punter and passer during spring drills concerned Fairbanks. Most glaring need prior to the Wisconsin struggle was for a big, strong body at strongside tackle where Bigby ably held forth. Several folks could get a try there before Oklahoma moves into Big Eight competition. Most likely candidates would be juniors Ed Foote, Costa Mesa, California; Tom Dougherty, McHenry, Illinois; Carl McElroy, Beaumont, Texas, who was number one when spring practice closed, and Tulsa sophomore Darryl Emmert.

The Sooners need complete recovery from Ken Jones' shoulder which remained dislocated most of his freshman season. Coaches feel his swift, quick, 6-4, 220-pound frame could manipulate well at strongside tackle.

A more effective blocking wall might enable Owens to accomplish the three national records within his sight. Bigger this fall (215 pounds) and quicker, Steve was only 1,045 yards away from the all-time three-year national rushing mark of 3,388, held by West Texas State's Mercury Morris before the opening game at Madison.

The Miami, Oklahoma, senior, voted the Big Eight's outstanding player by the Associated Press last year after hoofing 1,536 yards rushing, in 357 carries (the latter is a national record) had a chance to become the only player in history to rush 100 yards or more in 10 straight games and could have accomplished it against the Badgers. (The results of that game were not available at press time.) He is pursuing the national three-year mark of 52 touchdowns, needing only 19 this year to surpass Army's Glen Davis who scored 51 TDs in 1944-5-6. Owens had 33 after last season.

Steve is close to Gayle Sayers' Big Eight career rushing standard of 2,675 yards, needing only 331 to better that one.

Zabel is another Sooner who is more imposing physically this year. He exercised enough during the spring and summer that he's grown to 228 pounds, 10 more than his 6-4 frame carried last season. A

strong All-America candidate, he probably has the surest hands on the squad as evidenced by his 19 catches for 237 yards and four touchdowns last year, mostly in five games before his switch to the defense.

And, if spring practice was an indication, the Sooners will need receivers this fall. Neither Johnny Barr, who set a school record when he caught two TD aerials from Ripley in the Astro-Bluebonnet Bowl, nor sophomore Everett Marshall excelled at split end. Killingsworth's return might ease the problem.

The situation does not appear so severe when the other teams have the ball in '69. Oklahoma's ability to prevent yardage has improved.

Returning for starting duty in the secondary are halfbacks Joe Pearce, voted to United Press International's all-Bowl team after intercepting two passes and blocking an extra-point try at the Astro-Bluebonnet Bowl, and Bruce Stensrud, the Dallas scholar who logged straight A's in school last spring. Both were starters a season ago.

Barrett's vacated safety spot belongs to junior Monty Johnson, former All-State quarterback at Amarillo, Texas, Tascosa High School, who stirred adrenaline in spring drills with fierce tackling and wise decisions. He quarterbacks the secondary.

Another notable performance in the spring was given by sophomore Glenn King, defensive halfback with 9.6 speed who will surely keep Stensrud and Pearce alert in defense of their starting roles. Equally encouraging defensively was the linebacking in the spring. Junior Steve Casteel, voted the best sophomore

on defense in the Big Eight last year by the Associated Press, and senior Jim Files will apparently be joined by junior Vince LaRosa and sophomore Steve Aycocck. Oklahoma will use four linebackers.

Files has hiked his physique to 6-4, 220-pounds, and may be the most underrated player in the Big Eight. Big, stout and quick, he could be summoned back to defensive end where he and Zabel delivered bruises last year.

LaRosa, born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, is not overpowering physically, but linebacker coach Warren Harper says his new acquisition has the knack for finding the ball carrier and grounding him rapidly. Aycocck, from Midland, Texas, can do the same.

Pat James, OU's assistant head coach in charge of the defense, has been minus a big, stout interior lineman to work with since Granville Liggins departed. His search could be nearing the end if 6-3, 230-pound Kevin Grady pans out at right tackle. The Santa Ana, California, junior doesn't possess Liggins' speed or quickness, but he was impressive in the spring. So was left tackle Johnny Watson, the 6-5, 215-pound junior from Tulsa. The two of them offer physical potential up front.

Another defensive tackle who may see action is junior Alger Flood, long-time hospital patient in 1968 after dislocating his shoulder early in the season and again early in spring practice. If the shoulder remains together, Flood could offer valuable assistance.

Qualls and Gorman opened eyes in the spring with their quickness and size. They'll battle junior Forb Phillips of Tulsa for the two defensive end positions. Qualls, 6-3, 210 pounds, ran the 100 in 9.8 at Houston B.C. Elmore High School. Bruce DeLoney may get a shot at defensive end, also.

Oklahoma's kicking game, adequate but not electrifying last season, is due improvement. Monty Johnson will probably handle the punting and could become one of the more proficient kickers ever to play at Oklahoma since Joe Don Looney boomed 'em long and high. Zabel averaged over 38 yards a kick last season and could be called on in this capacity.

Bruce Derr, who toed 36 extra points last year, will continue as the number one placekicker. The Harvey, Illinois, junior was impressive in the spring with long field goals and lengthy kickoffs so valuable to the defense.

With so many new positions open, Fairbanks and crew might be experimenting until the national television date with Texas, October 11. Maybe longer. The youthful Sooner head man, starting his third season of command here, knows that the hatch had better be closed and sealed by the time his forces commence Big Eight action. The conference continues to strengthen.

Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas and Colorado are expected to battle for the championship. Nebraska and, yes, it's true, Kansas State, are qualified to defeat any of the above four.

Word seeping out of Lawrence has it the Jayhawks may be tougher than last year despite losing 13 first-teamers. A bevy of fast backs and plenty of physical ability keeps Coach Pepper Rodgers smil-

Steve Zabel—versatile man in action



ing. Colorado discovered some surprising talent in spring drills and Missouri didn't need to. Iowa State and Oklahoma State have the stuff to win on a given weekend.

Oklahoma's freshman team is liable to possess the makings for an enjoyable year. There's no way it could be better than in 1968 when the Boomers won all four games, three of them in romps.

But Fairbanks says this year's crop of incoming gridders is the best "by far we have signed in the four years I've been here. Physically, there's no comparison."

Concentrating on the home state's better folks, as usual, the Sooner coaches did drop into Texas, Colorado, California and Nebraska for added strength. From Texas comes Joe Wylie, the number one blue chipper down there whose acquisition marks the second year in a row that Oklahoma has brought such stature across the Red River. Mildren was it the season before.

Here's a list of the freshmen crop this fall:

BACKS—Vic Kearney (6-1, 205) Milwaukee, Wisc.; Steve Dodd (6-2, 200) Lindsay; Bill Orendorff (6-1, 215) Sallisaw; Leon Crosswhite (6-1, 185) Hennessey; A. G. Perryman (6-0, 219) Lubbock, Tex. Dunbar; Joe Wylie (6-1, 180) Henderson, Tex.; Cliff Hullinger (6-3, 200) Dolton, Ill.

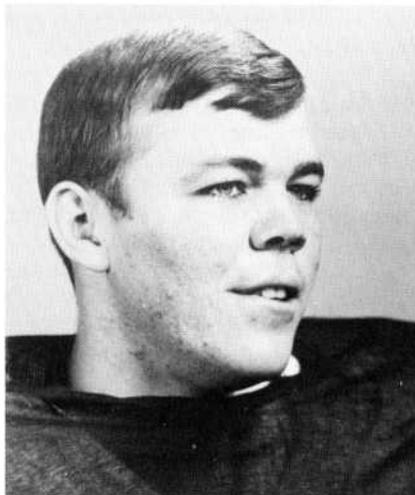
LINEBACKERS—Gary Baccus (6-5, 210) Brownsville, Tex.; Eddie Foster (6-4, 235) Monahans, Tex.; Ken Hulstein (6-3, 195) McCook, Neb.; Danny Mullen (6-1, 215) Houston Ball; Art Talkington (6-1, 195) Tyler, Tex.; and Jon Milstead (6-0, 195) Athens, Tex.

QUARTERBACKS—Stan Templeton (6-3, 185) Weatherford; Dan Ruster (6-1, 185) Littleton, Colo.; Larry Roach (6-0, 175) Watonga; Dave Robertson (6-2, 190) Garden Grove, Calif.

LINEMEN — Harold Paul (6-5, 218) Galveston Ball; Tom Speed (6-3, 220) Lawton; Dennis Cumbach (6-2, 240) Englewood, Colo.; Tom Brahaney (6-2, 220) Midland, Tex.; Paul Bunge (6-2, 225) Omaha, Neb.; Neil Acker (6-2, 210) Okmulgee; Tom Saunders (6-1, 220) Garland, Tex.; Jim Butler (6-1, 220) Midland, Tex.; Raymond Hamilton (6-1, 213) Oklahoma City Douglass; John McLaughlin (6-2, 215) Westminster, Calif.; Greg McCants (6-2, 215) Westminster, Calif.; Dean Unruh (6-2, 230) Lakewood, Colo.

ENDS — Kelly Roach (6-5, 225) Midland, Tex. Lee; Mike McLaughlin (6-5, 206) Cherokee; Albert Chandler (6-4, 209) OC Douglass; Bill Miller (6-3, 215) Tulsa Edison; David Holt (6-3, 210) Dallas Samuell; Eddie King (6-3, 200) Dallas Samuell; Mike Struck (6-3, 190) Clinton; Johnny Koons (6-2, 185) Dallas Highland Park; Gary Rhynes (6-1, 200) Ada; Steve Rork (6-4, 195) Pacific Palisades, Calif.; Greg Pruitt (5-10, 175) Houston, Tex.

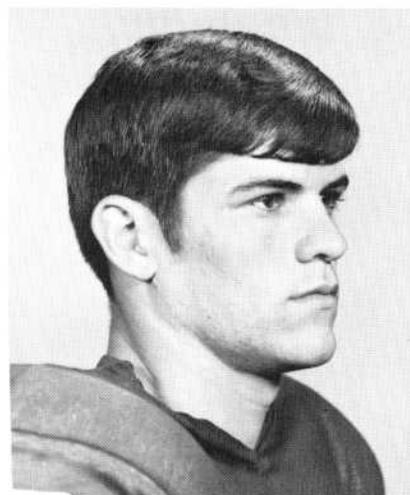
October 11	Texas at Dallas (National TV)
October 18	Colorado at Norman (Homecoming)
October 25	Kansas State at Manhattan
November 1	Iowa State at Norman (Band Day)
November 8	Missouri at Columbia (Regional TV)
November 15	Kansas at Norman (Dads' Day)
November 22	Nebraska at Norman
November 29	Oklahoma State at Stillwater



Mickey Ripley



Jack Mildren



Mike Jones