



On the morning of the 1942 Kansas-Oklahoma basketball game at Lawrence, Bruce Drake, youngish Sooner coach, was taking a walk about the Kansas campus to calm his nerves. Back in a Lawrence hotel, Drake had put his young squad to bed so they could store up energy for the contest.

It was January, and as Drake, walking briskly in the stinging cold, passed Hoch Auditorium a strident "Rock Chalk, Jayhawk" yell boomed out. Obviously, the frenzied cheering came from the Crimson and Blue student body in the midst of a rally for the Oklahoma game that night. With nothing better to do, the Sooner coach walked to the door and paused to listen.

To his surprise, he heard his own name mentioned. Curious, he entered, standing in the rear. Dr. Forrest C. "Phog" Allen, the eminent Kansas coach who had just been rated the No. 1 basketball mentor in the nation by Helms Foundation, was on the rostrum. Allen was attacking Drake for his part in an eligibility ruckus involving Gerald "Flats" Tucker, Oklahoma's sophomore star, who as a freshman had transferred from Kansas State to Norman and had been forbidden to play for Oklahoma until the second semester. Obviously, the Kansas coach didn't know that Drake was within miles of the rally.

Allen charged that Lawrence "Jap" Haskell, Sooner athletic director, was a paid baseball scout for the Boston Red Sox, which Haskell readily admitted and everybody in Oklahoma knew. He also maintained that Drake himself was subsidized when he played as a student at Norman. This was erroneous.

Drake let the Kansas coach finish, then walked down the aisle to the stage, identified himself and asked for equal speaking time to rebut the charges. It was a nervy thing to do. The Oklahoma coach was physically outnumbered about 4,000 to 1 by an assemblage highly fevered by the approaching game. Allen granted the permission.

The Kansas student throng sportingly gave the Sooner coach a hand and listened closely as Drake vigorously stated Oklahoma's side of the

On the court or on the bench, he was a classy little guy — spirited, competitive, tireless — but perhaps his finest hour was his struggle with a 7-foot giant.

BRUCE DRAKE

and the

Goal Tending War

By HAROLD KEITH

Tucker eligibility dispute. Drake was still talking when the classroom bells rang, denoting the end of the free period. Allen sent a note to Drake, informing him that time was up.

"This is the wrong time for time to be up," Drake responded. "I have a lot more facts to present." He ably detailed Oklahoma's side of the Tucker argument, after which the Kansas students applauded him warmly. Several of them shook his hand as he left the stage and walked to the door.

This act was typical of Bruce Drake. A spirited, competitive person, he relished all such challenges and accepted them joyfully. That night, Kansas decisively won the game in which Tucker could not play. But in a later contest at Norman, Drake's Sooners won, 63-51, with Tucker, the high scorer with 22 points, dominating the floor. The two schools tied for the Big Six championship at 8-2 each.

As an athlete at Oklahoma, Drake exuded pride and self-confidence. When he broke in as a sophomore forward, coming from Oklahoma City High School where his coach was Roy Bennett, he had to compete against three lettermen, Gene West, Les Nib-

lack and Bill Haller for his position. When Coach Hugh McDermott started two of them ahead of Drake in an early game, Bruce promptly walked to the dressing room, took off his uniform, donned his street clothing and watched the game from the stands.

Impressed with the lad's assurance, McDermott had a talk with him, explaining the high value all coaches placed upon experience. Continuing to burn up the floor in practice, sophomore Drake soon convinced "The Little Scotchman," as McDermott was called, that he was the finest forward on the squad despite his varsity immaturity.

He believed strongly in himself on the court, too. The national AAU champions, the famous Hillyards of St. Joseph, Missouri, came to Norman in December 1927 for a game with the Sooners in the old Armory. The game was refereed by Ernie Quigley, well-known National League baseball umpire. Forest "Red" DeBernardi, the Hillyard captain, was then the greatest basketball player in the world.

Drake, brash Sooner sophomore, deliberately sought out DeBernardi on the court, and their duel with each trying to out-finesse the other — DeBernardi defying Drake's best efforts to steal the ball from him and Drake faking a pass and then flashing

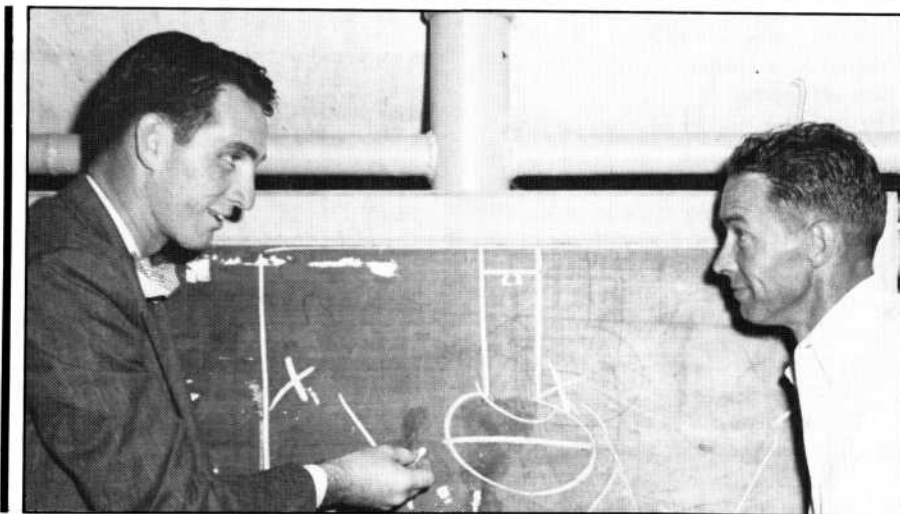
around the Hillyard ace with the dribble — delighted the crowd. The Sooners upset the Hillyards that night, 30-22. It was in this game that the first goal tending by a Sooner player occurred. With a minute to play, Vic Holt, 6-6 Sooner center, leaped above the ring to palm a long shot by George Starbuck, Hillyard guard.

Drake played forward on McDermott's strong 1928 Oklahoma team that finished 18-0 to win the Missouri Valley conference championship. In 1929 the old conference was broken up and became the Big Six. As a senior that season, Drake was the guard and captain of McDermott's team that again won the conference championship, this time with a 10-0 record.

With delicate artistry, Drake saved the latter mark in the final moment of his final college game. Missouri led by three. Spectacularly employing his broken field dribble (he was the finest dribbler I ever saw), he twice cut his way the court's full length through the entire Tiger team and threaded the hoop. The Sooners won by one.

In 1927, weighing only 165 pounds, Drake went out for football at Oklahoma and lettered two seasons at quarterback although he had never played the game in high school nor as

Gerald Tucker, left, Bruce Drake's greatest player at Oklahoma, enlisted his former mentor as his assistant in coaching the U.S. basketball team to the gold medal in the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia.





Drake, at right, continued to work for the shorter player with his uniformly small 1951-55 teams, developing the "Drake Shuffle." Here he gives some time-out pointers to his star of that era, Lester Lane (#25).

an OU freshman. In track, he was a corking pole-vaulter, winning the Rice Relays and Kansas Relays championships. At Oklahoma City High School, he not only participated in most of the major sports, but made the cross country team and was unbeatable at handball.

As a senior Drake won the Dad's Day Award given to the University's outstanding man in scholarship and activities, and also a Letzeiser Medal as an outstanding senior man. He was a member of Alpha Tau Omega social fraternity. On April 19, 1930, the year after he joined the OU physical education faculty, he was married to Myrtle Tosh of Oklahoma City. He succeeded McDermott as the Sooner basketball coach in 1939.

I was associated with Bruce all during his coaching career. I was then the OU sports publicist. Our families lived across the University golf course from each other. Our children grew up together.

We shot off our 4th of July sky rockets together. On one July 4th night, when our kids averaged eight to ten years old, Bruce and I told them that

at the climax of all the rocketry, we would fire a "Talking Bomb." Awed, the kids waited nervously. Ken Farris, then a student assistant in my office, was also there with his family.

At the appointed time, we lighted an ordinary sky rocket. With a swish and a roar, it soared and detonated, bursting colorfully across the sky. Breathlessly, the little Keiths, the little Drakes and the little Farris listened. Then it came. From out of the heavens a voice spoke in spectral tones, "Hooray for the American Eagle!"

The kids gasped in abashment. They didn't know that we had planted Ken Farris halfway up the WNAD radio tower that then stood on the nearby golf course. His was the voice they had heard.

We went fly-fishing in Colorado, taking our families. Our son, John Keith, today assistant athletic director and sports publicist at the University of New Mexico, recently wrote

Mrs. Drake a letter concerning Bruce:

"I believe the thing I remember most about Bruce — other than the times I used to borrow five cents from him to buy cokes when I was little and obnoxious (and you could still buy cokes for five cents at the old Field House) was the time we went fishing at Creede (Colorado). There were Bruce, John Grayson, Harold Keith and me. Why they invited me, I'll never understand.

"One day when Harold and John were already on the river, Bruce whispered that he would take me quietly to Ruby Lake, and we would snare bigger fish — and more of them — than H. Keith or Grayson combined. I remember how tired I got walking up that mountain trail. Bruce, foreseeing that I was young and therefore not up to walking all that way, rented a horse for me to ride. What a great move! We finally arrived at Ruby about noon.

"Well, he spent more time showing me how to throw that fly on the water than he did fishing himself, which was always like Bruce. He got a kick out of helping other folks, something you don't find in many people anymore. The trout were so big and plentiful up there that we threw big ones back in the water knowing we would catch even bigger ones.

"In the cabin, after we returned, Bruce kept a straight face and told Grayson and Dad how we had caught all those big cutthroats right there in the river, where they had been fishing all day (author's note: with undistinguished results). Every fish we flopped out there for them to see was huge. It was one heck of a move by a class guy who enjoyed teaching and showing the younger generation how to do things."

Bruce and I especially enjoyed the spirited bridge games that he and I played against our wives, Myrtle and Virginia. As a bridge player, Bruce liked to gamble and sometimes bid too aggressively, but once the cards were on the table, nobody could play

them more brilliantly than he.

We even sang together in a barber-shop quartet, "The Fieldhouse Four." Bruce was the lead singer, Snorter Luster the baritone, I the tenor and Peck Wathen the bass. That quartet closed half a dozen country schools in Cleveland County. Through some strange coincidence, each permanently shut its doors shortly after our off-key quartet performed at their institutions. Our best number was "Casey Jones." Its popularity stemmed more from our mimicking of the steam engine sounds than from its musicality. We had a world of fun.

Drake's chief coaching rivals in those times were Allen of Kansas and Hank Iba of Oklahoma A&M, two of the most formidable in basketball. Bruce liked that. Fearless and resourceful, he always wanted to go against the best. In his 20 years as a coach — college, National Industrial League, Armed Forces and Olympic — his teams won or tied for nine championships.

Drake is remembered particularly for knocking out goal tending, the custom employed by abnormally tall youngsters to snatch out opposition shots about to drop through the hoop. Its fate, a national concern, was finally settled in central Oklahoma. In the first Sooner-Aggie game at Norman in 1944, a platform was built over the north goal so that the chairman of basketball's National Rules Committee could observe the problem from close range. In a later Sooner-Aggie clash at Stillwater, a near riot ensued that had to be quelled by the Oklahoma State Highway Patrol.

The best goal filcher in the nation at that time was Bob Kurland, seven-foot Oklahoma A&M giant, who was only a sophomore. Kurland's leaping larceny off the lip of the goal wasn't new. All sections of the country had occasionally seen it by boys of monstrous height. The alarming



thing was that in the early 1940s college coaches were searching out the tall timber so industriously and developing it so skillfully that it was practically impossible to beat a team that raised its defensive umbrella over your goal, if that team had any assisting strength at all.

In basketball, the goal stands only 10 feet above the floor. A six-and-one-half-foot player can jump two feet higher than that. Was the new race of basketball giants ruining the game? Would basketball scores of the future be 0-0, 2-2 or 4-4 with no field goals scored?

At first, nobody seemed to want to do anything about it. Nobody but Bruce Drake. Bruce likened goal tending to a croquet player suddenly thrusting his foot across a wicket to thwart an opponent's perfect shot, or to a billiard player placing his hand across a pocket toward which an

Drake, standing fourth from right, and an eager 1948 basketball team prepare to lift off for the Big Apple to meet City College of New York in legendary Madison Square Garden.

opponent's scoring ball was rolling. Once a basketball shot reached its zenith and began falling toward the goal, Drake believed that its course should not be violated or profaned. Otherwise the Sooner coach was perfectly willing to play against the opposition giants and their normal skills, such as tip-ins, lay-ups, rebounds or blocked shots. But he cordially detested goal tending. And no wonder.

In the early 1940s, Drake's Sooners had run into a whole crane's nest of goal-stealing giants — Slim Wintermute of Oregon, Harry Boykoff of St. John's, Wyoming's Milo Komenich and, of course, his home state rival



who was having such a phenomenal season, Kurland of the Oklahoma Aggies. In the 1943 Aggie-Sooner clash at Stillwater, Kurland, then a freshman, had climbed into the stratosphere like a cat burglar to pluck out 22 probables and ensure the 59-40 Aggie romp. And Drake had to contend with Kurland's deft aviation at least three more years.

Drake began his attack on goal tending with an article, "Seven-foot Trouble," in the February 19, 1944, issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*. I wrote it for him, but he told me what to say. In it, the *Post* quoted other coaches and authorities who disagreed with Drake. "Why not bank the ball? Why not arch your clean shots more?" inquired Frank W. Keaney, Rhode Island State coach. "A tall, gangling kid should not be denied any opportunity to express himself and become a man instead of a

goon," declared Dr. H. C. Carlson, Pittsburgh mentor. "Personally I prefer to see fewer rules for officials to enforce," said Ned Irish, acting president of Madison Square Garden.

Two coaches agreed with Drake. One was Nat Holman of New York's City College. The other was — hold your breath — nobody else but Hank Iba, Kurland's own coach, the Oklahoma A&M mentor whose 1945 and 1946 Orange and Black powerhouses would win national collegiate championships and who would later coach three American Olympic basketball teams.

Hank was always thoroughly honest. "I know it smells. I hope that Kurland is the cause of getting goal tending, and also the three-second rule, out of the game," he told the weekly luncheon of the New York Metropolitan Sports Writers.

Then Drake went into courtside action. In the return Sooner-Aggie tiff at Norman in February, the Oklahoma coach was ready. He invited Jimmy St. Clair, chairman of basketball's National Rules Committee, to attend the game. Drake did more than that. He built a small platform above the north goal in the Sooner fieldhouse and posted St. Clair there in a chair to look down upon Kurland's tending and to observe what retaliatory action it might bring.

It brought a classic Sooner stall. Relaxed wartime rules permitted Oklahoma A&M, which had no Naval ROTC program from which to enlist athletes, to use two graduates, Danny Doyle, former Aggie backcourt artist, and Capt. Floyd Burdette, former AAU player. Thus Iba had (1) Kurland, and (2) the more experienced team.

But Drake, using three freshmen and Grover Ramsey, a Navy ROTC transfer from Oregon, ran the show, sewing the backcourt with a criss-cross pattern of 40 deliberate passes before hoisting a heave at the goal, guarded by Kurland. Drake's fresh-

man trio of Jack Landon of Oklahoma City Capitol Hill, Don Buelow of Enid and Ken Pryor of Waurika, played super. Pryor's three soaring first-half long goals would make him the high scorer of the strange game.

With Allie Paine, Sooner captain, directing the carefully rehearsed tactics, the youthful Sooners lazily passed and rolled the ball to one another just out of reach of the Aggies' diamond zone defense. Then suddenly the Sooners would speed up the tempo of their passing and deliver the shot, usually a long heave by Pryor with Landon screening out Kurland. The mischievous Sooner passing pattern was carefully synchronized so that Landon's screening of Kurland was accurately timed with the shot.

What happened? St. Clair, in his nest atop the north goal, saw an eyeful of what goal tending could bring. Drake's slowdown style netted the Sooners 25 field goal tries to 14 for the Farmers during the whole game. Oklahoma had possession of the ball for 30 of the 40 minutes. With only six minutes left to play, Paine flicked home a long shot and the audacious Sooners led 10-9. The crowd of 6,000, sensing an upset, bellowed with excitement. The Sooners were still delaying everything and succeeding so well at cooling off Burdette that the 6-foot 5-inch Army captain, oldest man on the floor, missed three point-blank shots and twice ran with the ball.

Then Kurland, the scowling Aggie sophomore, became a basketball player. He leaped into the ozone to bank in the winning field goal. Iba's club later added another field goal by Burdette. Fighting wildly for the ball, the two teams exchanged free tosses by Burdette and Buelow at the gun. Oklahoma A&M won, 14-11, but Drake had shown the National Basketball Rules Committee and the nation how goal tending could bring dozens and dozens of similar stalls, spoiling the game for spectators.

Meanwhile, Drake took a poll of the

nation's coaches, and it revealed that they were overwhelmingly behind him against goal tending. But the rules committee needed time to phrase and test the new legislation. Drake chafed at this delay. In the summer, he asked Iba to agree to try out the proposed anti-goal tending rule in the two Sooner-Aggie games of 1945. The proposed penalty awarded a field goal to the shooting team if a defensive player touched the ball in its downward flight.

"Hank looked at me as reproachfully as if I'd asked him to give me his best birddog," Drake wrote in his *Post* article.

"Nothing doing," replied Iba. "It's still in the rules."

"I don't blame him," Drake said. "So we'll go ahead this winter and play Hank's Aggies under the present rules, with big Kurland going up and down like a freight elevator to put the lid on our goal."

But the Oklahoma coach changed his mind. In the game at Stillwater February 22, his outmanned Sooners cut loose with a combination of intentional fouling and occasional stalling that all but upset Iba's national champions on their home court in a game the Cowboys had figured to win by 21 points. The nifty little Sooners blanked the Aggies all through the third quarter. And when Buelow sank a free throw at the start of the final period, Drake's Sooners led 17-16.

Harold "Scooter" Hines, Oklahoma's 5-foot 5½-inch forward, who today is an Oklahoma City tax attorney, played parts of that game despite an injured knee. "Bruce's strategy that night was that if we were ahead by a point, we held the ball in back court and made 'em come and get it. If the score was tied, we did the same thing. Even if we trailed by a point, we froze the ball in back court, hoping to win the game with a long shot in the final seconds."

There was also another phase to Drake's subterfuge. When the ball went to Kurland, the Sooners would

slap him on the wrist and draw a foul. That put Big Bob on the foul line instead of under the goal for deadly goal tending duty. This irritated the big fellow, and he missed seven free tosses in the first half alone.

"Our fouling was clean," Hines recalls today. "We didn't hurt him, just tapped his wrist. The guys who did the fouling were two of our subs, and they both fouled out, just as Bruce had expected."

In the last half, Hines sat on the ball just inside the center circle. This maddened the Cowboy fans. "I was tired," Hines remembers. "The Aggies were back underneath their goal, and my sore knee was hurting. So why stand?" The fan abuse continued. "I couldn't hear what they said, but I could read the profanity on their lips," Hines says.

Then Iba resorted to subterfuge of his own. With the Sooners rebounding most of Kurland's missed free throws, he ordered the Cowboys, when they were fouled, to put the ball in play from out of bounds, a course the rules then permitted, instead of trying free throws. That was the strategy that won the game. As he had at Norman during the previous fall, Kurland laid in the decisive field goal. Still declining to shoot free throws, the Aggies widened their lead at the gun, winning 23-17.

Furious, the Aggie students and spectators swarmed the court. Drake was struck in the head by a big wad of tape.

"I headed for the locker room," Hines recalls, "but five or six big guys surrounded me. They wanted to get me outside. Some lady, whom none of us ever identified, charged them. 'Let him alone!' she screamed, swinging her purse like a bolo. She cleared 'em out! We stayed in our dressing room for an hour. Hank Iba was right there with us, protecting us. He called the highway patrol to escort us out of town, leading us and flanking us. Hank is one of the finest gentlemen I ever met.

"Bob Fenimore, Cowboy football player, proved himself a gentleman, too. At a cafe in downtown Stillwater, some of our fans were dining. A bunch of Aggie fans were threatening them. 'Cut it out! Leave them alone!' Fenimore told them. They obeyed him."

At Norman the following season, Hines recalls that Drake, still refusing to play normally against goal tending, instructed him (Hines, 5-5½) to jump center against Kurland (7-0). "That made Kurland so mad that he scored 30 points," Hines laughs today.

Meanwhile, the National Rules Committee outlawed goal tending, forbidding defensive players to touch the ball in its downward flight into the goal. The penalty was to award a field goal to the shooting team unless the ball was obviously falling short of the basket. The high schools and professionals quickly adopted the rule, too. And it's still working well today.

Drake was one of the most popular coaches who ever lived. Impressed with his aggressive campaign on goal tending, the nation's coaches elected him chairman of the game's most powerful body, the National Rules Committee of the United States and Canada. He served five years in that capacity. An All-American, he was elected to the Helms Foundation Hall of Fame as both a player and a coach and also was enshrined in the National Basketball Hall of Fame at Springfield, Massachusetts.

During Drake's last four years of coaching at Oklahoma, his players were uniformly small, and his record fell below .500. In 1955 he resigned but not before devising the "Drake Shuffle," an ingenious new offense for short-statured players. His 1954 club, 8-13 for the season, upset Iba's Cowboys 63-60 at Stillwater with Lester Lane bagging 18 points. That win broke an Aggie string of 17 straight victories and scissored their run of 27 consecutive victories at Gallagher Hall.

And in 1955, Drake's final season at OU, his slippery snipers, using the

"shuffle," combined a tight zone defense and elegant free-tossing (they hit 31 of 36) to surprise the Aggies and win 55-50 at Stillwater. Thus Drake closed his career with two wins in a row over Oklahoma A&M at Gallagher Hall.

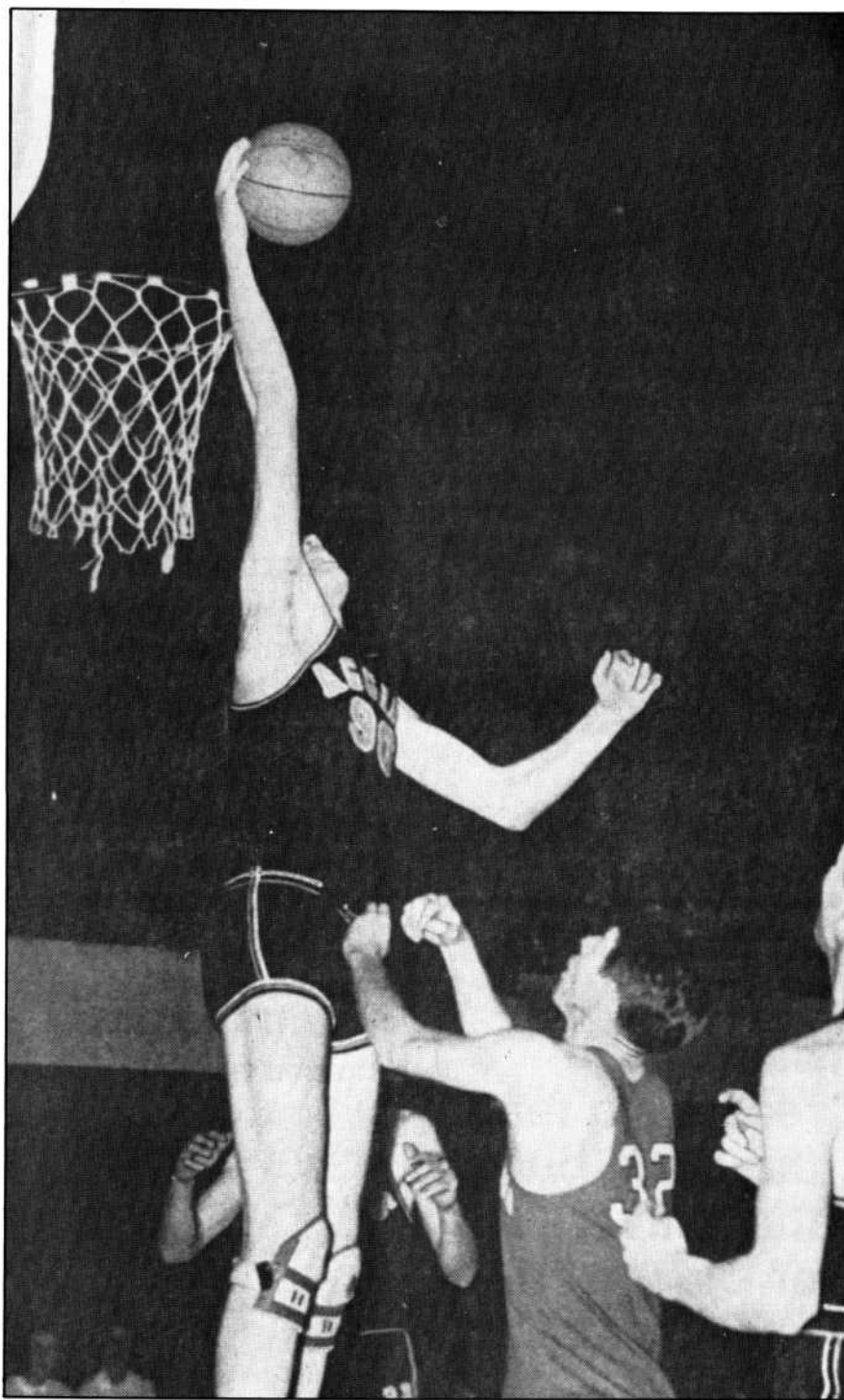
After his resignation, he was hurt because people thought that he had lost his coaching touch. He quickly disabused them of that idea when he directed the Air Force Armed Forces team to a 34-14 record, a feat that won him the right later that season to assist Gerald Tucker, his greatest player, as coach of the American Olympic team that annihilated the Soviet Union in 1956 in Melbourne, Australia, to win the championship of the world.

Next season Drake entered a fourth field of coaching, coxswaining the Wichita, Kansas, Vickers to a tie for the National Industrial Basketball League championship. Thus he laid to rest forever the erroneous idea that the game had passed him by.

Drake founded golf at Oklahoma, brilliantly coached its first 16 teams and in the earlier years personally bore some of the travel expenses as well as using his family automobile to transport his team to the big meets. His Sooner nblack squads once won 33 consecutive dual meets, swept 21 of 26 duals against arch rival Oklahoma A&M, and in 1933 Walter Emery, one of Drake's boys, won the NCAA championship. Drake was a crack golfer himself. The Sooner clubhouse is named for him.

Although the Sooners had no pool at first, Drake also established swimming as a sport at Norman. His small squads, led by distance ace Jack Davis, broke several Big Six conference records and twice placed in the NCAA meet.

Drake was a past president of the National Basketball Coaches Association, a member of the Oklahoma Athletic Hall of Fame and a member



The 1944 Saturday Evening Post graphically illustrated the dilemma of legal goal tending. The caption read: "Picture of a robbery. Bob (Foothills) Kurland, Oklahoma A&M's 7-foot 1-inch giant, intercepts what looked like a sure goal."

of the All-College Tournament Hall of Fame. After he retired from coaching, he operated a Norman real estate agency and was elected president of the Norman Kiwanis Club, president of the Norman Home Builders Association, and president of the Norman Realtors. He conducted basketball clinics around the world, his most

recent one at Athens, Greece, where he worked with all varieties of coaches from professional to high school.

Last December, at the age of 78, Bruce died after a brief illness, nearly 40 years after he launched his crusade to eradicate goal tending from the game he loved. 