

# Off and Running at Huston Huffman Center

The University's new physical fitness facility was a long time in the making, but several thousand students a day are finding the results well worth the wait.

By CAROL J. BURR

If anyone turns up missing on the University of Oklahoma campus, from 6 a.m. to midnight on any given day, the best place to look is the new Huston Huffman Physical Fitness Center. After 15 years of planning, cajoling, campaigning, contributing and hoping, the students and their counterparts on the faculty and staff are flocking to Huston Huffman, 3,000 to 3,500 per day.

Completed in June, the first phase of the Huston Huffman Center, the S. J. Sarkeys Building, presents a low profile, nestled among the high rise dormitories, south of Lindsay Street,

bounded by Asp, Third and Jenkins. Much of its 73,220-square feet are located below ground with wide ramps leading from the glass-enclosed first floor to the playing floors below.

The building is divided into two basic areas on either side of a ground-level breezeway, the academic facilities of the department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation on the west and the recreational facilities on the east. The two areas connect on the lower level.

The recreational facilities include five basketball-sized courts, each lined in black for basketball, in white

for badminton, in red for volleyball, with one enclosed court also marked in yellow for metric (international) volleyball. A jogging track forms the upper level corridor overlooking and encircling the courts. The track can also be used as spectator space when large events are going on below.

Eleven racquetball/handball courts and a squash court line the north side of the lower level, also with viewing space above. Two of these courts are glass-backed to allow for spectators during intramural competitions. Also located on the lower level are a completely equipped gymnastics room,

and dressing, locker, equipment check-out and storage areas.

Huston Huffman's administrative offices are located on the upper level across the entry and ramp areas from the weight room and a large multi-purpose room, used for body mechanics, fencing, judo and a variety of team and individual recreational activities.

In the HPER section of the building, the upper level is composed of three multi-purpose classrooms, faculty and administrative offices, a conference room and a reading/study area. The lower level contains various HPER laboratories. HPER conducts many of its skill classes on the recreational side of the building, especially during the morning and early afternoon hours when the recreational demand on the facilities is lighter.

The interior decor of the building is largely poured concrete and glass, but the surroundings are far from drab. Abundant natural light from ground level windows and skylights gives Huston Huffman a open, airy look, while the three areas of the building are color-keyed with accents of bright yellow for recreation, blue for HPER and red for administration.

The wide, gently sloping ramps, leading from ground to lower level, make the Sarkeys building fully accessible to the handicapped.

The HPER section and the recreational office area are air conditioned. However, the recreational facilities with their vast open spaces and two-story ceilings are cooled and heated by an innovative energy-saving air flow system. In spite of some early doubts about the effectiveness of this system in Oklahoma summers, the temperatures have ranged from the high 60s to the low 70s during the first six months of operation. Monthly utility bills for the mammoth building have been running below budgetary estimates. The original design for the Sarkeys building included roof top solar collectors, which can be added at any time if operational analysis after the shakedown period shows that they are needed.

Former students whose efforts kept alive the physical fitness center for 15 years must feel a tinge of regret that the project took so long. There were no "good old days" in OU recreational

facilities. After World War II, the departing U.S. Navy left the University with a large frame gym full of basketball courts on North Campus and a couple of deteriorating swimming pools on South Campus. Several over-used, drafty handball/racquetball courts were located beneath Oklahoma Memorial Stadium, along with the infamous "Pneumonia Downs" running track.

The 72-year-old Field House bulged at noon with students, faculty and staff vying for space to participate in half-court basketball, volleyball, fencing, table tennis, gymnastics, jogging, weight-lifting and organized adult aerobics — all giving way to intercollegiate athletics in the afternoons and evenings.

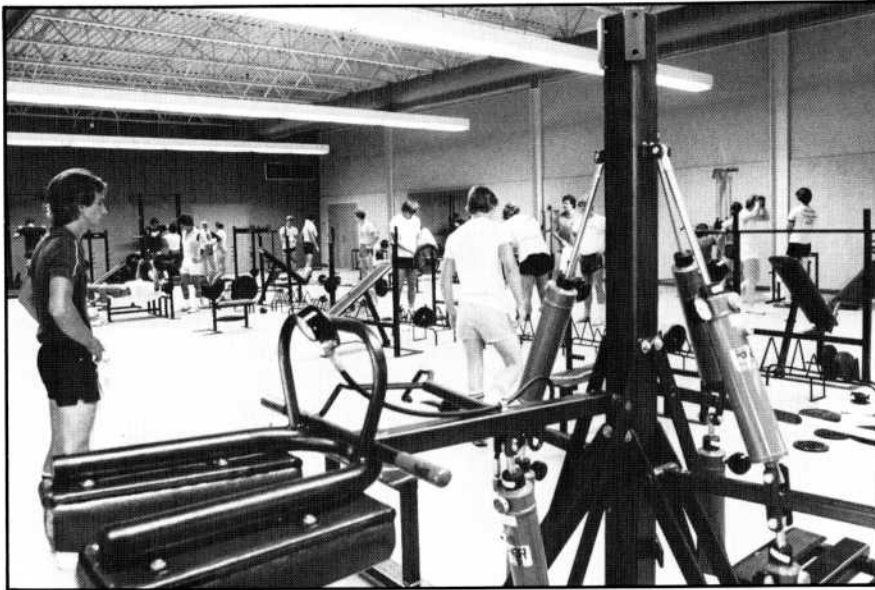
In 1966 the student body voted a \$15 per semester fee upon themselves to help pay for a student facilities package — a health center, a multi-purpose arena, an activities building and a physical fitness center. A combination of student, state and private money had provided the first three items on the list by 1975. The students then voted a second \$10 per semester fee to hurry along the physical fitness center. The legislature responded with a \$1.1 million special appropriation. A \$2 million private funding drive, headed by Tulsan R. P. Clinton, completed the financial package.

The bulk of the private money came from four donors: \$1 million from the S. J. Sarkeys Foundation of Norman, \$500,000 from the Samuel Roberts

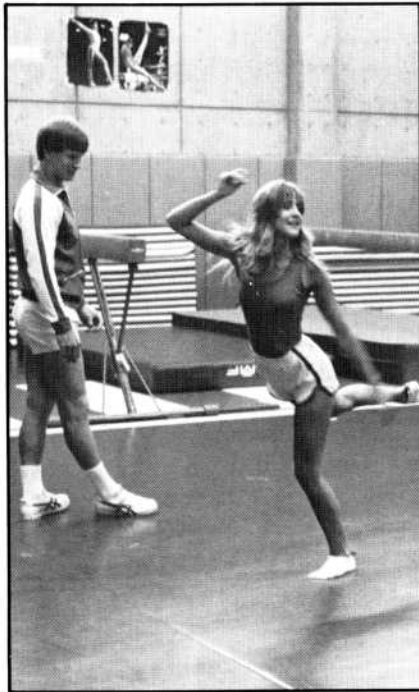
**The interior decor of the building is largely poured concrete and glass, but the surroundings are far from drab with abundant natural light from ground level windows and skylights and color-keyed accents of bright blue for HPER, yellow for recreation and red for administration.**



*Recreation services director Paul E. Wilson, left, looks on as students reserve time on the Huston Huffman Center racquetball courts. Approximately 3,000 to 3,500 students, faculty and staff visit the new physical fitness center each day.*



*The large, fully equipped weight room, located on the ground level just inside the main entrance to the Huston Huffman Physical Fitness Center, is one of the most heavily used features of the new building – for both men and women.*



*No competition for Nadia, perhaps, but students in HPER classes find drills in the Huston Huffman gymnas-tics room great for fun and fitness.*

Noble Foundation of Ardmore, \$350,000 from Clinton, and \$50,000 from the I. A. O'Shaughnessy Foundation, Inc., of St. Paul, MN, through Donald E. O'Shaughnessy of Midland, TX. The balance of private gifts came from family and friends of the late Oklahoma City oilman Huston Huffman, in whose honor the center was named by his former colleagues on the University Board of Regents.

While Huston Huffman is the newest and most complete recreational facility to be added at OU, it is not the only advance in that area in recent years. The Murray Case Sells Swim Complex offers nearby indoor and outdoor swimming and diving pools. Lighted tennis courts have been built on Timberdell Street and a new parcourse (an outdoor fitness area) is located at the duck pond. The intramural fields, just two blocks from the center, provide 11 football and softball fields.

In the meantime, the University's varsity sports facilities have been vastly improved, relieving the pressure on recreational facilities designed for the general campus population.

The man who oversees all these facilities is OU's director of recreational services, Paul E. Wilson. As a veteran of the have-not days, Wilson is determined to preserve the new-

found recreational wealth while helping students develop life-long recreational and physical fitness programs.

With a large percentage of University students coming from high schools and communities that do not have extensive recreational facilities, Wilson feels responsible for their education in the proper use of equipment, in a basic understanding of recreation and how to pursue it for the maximum benefit.

"This is not the last recreation facility these students are going to use," he insists. "We want them to be comfortable in recreational surroundings, to develop life-long skills." He also plans a long life for Huston Huffman Center. "If this building is not in good shape 10 years from now," he says flatly, "someone is not doing his job."

Wilson terms the Huston Huffman operation as open but structured, as opposed to open and informal, such as the basketball goal attached to the tennis court in the city park. "If you're the 'biggest and the baddest,' you can stay on that court all day long," he explains. "The rules reflect the playground mentality. It's survival of the fittest."

When the facility opened last summer, a few students protested that the rules for the use of Huston Huffman would create an exclusive club atmosphere, but Wilson contends that the vast majority of participants have responded positively to preserving the center for the future.

No black racquetballs are allowed, for instance, and all racquetball and paddleball racquets, metal and wooden, must have protective guards to avoid chipping and marring the walls. Proper athletic shoes are required on all courts; black soles, which permanently mar the pro-synthetic surface, are prohibited.

"The floor at Bowling Green University has lasted for 14 years," Wilson says, "while many city recreational center floors last a year." The Huston Huffman floor, which would cost \$50,000 to replace at today's prices, must last five, and hopefully 10, years. Likewise a no-dunk rule is designed to protect basketball rims and backboards from Darryl Dawkins-type demolition.

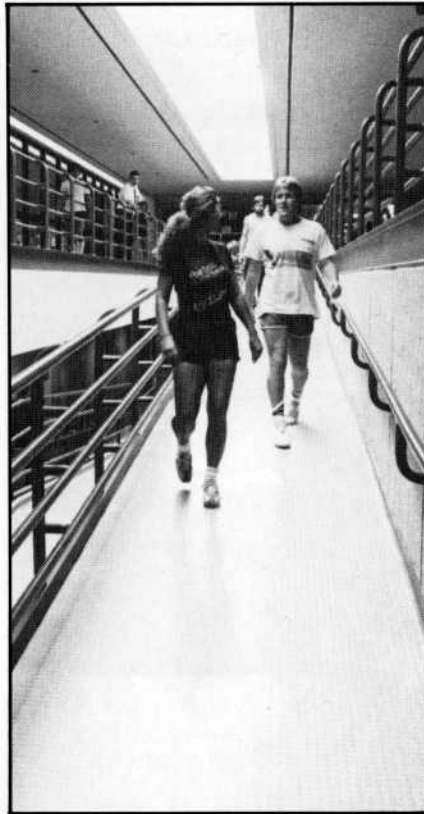
Wilson admits that, as with any

building, there are a few things he would have done differently, such as widening and banking the jogging track. But by and large the facility is working well, and already the staff is looking to the time when phases two and three will be necessary to handle the heavy usage. The architects included plans for such expansion in the design for the Sarkeys building.

"We don't know what our saturation point is," Wilson says. When the building opened in June, about 250 to 300 students a day came by. When HPER moved in in the fall, students came for classes, became familiar with the building, gained skills and came back for recreation. The same happened with adult fitness classes.

The University's extensive intramural program has introduced the center to hundreds of new customers. With the beginning of intramural basketball — and winter weather forcing outdoor athletes inside — the courts have been packed. Reservations are required for racquetball and handball, but the heavily used weight room and jogging track still are open.

Phase two of Huston Huffman would add five more basketball-sized courts, another squash court, a



*Wide, gently sloping ramps from ground level make Huston Huffman fully accessible to the handicapped.*



*Volleyball classes take over the lower level courts on some mornings; by afternoon basketball players will pack this same area, which is marked for both sports and also for badminton. The upper level jogging track overlooks the courts.*

wrestling room, a padded martial arts room, a snack and vending area, and a multi-purpose games room for everything from ping pong to cards to electronic games.

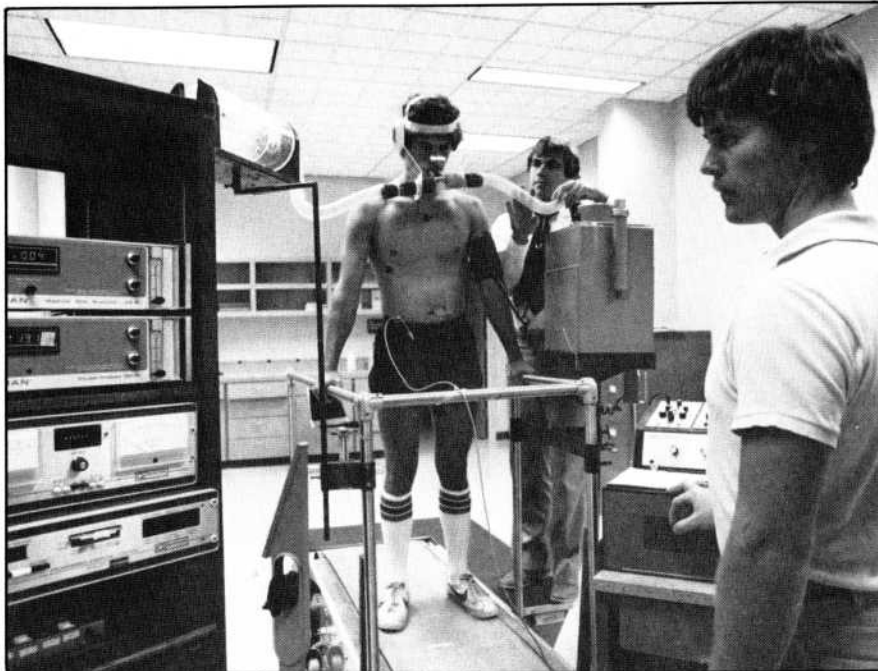
Development of the outdoor areas surrounding the center would be included in phase three — five outdoor tennis courts, a golf driving range, an archery range, outdoor basketball courts, a nine-station jogging course and an outdoor amphitheater. The HPER section also would add two more classrooms, faculty office space, locker rooms and a teaching swimming pool.

Brand new facilities have not necessitated brand new recreational programs, however. "We've always had the programs," Wilson contends. "We've just never had the facilities. The kids always have rallied around intramurals and will continue to do so." In many areas of intramurals, participation at OU has been the highest in the Big 8 — over 13,000 annually in past years — and the figures already are up for 1981-82.

Before the recent facilities boom added to his responsibilities, Wilson was assistant director, then director of intramural sports. He has seen the gradual development of a program that provides participation for both the intensely competitive and the recreational sports enthusiast. Wilson encourages students to develop basic skills, then decide for themselves on a level of intramural competition.

"In high school," Wilson explains, "if a youngster cannot make the team in a specific sport, he has nowhere to go. That's why racquetball has become so popular and why there are more youngsters playing soccer than football. The basic skills are simple, and the potential for injury is not so great."

While the direct benefit of the Huston Huffman Physical Fitness Center and its sister recreational facilities is to those who use them, Wilson considers such facilities a tremendous asset for the University itself. "Right now, we have all the students we can handle at OU," he reasons, "but one day we may need to attract more students to stay alive. When that time comes, all other things being equal, students will choose the place where they can have the most fun."



*Bill Marty, left, is hooked up to the treadmill by Dr. Ron Ratliff as Tom Crotty prepares to measure his oxygen consumption and assess energy metabolism. Ratliff is involved in the physiological aspect of the elite athlete research project.*

Saturday afternoon TV. The NCAA Game of the Week. The gold jacketed announcer cautiously extends the microphone to a charging line of overmuscled young men in battle dress. One after another they peer over their blackened cheekbones and parrot a similar set of statistics: "Flash Fenster, Mongoose, Texas, sophomore. Physical Education." Flash didn't need to tell us his major. We could have guessed.

A typical pre-game scenario for a Big Red telecast? A few years ago perhaps, but today you won't find many football players, or other varsity athletes, among the physical education majors at the University of Oklahoma.

Dr. Trent Gabert, who this year became the chairman of HPER (an acronym for Health, Physical Education and Recreation), is distressed by the outdated image of the department as the Grade-Point City refuge for the college athlete waiting to be a professional.

Certainly, skill classes in physical fitness and a myriad of individual team sports still are available to both majors and non-majors. You still can enroll in courses in the theory of foot-

ball, basketball, gymnastics and the like. However, the real basis of the program lies in the core courses, which include all the general University requirements, the College of Arts and Sciences requirements and such HPER staples as anatomy (including the dissection of cadavers), physiology, physiology of exercise, kinesiology and motor control.

While the physical education majors concentrate on scientifically oriented subjects, the recreation majors pursue a more interdisciplinary path in the social sciences, including business management, human relations and political science.

Candidates for degrees in HPER must concentrate in one of six different areas — teacher education, the scientific bases of human movement, sports administration, therapeutic recreation, outdoor recreation and recreation administration. Gabert also sees a definite need for students in recreation and sports administration to move heavily into business courses to meet the demand for skilled professionals in commercial and public recreation, industry and physical fitness programs.

Students from the health programs at the OU Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City, particularly those in physical or occupational therapy and sports medicine, frequently return to Norman for various HPER courses. Although HPER offers no degree in sports medicine, research as well as course work is under way in this area, often in cooperation with the HSC sports medicine specialists. While both HSC and HPER researchers concern themselves with the physiology and psychology of sports, the HSC doctors primarily are interested in

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## THE NEW WORLD OF Health, Physical Education and Recreation

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the cause, prevention and treatment of athletic injuries, while the HPER faculty concentrates on the analysis, prediction and expectations of athletic performance.

Since course work requirements for physical education and recreation majors are stiffer at OU than at any other state school, the HPER enrollment is not large, usually around 400 undergraduate and graduate students.

Besides required course work, graduate students must be active in research. One of the current research projects is the study of the elite athlete from the physiological, psychological and biomechanical standpoints. "We're not trying to mass produce athletes," Gabert explains, "but we are trying to determine what improves performance. It's like the sub-four-minute mile. We just don't know what the limits are."

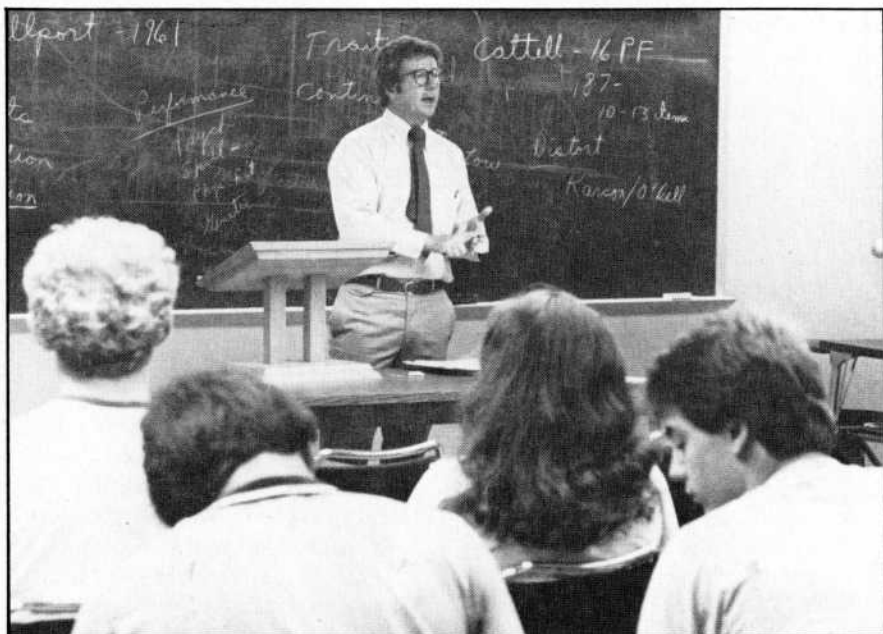
Another project, conducted in conjunction with an adult physical fitness program, is aimed at determining if different training techniques and life styles will affect blood lipids, the intent being to reduce cardiovascular disease. Research in vestibular stimulation is seeking to improve the sense of balance in young children.

In the area of recreation, HPER staffers are working on community

**"They must earn a living. To earn a living doing something they like is important also."**



*Laurie Janos takes a dip in the hydrostatic weighing tank to determine her body composition, i.e. the percentage of body fat to lean body mass.*



*Dr. Trent Gabert teaches the psychology of sports and applies it to the elite athlete research project with Ratcliff's physiology and Gail Shierman's biomechanics.*

recreation designs, the relationship of property values to the availability of public recreation facilities and leisure activities, gerontological mental health and boating and water safety codification.

Gabert cites two main goals for HPER. One is to receive national accreditation in recreation, which would give OU one of approximately 10 such recognized programs in the country. His second goal is to establish a doctoral degree program in the scientific bases of human performance. In order to achieve these goals the University must continue to recruit top quality faculty members and to provide increased support for their research.

With all the emphasis on physical well-being, activity and performance, why does HPER attract so few varsity athletes as major students?

"We're not anti-sports," Gabert insists. "We'd love to have more varsity athletes in the program. Athletes possess the skills and attitudes we are seeking. But one of the problems is that athletes do not have the time to pursue the science laboratory courses, which are frequently held in the afternoons, the same time when most athletes are required to practice."

The problem is a frustrating one for HPER faculty members, who see what is happening in big-time athletics as college players point toward professional careers. "If there is big money in a particular sport," Gabert explains, "the athletes usually are not interested in HPER careers. However, the majority of athletes do not enter professional athletic careers, especially in the minor sports, unless you are a Bart Conner. When these athletes realize that the big money isn't there and that the degree is important, they may come back. They must earn a living and to earn a living doing something they like is important."

HPER graduates generally cannot count on high-paying jobs. The rewards they derive from their work must come from something other than money. "Our students are people who like physical activities," Gabert says, "who are fascinated by psychomotor development — and most of all, they are people who like working with people." 