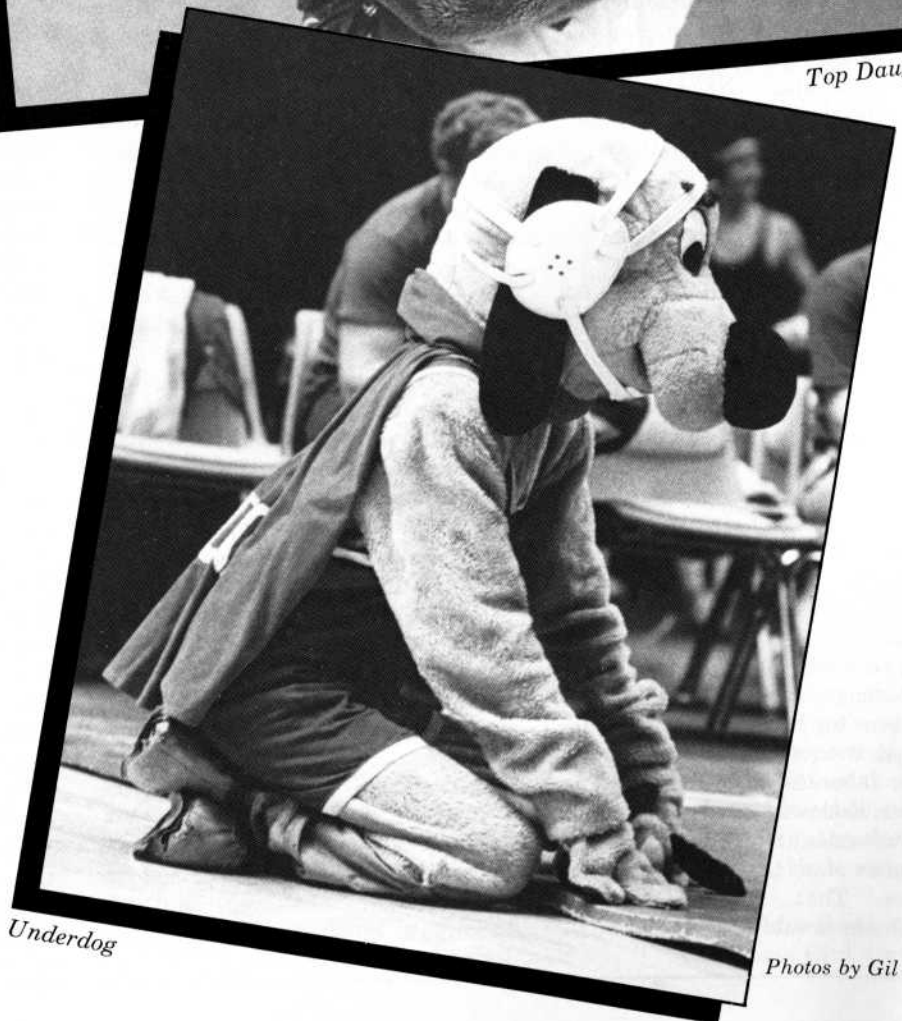




Top Dog



Underdog

Photos by Gil Jain/Betsy Baker

HOW 'BOUT DEM DOGS!

It's finally happened. School spirit at the University of Oklahoma has gone to the dogs — and Sooner sports fans are delighted.

The canines in question are a couple of certifiable zanies in dog suits who answer to the unlikely names of "Underdog" and "Top Daug" (catch that spelling — all the better to interlock the "O" in Top with the "U" in Daug). Their native habitat is Lloyd Noble Center, where they may be found any time the OU wrestling or basketball team is at home.

In appearance, Underdog and Top Daug are your favorite stuffed animals come to life, cuddly and lovable. Their antics at matside and on the court are at best comical and at the worst outrageous, but always imaginative. Red-clad athletes appreciate them; game officials tolerate them; opposing fans abuse them; and home folks, for the most part, adore them.

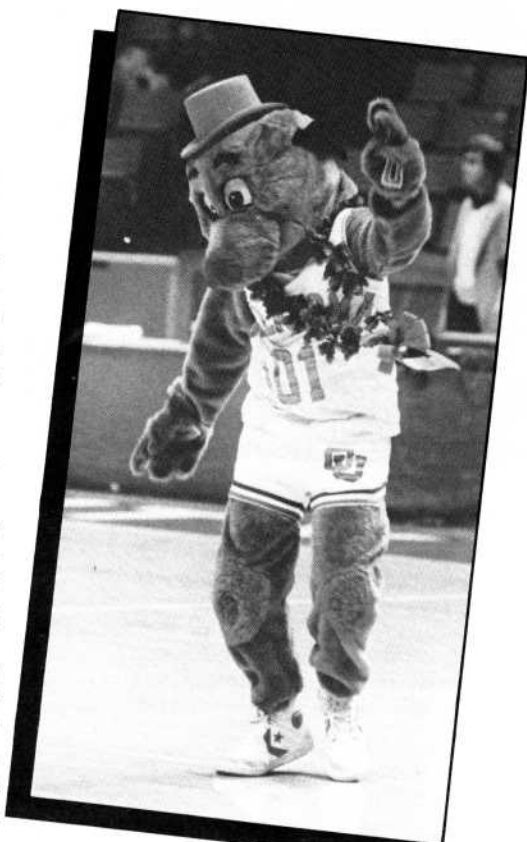
The dogs have been around for several seasons now, but only in the past year have they gained the kind of campus-wide acceptance that real "mascots" are made of, thanks primarily to the talents and personalities of the students who wear

the suits, Bruce "Top Daug" Spears and Bernie "Underdog" Maroney.

The idea of separate mascots for individual sports originated with wrestling and basketball booster groups. The Take-Down and Tip-In clubs felt underrepresented in the spirit squad department, since OU's official mascot, the Sooner Schooner with its team of matching white ponies, obviously is restricted to the football field.

Underdog was the first-born, springing full-grown from the imagination of a member of the Take-Down Club, Oklahoma City psychologist, alumnus and wrestling fanatic Logan Wright, who bought and still owns the suit. The dog was named for the Oklahoma Underdogs, a group of OU wrestlers who spend the off-season and summers practicing the Olympic free-style sport. But even clad in wrestling garb, the floppy-eared, bulbous-nosed mascot bore a distinct resemblance to the old TV cartoon character of the same name.

Shielded by the anonymity of the suit, Wright himself appeared as Underdog for the 1979-80 wrestling season. The following year, he did double duty for the new basketball



Top Daug

By CAROL J. BURR

coach, Billy Tubbs, who considered Underdog the ideal symbol for his first OU team, which finished the Big 8 in seventh place. The mascot was even more apropos for the 1981-82 campaign, with the Sooners picked to finish last but actually capturing third and going to the final four in the NIT.

But Underdog's true identity began to leak out, and Wright's wife suggested that the caped canine be turned over to the students. Several volunteers were enlisted during the 1981-82 season for both wrestling and basketball, including former OU wrestling standout Isreal Sheppard.

Last season, the Tip-In Club, which also sponsors the OU pompon girls, decided that Wayman, Billy and the Boys were no longer underdogs and needed their own mascot to reflect their heightened expectations. Top Daug was born at tryouts in which both Bruce Spears and Bernie Maroney were among the 25 competitors.

In the midst of his tryout in the new Top Daug suit, Bruce suddenly punctuated his extemporaneous clowning with an impromptu dive onto the judges' table. "Everything went flying, and I guess that clinched it," he recalls.

As the runner-up to Bruce, Bernie became Underdog, with each man serving as the other's alternate — but the emergency would have to be dire indeed to prevent either dog from performing his appointed tasks. In two years, Bruce has substituted as Underdog once, while Bernie has never been called into service as Top Daug.

Occasionally, for big games and special occasions, the two dogs appear together. But whether in costume or not, Bernie is always front and center at OU sports events, both as current chairman of the Sooner Rally Council and as leader of the infamous B*L*O*B, a group of student basketball fanatics self-appointed to whip the home crowd to fever pitch.

"We've all been big basketball fans for the last five years," Bernie explains. "I haven't missed a game since I was a freshman, except over Christmas on the years that I went home to Canada. But we didn't know what to call ourselves — you know, like the Antlers at Missouri and all the other really rabid groups around the country who are foaming at the mouth for basketball."

Finally they came up with B*L*O*B. "It was going to stand for 'Bohemians Love Oklahoma Basketball,'" Bernie says, "but that didn't make a lot of sense. Then Calvin Pierce (OU's senior forward) said we should call it 'Be Likin' Oklahoma Basketball,' and we decided that was a pretty good name."

Bernie explains that the B*L*O*B tries to come up with "something really weird" for each game. At last year's Kansas game they wore suit jackets and armbands that said "KU Regents" and made a giant "pink slip" to present to Kansas coach Ted Owens.

"Two weeks later, he got fired," Bernie recalls ruefully. "We worried about that. We liked Ted; he's an OU graduate."

Top Daug and the B*L*O*B have had their work cut out for them in educating OU crowds to the wild ways of big-time basketball.

"OU is different from any basketball school I've been to," Top Daug insists. "In all the other places, the crowd really gets the team motivated — you know, they get pumped up before the team does. Here, the only time the crowd gets excited is when the team does something exciting."

Underdog experiences even more difficulty with the smaller wrestling crowds, except, of course, for the classic confrontations with arch-rival Oklahoma State. "I think they ought to move wrestling back to the Field House," the mat mascot suggests, "to get the noise level up. Maybe people would start showing up again."

But while combating complacency



When not busy stirring up the crowd or advising the referee, Underdog finds time to offer some coaching tips to Oklahoma Sooner wrestlers.



Always popular with the ladies, Underdog and sidekick Underpuppy perch happily on the lap of a startled spectator at a Sooner wrestling match.



Top Daug, reading a newspaper and shouting "Who cares?" after each player's name, leads the student section in demonstrating boredom with the introduction of the visiting team.

at home, the mascots find plenty of hostility when they visit foreign arenas.

"I like hostile crowds myself," Top Daug contends. "Coach Tubbs likes them too; he likes to get 'em going, get the noise level up because it pumps him up and pumps the players up — and it pumps me up. So, I usually just egg them on — of course, it helps a lot to be inside the suit."

Being sheltered inside the suit is a big factor in transforming two good-looking, reasonably normal young men into the campus' most uninhibited ham actors. "You can do all those things you wish you could do when you're out of the suit," Bruce claims. "Nobody cares. They just say, 'Oh, it's only a dog.' I know this sounds real corny, but when I put on the suit, I actually feel energized."

Yet, in his second year as a mascot, Bruce finds it more difficult to lose himself in Top Daug's personality. "At first I didn't want anyone to know who Top Daug was," he explains. "I wanted everyone to ask, 'Who is that?' But now people are starting to know who I am. It's harder to act foolish when you are going to see those people on the street or in class the next day."

But if Top Daug has lost some of his protective covering, he has gained a voice this year. "Last year I tried to pantomime everything," Bruce says, "but the little kids would say, 'Can't

you talk?' They expect something to come out of there."

"Underdog talks constantly," Bernie admits, "and sometimes I bark at 'em."

Some of the dogs' antics are spur-of-the-moment inspiration, but a lot of advance planning also goes into the performances. Bruce feels that unless he adds something new for every appearance, the crowds will get bored with Top Daug, just as they were always bored with the big white chicken Coach Dave Bliss tried unsuccessfully to establish as the basketball mascot in 1978.

"The chicken suit is still here," Underdog claims. "We may bring it out and hang it in effigy. I'd love to get SMU (where Bliss now coaches) in here and hang that chicken."

Underdog usually performs alone at wrestling matches, except for a little stuffed dog he has added to his act and christened "Underpuppy." But Top Daug has the benefit of a supporting cast of pompon girls, cheerleaders and a pep band. In December the spirit crew adopted a Christmas theme, wore bells, tinsel and holly and drafted Underdog to play Santa Claus.

Last season, when the basketball team returned to Lloyd Noble after playing in the Rainbow Classic in Hawaii, Top Daug dressed in a Hawaiian shirt, straw planter's hat and giant sunglasses and "sunned"

Underdog dons Santa Claus garb to help Top Daug and the basketball spirit squad celebrate the holiday season in Lloyd Noble Center.

himself on a straw mat while the visiting team was being introduced. He and the entire student section usually express their boredom with the introduction of the visitors by reading newspapers and shouting "Who cares?" as each player's name is announced.

The mascots reserve some of their more creative pranks for offending referees, but one of those routines — when one of the dogs pretends to mistake the referee's leg for a fire hydrant — has been banned. "I caught a lot of flak for that," Bernie confesses.

The dogs look forward with greatest anticipation to visits from the OSU Cowboys and their mascot, Pistol Pete. "Pistol Pete and I have an agreement," Top Daug says, "that when I go to Gallagher Hall, he gets his way with me, and when he comes here, I get my way with him." This year Top Daug managed to "decapitate" Pete and paraded his giant head around the arena floor.

"Pistol Pete didn't come down here for wrestling," Underdog complains. "I was kind of disappointed. They only sent six cheerleaders."

Top Daug and Underdog each have a well-practiced eye for a pretty girl. Underdog has been known to startle a coed wrestling fan by suddenly perching on her lap, while Top Daug is never far away when the pompon girls are performing; he even has a dance routine with the Sooner lovelies.

But it is with the children that the mascots really shine. "I love little kids," Top Daug says. "They just kind of go with the flow and have a good time. Of course, how can you resist them when they're sitting there with their arms outstretched? A lot of it is the suit. Anybody could get in that thing and have little kids run up to him."

But with both dogs, it's more than the suit. They are both accomplished performers and experienced crowd-pleasers.

A senior in marketing, Bruce was a



four-year letterman in football and track and a member of Durant's 2A state championship high school football team. But he also has been acting since the age of eight, was his high school's "best actor" and spent summers touring with a comedy troupe.

Bernie, on the other hand, grew up in the spirit business in the sports-mad atmosphere of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. As a high school senior, he was the back-up mascot for the local professional team in the Canadian Football League. "I was Gainer the Gopher," he confesses. "Now that's a really ugly mascot."

As a freshman in 1979, he found the school spirit situation at Oklahoma disappointing, especially the absence of a San Diego Chicken-type mascot at the football games. "Nobody even wore red to the games — or if anybody did, you could tell he was a freshman. You couldn't wear red 'cause it wasn't cool."

The Tip-In Club prefers to keep Top Daug exclusively for basketball, and with a possibility of 25 to 30 games to cover, the job keeps Bruce plenty busy. Although neither mascot is paid or on scholarship, alumni support makes it possible for Top Daug to

travel with the team to most important out-of-town games and the post-season tournaments.

Underdog, however, who has to pay his own out-of-town expenses, usually makes only the trip to Stillwater. Both dogs are also in great demand for appearances at high school and junior college games, pep rallies and homecoming celebrations. In fact, the warm receptions they receive on the road have caused Bernie to suggest turning pro this summer.

"Imagine that," Bruce shakes his head, "professional mascots."

"Seriously," Bernie insists, "I think there's a real possibility we could freelance as a team. Bruce is good — he's really good. Of course, we'd have to have our own suits made without the 'OU'."

Bernie still has three more semesters for his graduate degree in structural engineering and would like to retain his Underdog job. But Bruce has resisted the suggestion from fans that he should go on to graduate school just to stay eligible.

"I'll miss it," he admits, "but I think I'll hang 'em up and get out and make some money. After all, you can't be a dog all your life." 