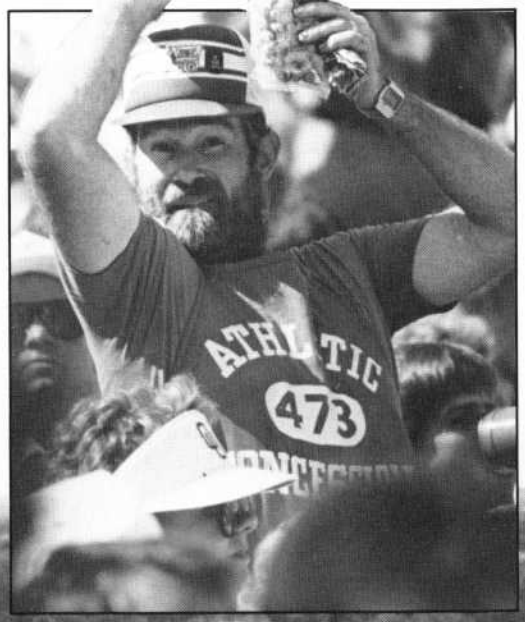
GAME DAY

By EVE SANDSTROM



There is more to a Sooner football game than football — just ask the 2,700 people whose behind-the-scenes efforts make Saturday at home an event to remember for the fans.

Photo by George Dotson

It's a folk festival, a musical extravaganza, a media event.

It's bigtime college football, Sooner style. And it's great.

When the Big Red charges down Owen Field, 75,000 cheering fans are in the stands, and 200 players and coaches rim the sidelines. And behind the scenes, 2,700 people who may not see a punt, pass or kick are working to make the day a success.

"If the game is all the fans talk about as they're leaving the stadium, we've done our jobs," Bill Dickerson says.

Dickerson is in charge of game day operations for the athletic department. A former Kansas State football player, he came to OU as an intern while working on a master's degree in athletic administration from Wichita State, and he stayed.

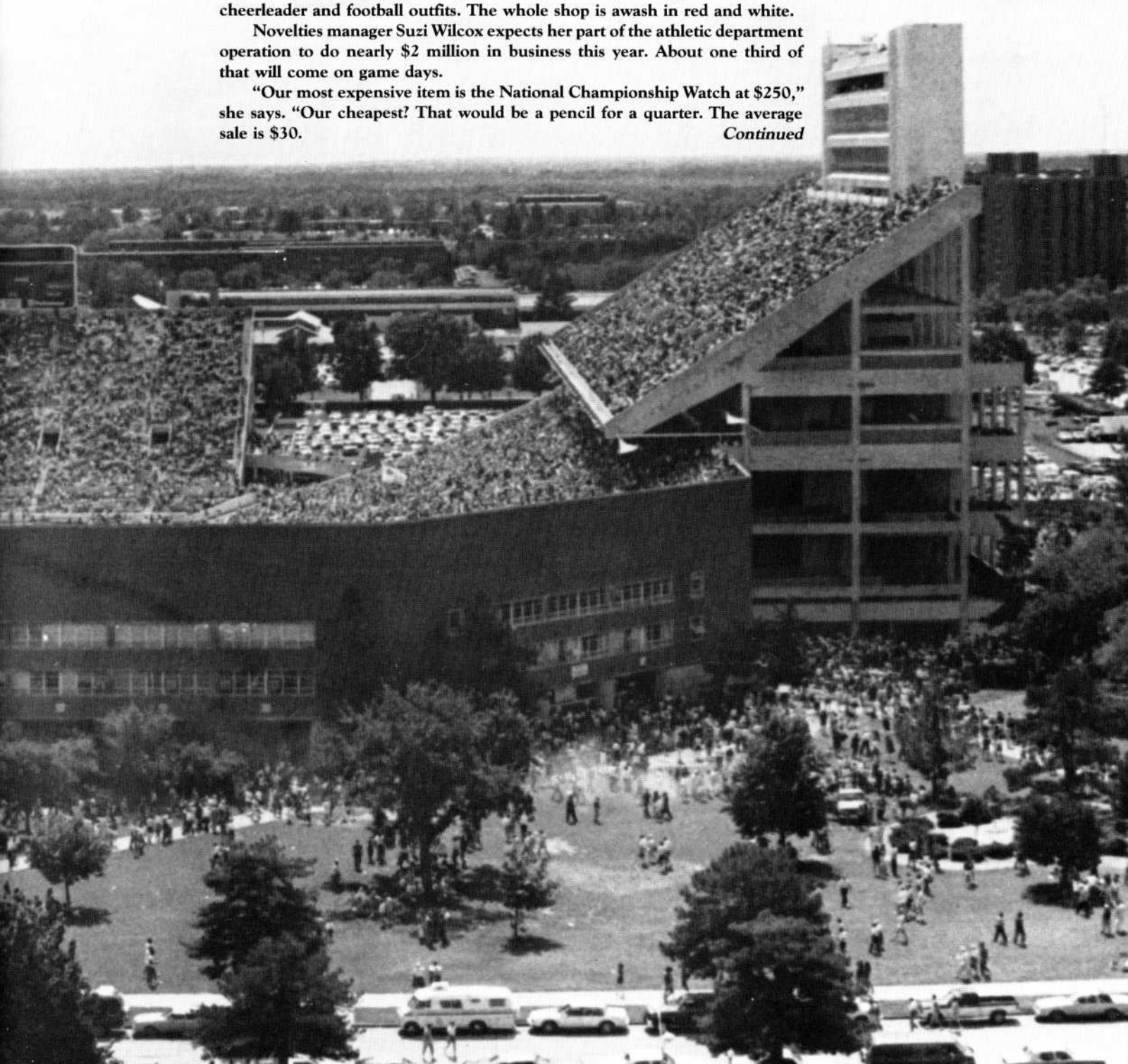
"We have to treat the stadium like a city on game days," he contends. "We've got to have our sanitation, our police, our electricians, our food. After all, 75,000 people is larger than most towns in Oklahoma."

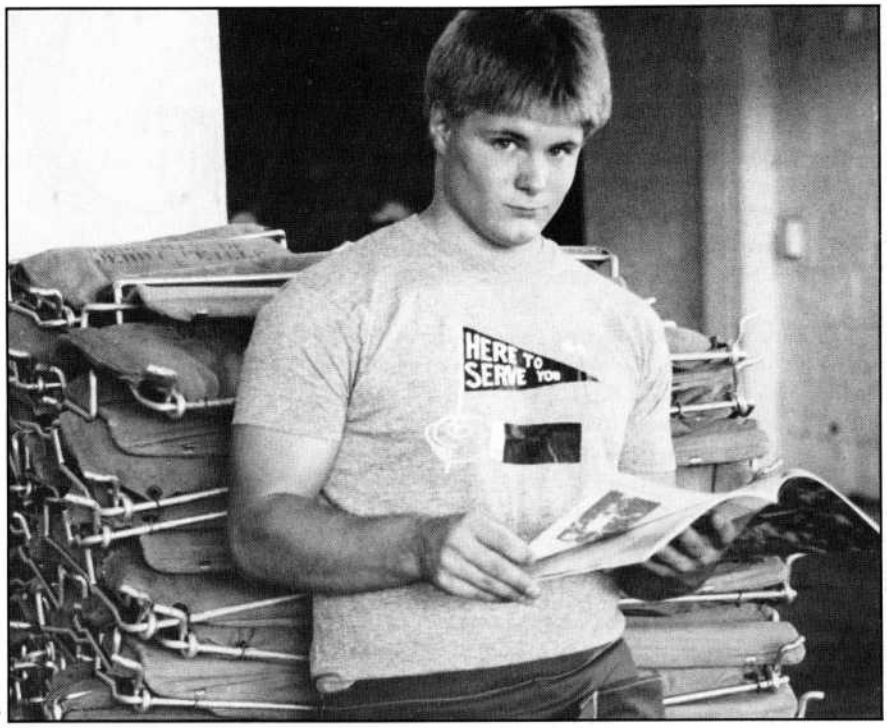
By 10 a.m. on a typical game day, the novelty shop at the south end of Oklahoma Memorial Stadium is already busy. Fans dig through piles and racks of sweatshirts, stationery, socks, shoelaces, postcards, clocks, jackets and kids' cheerleader and football outfits. The whole shop is awash in red and white.

Novelties manager Suzi Wilcox expects her part of the athletic department operation to do nearly $2 million in business this year. About one third of that will come on game days.

"Our most expensive item is the National Championship Watch at $250," she says. "Our cheapest? That would be a pencil for a quarter. The average sale is $30.

Continued

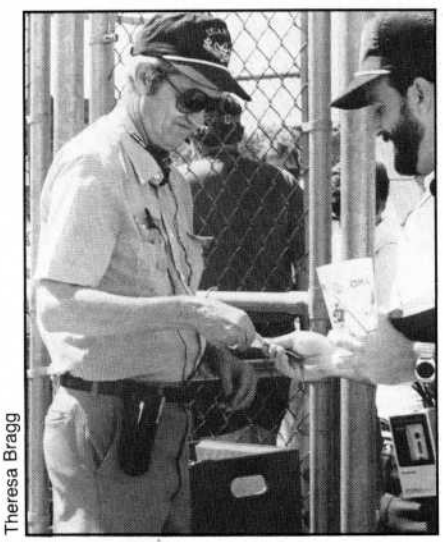




Gil Jain

Gil Jain


Gil Jain


Theresa Bragg

"The fans want an inexpensive memento to take home to the kids—a pennant or a giant foam finger that says 'No. 1.' But it's getting awfully hard to find anything with any quality to sell for under $5."

During football season, Wilcox has a core group of five full-time employees and four part-time student workers. The sales crew swells to 70 on game days, when an additional store at the north end of the stadium, nine novelty stands and 10 carts are opened.

"It takes two weeks to stock the stands and carts before the first game," she says. "It takes one whole day after a game just to refold and straighten stock in the main store."

While fans shop for souvenirs, the RUF/NEKS and the RUF/NEKS Little Sis members assemble north of the stadium, hours before kickoff. Dressed in white pants and red corduroy shirts and carrying their traditional red and white paddles and white shotguns, the pep clubs are the honor guard for the Sooner Schooner, a miniature covered wagon drawn by two white ponies, Boomer III and Sooner III. Boomer and Sooner will pull the schooner onto the field for a victory run after every OU score. Until game time, however, they pose for photos with fans, helping the RUF/NEKS raise money.

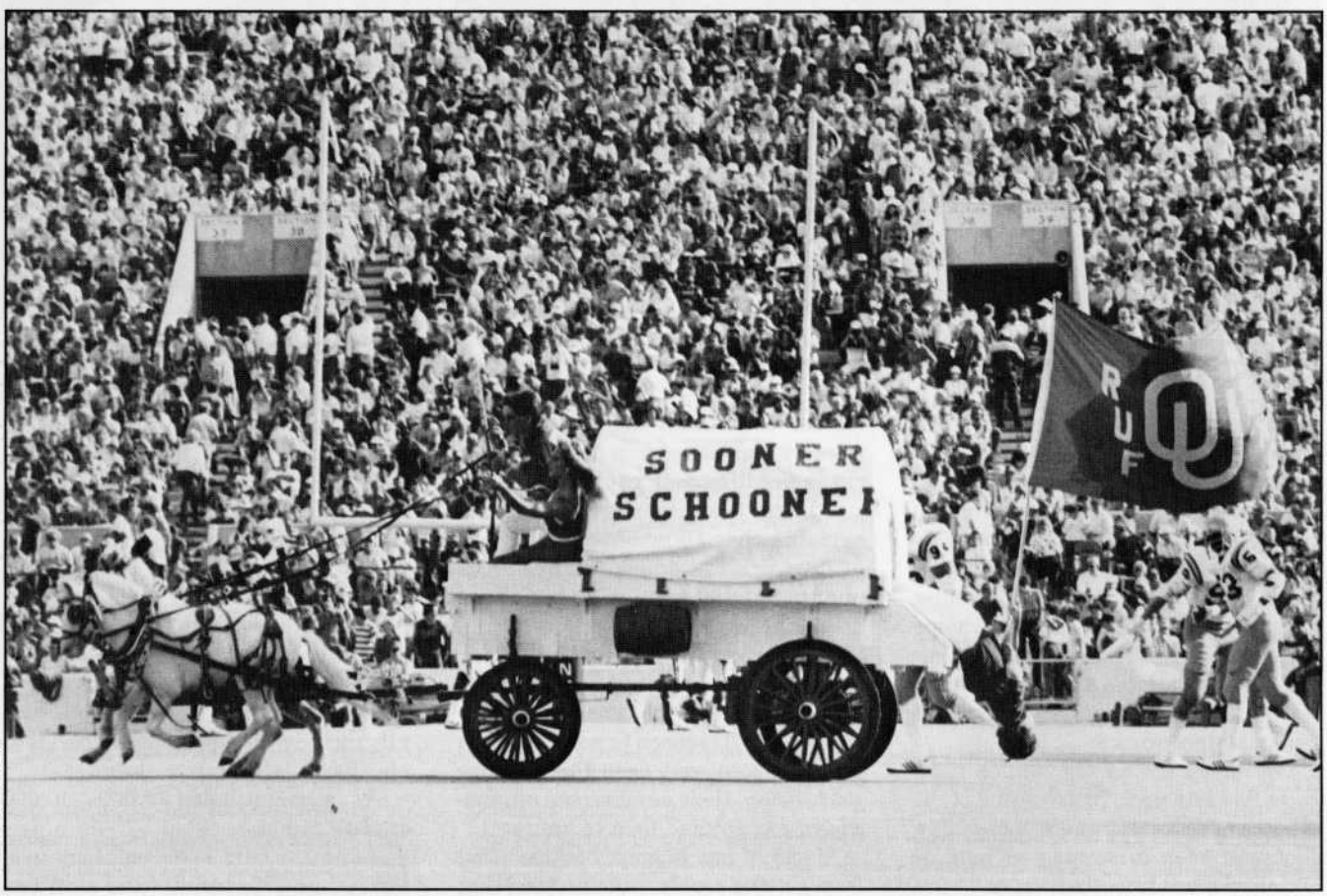
Brad Matson, of Ponca City, is president of RUF/NEKS and is one of four student drivers of the Sooner Schooner, two active and two in training. Another group of RUF/NEKS carry and fire the shotguns. They load their own blank ammunition and must pass a safety check by the Norman Police Department.

How do the ponies like shotguns?

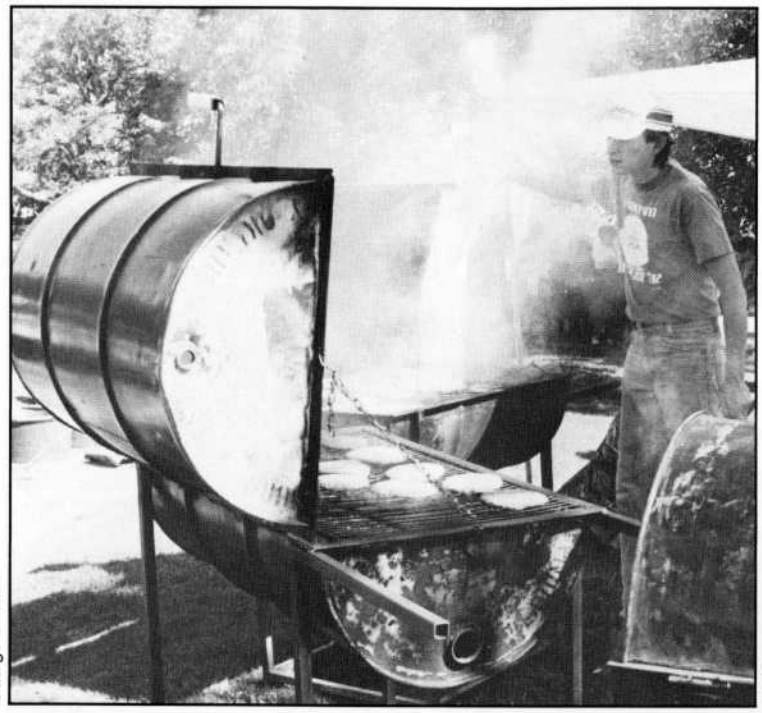
Brad grins. "They don't like them much. We have to hold them, or they get real irate. We've had them jump up like 'Hi-yo, Silver,' "—he takes a step forward— "and away."

Boomer and Sooner and the schooner are provided to OU by the Doctor and Buzz Bartlett Foundation, set up by a pair of OU alumni brothers, Dr. M. S. Bartlett and Charley (Buzz) Bartlett, both of Sapulpa. They created the schooner as a symbol of the land rushes and the original Sooners, pioneers who jumped the gun in their eagerness to stake their claims in Oklahoma.

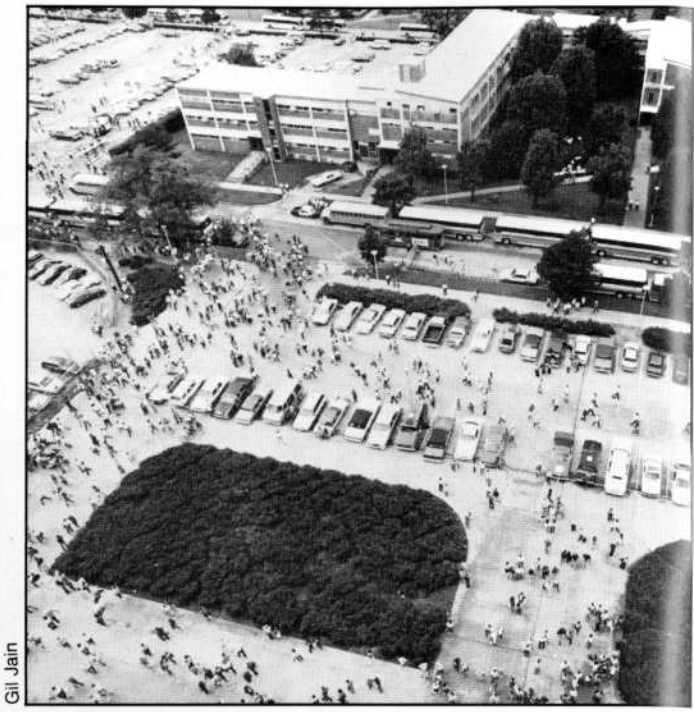
"I've seen football games all over the United States, and they have lions, tigers, red birds, blue birds, cornhuskers—just the traditional names for



Photos by Gil Jain



George Dotson



Gil Jain

Gil Jain

Gil Jain

their teams," Dr. Bartlett says. "But the name 'Sooners' is a little different. So why not have something that really reflects the state and the meaning of the team's name, something unique?"

The ponies are 42-inch Welsh-Arabians. They live on a farm near Sapulpa and appear at every home game, at the OU-Texas game in Dallas and at bowl games. A second team of ponies marches in parades and makes personal appearances.

"We enjoy seeing the ponies run," Buzz Bartlett says. "We're proud of the schooner. We've set up a foundation that will keep it running as long as Oklahoma has a football team."

Near the Sooner Schooner, a teenager with an overgrown Mohawk haircut is peddling four game tickets.

Athletic ticket manager Ben Silvia explains that Oklahoma has no law against ticket scalping. Silvia, an OU pharmacy alumnus, is philosophical about the job he took over this year.

"One day you're a hero, the next day a rat," he says, smiling.

About 5,000 people are on the waiting list for OU season tickets, and they can expect to wait from three to five years before their names come up. Purchasers are picked by a computer.

"Some of our biggest hassles come from getting people to understand that ticket orders really have a deadline date," Silvia says. "They figure it's like the gas bill—if you don't pay on time, they'll just tack on a few more dollars.

"When they finally do send the money in, we've had to reassign the seats. We've got to fill them up."

And divorce—the thought makes Silvia shake his head. OU tickets have been the object of custody battles in Oklahoma courts. The final split usually includes dividing the football tickets; then Silvia has to reassign seats.

The stadium holds 75,000—10,000 student tickets, sold at $25 for a five-game season, and 55,000 public season tickets, at $75; faculty and staff can

Gil Jain

Theresa Bragg

Gil Jain

buy at a reduced rate. The visiting schools get from 2,000 to 5,000 tickets, and the ones they return are sold as single admissions at $15 per seat.

Ticket sales will bring in more than $4.2 million this year toward the $11 million budget of the OU athletic program. Other income comes from donations, concessions, novelty sales, radio and television, licensing, Big Eight Conference events, basketball tickets and a variety of incidentals.

Football costs the athletic department between $3 million and $4 million annually, but football-related income, with an assist from basketball, supports the 19 OU varsity sports programs, according to athletics administrator Dickerson.

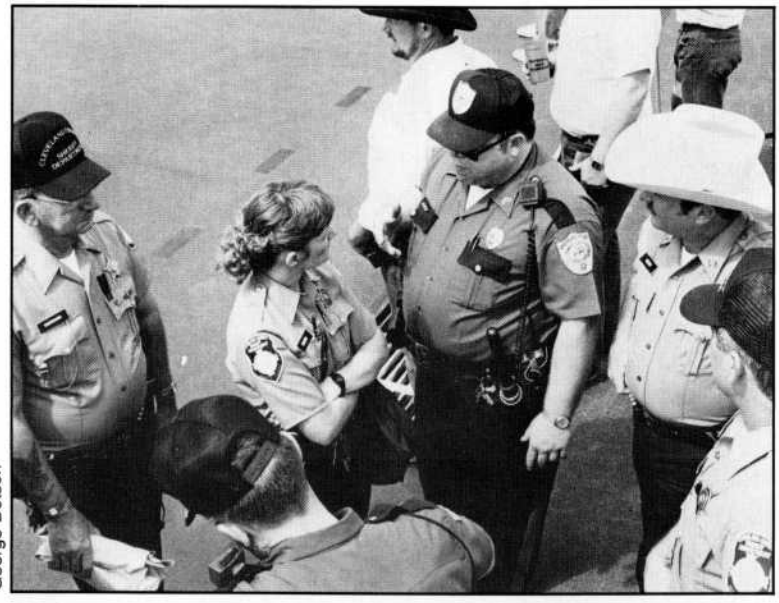
"Many people don't realize that the athletic department is considered an auxiliary to the University. We get no funding from the University at all—in fact, we pay two percent of our income for overhead. We're strictly self-sustaining," he says.

The only item that isn't red at an OU game is orange, the oranges some fans throw onto the field to symbolize the Orange Bowl as the season's goal. Oranges make Dickerson unhappy. So does tearing down goal posts.

"If you get hit in the back of the neck with an orange, you can be paralyzed," Dickerson says. "The goal posts are aluminum. They snap, and you don't know where they'll land.

"Besides, the goal posts cost $4,000 each. So tearing them down costs $8,000 for the goal posts, plus, say, $2,000 for the cleanup." He takes a deep breath. "It doesn't make me a happy person."

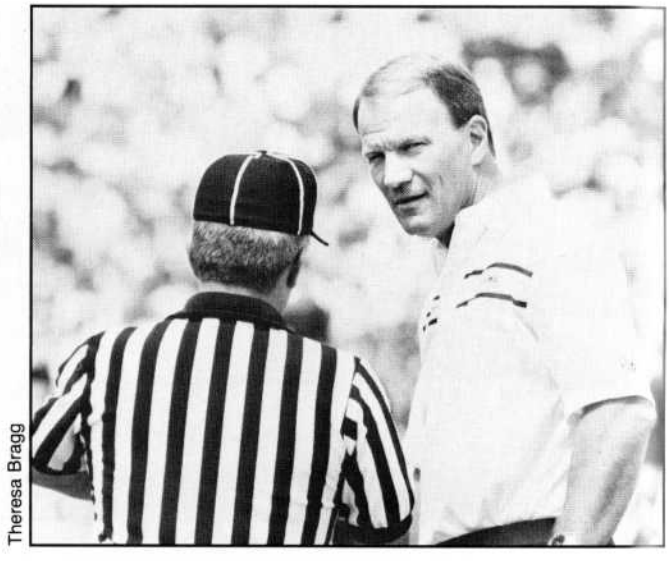
Bill Jones, director of OU's department of public safety, gets unhappy over oranges and goal posts, too, but he still prefers victories. OU fans are used to winning, he explains. If the Sooners lose, the security officers and parking workers will have a tougher crowd to handle. *continued*



George Dotson

Gil Jain

George Dotson



Theresa Bragg

"A minimum of 20,000 to 25,000 vehicles are at every game," Jones says. "The thing that saves us is that we have not only the No. 1 team, we have the No. 1 fans. These folks have been coming to the football games for years, and they have their pet ways to get here and their pet places to park. I don't know how we'd manage if we had a bunch of strangers coming.

"I always tell people there are two ways to beat the traffic—come early and stay late."

All available campus parking is turned over to football on game days, and the University charges varying fees for the service. The best bargain is Lloyd Noble Center, Jones says. Parking is free, and fans can ride the shuttle bus to the stadium for 50 cents.

Bob Connor, manager of athletic facilities, is in charge of parking near the stadium, most reserved for donors.

"It's still first come, first served," Connor says. "I get people who tell me, 'Barry Switzer said I could park here.' I try to be polite, but I've got to see that pass. No pass, no park."

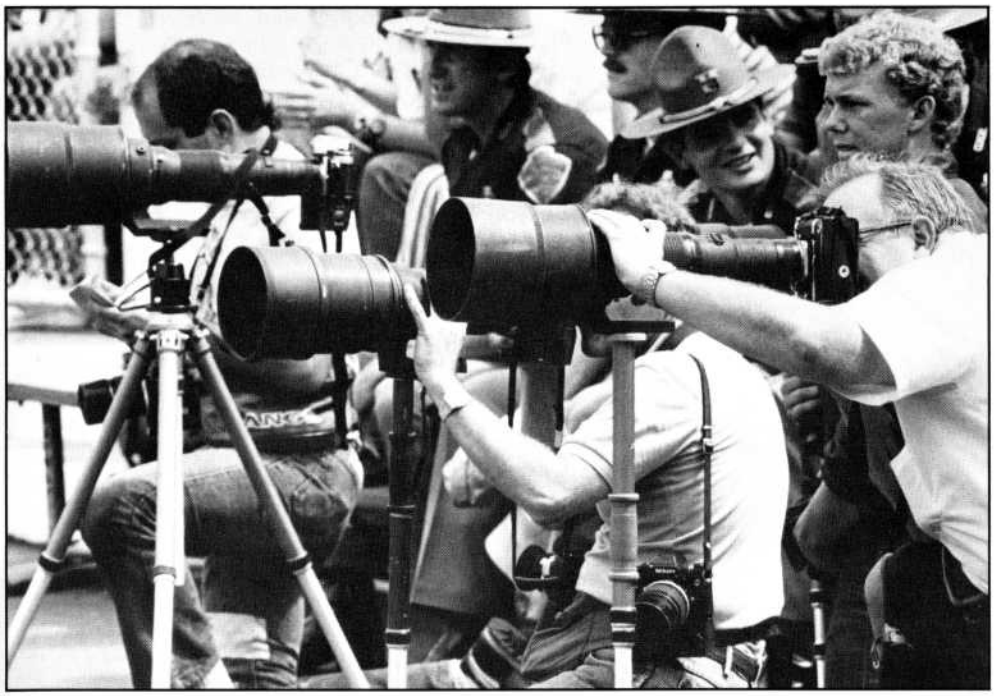
All told, 165 officers from the OU and Norman police departments and the Oklahoma Highway Patrol are needed to handle the crowds, aided by 200 private security guards and parking attendants.

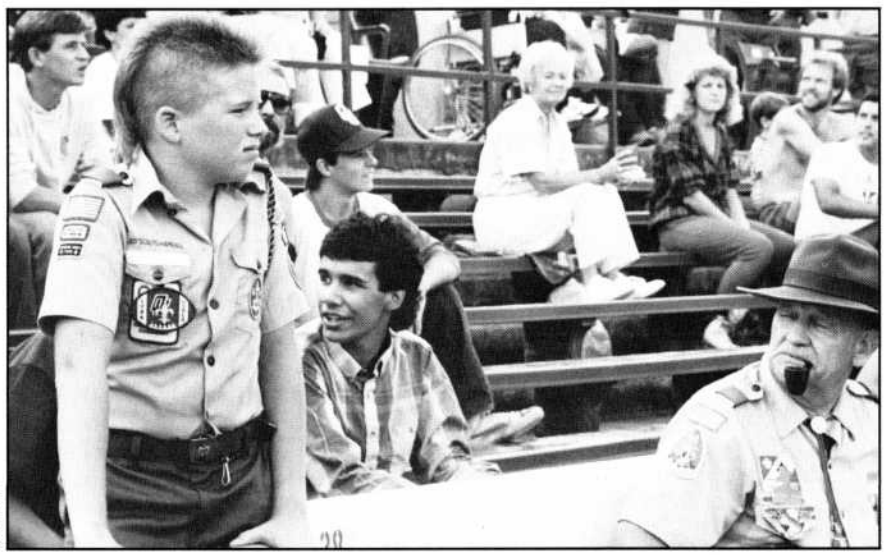
In the Gomer Jones Memorial Cardiac Care Center under the stadium's north end, Nola Duncan recalls that facility's busiest day, September 16, 1978.

"It was the second game of the season, a real hot day. OU was playing West Virginia, and they had brought their band. They were wearing wool uniforms."

In two-and-a-half hours, the staff treated 101 people, 66 for heat stroke—most of them members of the visiting band.

Duncan, director of surgical services at Norman Regional Hospital, and her husband Larry coordinate doctors,





Gil Jain

nurses and technicians from the hospital who volunteer to man the Gomer Jones Center. Dr. Hal Belknap, a Norman internist, is the medical director.

The modern, fully equipped facility has separate areas for minor first aid and for serious illness. Before the establishment of the center, OU had nothing more than a first aid station for health care at the games, Belknap recalls.

In 1969 Goddard Health Center director Dr. Don Robinson and Associate Athletic Director Ken Farris organized a care unit on the west side in the NROTC rifle range. The present facility followed in 1973 after planning by personnel from the Norman hospital, Goddard and the OU Health Sciences Center, advised by two OU alumni, Dr. Charles Robinson and Dr. Tom Russell, both Oklahoma City cardiologists. Former OU trackman Howard McGee, of Ardmore, donated his architectural design services.

Belknap and Jones believe the Gomer Jones Center is as good as any medical facility at any stadium in the United States. Built by gifts given in memory of former OU coach and athletic director Gomer Jones, who died in March 1971, the operation is sustained by donations. There is no charge for treatment.

During every game, one doctor stays in the center, a second is assigned to an emergency station in the stands, and a third is ready to accompany the seriously ill to the hospital. A Medi Flight helicopter from Oklahoma Memorial Hospital stands by, in case heavy traffic stalls ground ambulances.

Belknap considers Explorer Scout first aid teams throughout the stadium an important part of the medical team. More than 350 Scouts and leaders from the Last Frontier Council work the game. Scouts have served as ushers and assisted with first aid for nearly 30 years.

On the sidelines, cheerleaders are building a pyramid three people high. "Go, Sooners! Fight!" Pause. "Fight!" Pause. "Fight!" The six girls jump down daringly, to be caught by six guys.

Meredith Wilber, an OU cheerleader from 1968 to 1972, has just taken over as coordinator of the Spirit of Oklahoma—the cheerleaders and the pom pon squad.

"Cheerleading is drastically changed since my day," she says, "but I've been active in the National Cheerleaders Association, so I've seen it evolve over the years."

OU has had all-girl squads, then girls with a male sidelines announcer, and now a male-female squad. The coed squad is able to do lifts and tumbling tricks that classify cheerleaders as real athletes.

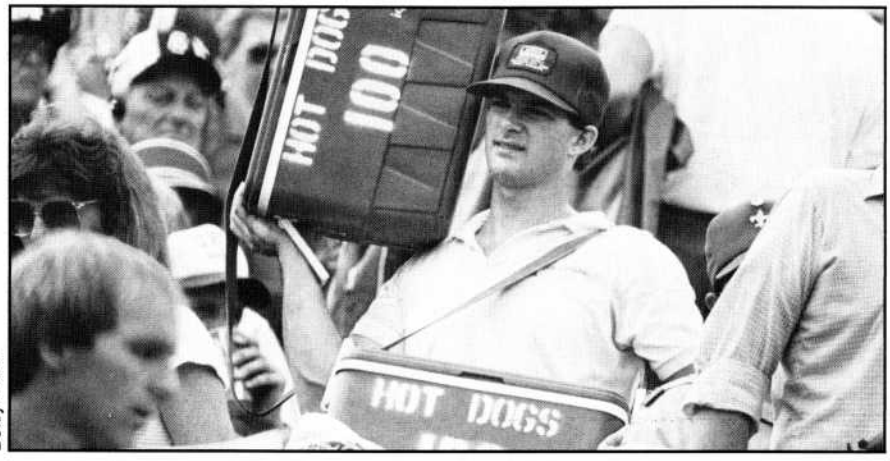
"I call it a sport," says Jan Lane Warner. Warner, who works for the Tip-In Club, the OU basketball support group, formed the first pom pon squad in 1975 and was the spirit squad coordinator until she stepped down in August.

Pom pons travel with the basketball team and the cheerleaders with the football team. Both groups go to bowl games or to basketball's national playoffs. They make a number of personal appearances—some to raise money for their own programs, some as public relations for the University or the athletic department.

The 1985-86 cheerleaders placed second in national competition, and the pom pon squad placed third.

"These young people represent the University in a very high profile," Warner says. "They have high grades, and they are active on campus. Some have jobs. One girl completely supports herself." *continued*

Bill Williams



Betsy Baker

Gene Thrailkill, director of OU bands, also thinks his students are tops.

"I'm prouder of the quality of these kids than I am of the way they play and march," he says. "Band kids are good kids. They really work hard, and they do things for others—such as bringing handicapped kids to visit band practice. I get a little tired when I hear people complain about kids today."

Only 20 percent of the OU band members are music majors. About 400 audition every year, demonstrating both playing and marching skills. About 290 players and alternates are selected.

Roland Barrett, assistant director of bands, devises the marching charts, using a computer. The computer even will print out the individual charts for the band members.

"We try to gear halftimes to all our audiences," Thrailkill says. "If you don't keep the kids in the band happy, they just quit. But the marching band is entertainment. We have to please the 75,000 people in the stands.

"Then we try to remember the small percentage of band members who will become band directors. The audience doesn't really care, for example, if there's absolutely no movement after the final bar is over. But we want our students to know that that's the right way to do it."

At 8:30 a.m. on game days, the band members practice in the stadium. They wear black pants with red and white shirts, and black raincoats if it is a moist day, as it was on a couple of occasions this fall. Flag girls have red slickers.

They end their practice by singing the "OU Chant," holding up their right forefingers in the classic "We're No. 1" signal. At the chant's end the drums boom, and the band goes into "Boomer Sooner." Then they dash out to change into marching uniforms and eat lunch. They have to march to the stadium in time to give a concert before the game starts.

As the band heads home for lunch, the crowd grabs a bite to eat from sidewalk vendors and stadium concessionaires.

A bearded showman named Roy Rector has sold concessions at OU games since 1971. Now 39, he hawks Cokes and peanuts on the west side of the stands, and on a good day he clears more than $100 a game. Concessions managers rate him as one of the best salesmen they have.

"I'm the goober man," Rector says. He grins, but he leaves no doubt that he takes his work seriously.

"The main thing is to be in shape. I run every day. You've got to be strong. The other thing is getting out there and hustling."

A rack of soft drinks holds 20 14-ounce cups. The product alone weighs 17½ pounds. The metal rack is not light, and it is awkward to carry. Rector expects to sell 23 or 24 racks of Cokes and three or four baskets of peanuts during a game.

"I just have fun with the people. About the third quarter, you start having to talk people into buying, and I have a little patter I use. I say, 'If you got the munchies, I got the cure. Get yourself a big ol' sack of goobers. Give your mouth and hands something to do.' Advertising pays."

Does Rector ever see any of the game?

He looks shocked at the idea. "I don't have time," he says.

Sylvania Tucker and Bill Wharton, co-managers of concessions, report that 85 percent of stadium sales are soft drinks, hot dogs and nachos. But popcorn, pizza, soft pretzels and plenty of other items also are offered. Approximately 800 people work for concessions on game days.

The quantities of food they prepare and sell are hard to picture.

For the first games, in hot weather, the kitchen crew will cook 18,000 hot dogs. In cold weather they will cook 22,000 and sell out by halftime.

Trucks deliver 12,000 gallons of soft drinks for each game. Tucker explains that the contract is divided between Coke and Pepsi, with each company supplying a section of the stadium.

Two women work nine-hour days Wednesday through Friday before games, popping 750 pounds of popcorn, to be rewarmed on Saturday. In addition, 11 of the stadium's 31 conces-

sion stands have popcorn poppers, which pop 500 pounds more on game day.

Thirty people arrive at the two stadium kitchens at 7:30 a.m. on football Saturdays to man the hot dog assembly lines. One crew member opens the buns. Two swipe the cooked hot dogs through a big, flat pan of mustard and shove them into the buns. Two more stuff the buns into bags. A sixth packs the hot dogs into wooden boxes that go into warmers.

Mary Henderson, Georgie Rumfelt and Ruby Reed, all retired as cafeteria cooks with the Norman schools, prepare hot dogs in the west kitchen. Reed has performed this chore for at least 20 years, the other two 18 years.

What's the best technique?

Reed smiles. "There's no technique. You just keep working."

Upstairs in the press box, Dr. J. Clayton Feaver is looking over his pregame prayer. Feaver, director of the Scholar-Leadership Enrichment Program and a David Ross Boyd professor emeritus of philosophy, has given the prayer since 1970.

"This is the only occasion when I get applause for a prayer," he says.

"My particular guideline is to write a prayer that will not exclude persons of different persuasions—I even hope my prayer will not be offensive to a non-theist."

Next, he says, "One expresses some appreciation for the meaning of play, fun, recreation—evoking the idea that both the teams and the fans will participate enthusiastically.

"Last year, I took a lot of kidding because the team lost the first game. I just told people that I had left the first game in the hands of the team and the coaches. After that, I took it back."

The OU press box is four stories of activity before a game.

The top floor provides a bird's eye view for approximately 75 cameramen.

The second floor is for radio, television and others who require private booths. The coaches have a booth, for example, and the OU regents, the public address announcers and KGOU, the campus radio station.

For a nationally televised game, a large room in the center becomes a temporary studio. At the UCLA game in September, the ABC Sports crew fastened a sheet of vivid chartreuse to one wall with silver duct tape. They installed three television sets by the open windows, all taped down securely to the counter. People with headphones kept up a constant chatter with unseen colleagues, giving the appearance of talking to themselves.

Down another flight of stairs is the deck for the print reporters. More than 150 writers cover a game, each with an assigned seat. Major dailies and news services—*The Boston Globe, The New York Times,* the Associated Press—get seats along the windows. Middle-sized papers— *Lawton Constitution, Muskogee Phoenix*—get a bank of desks about five feet higher and five feet farther back. Behind them are high, backless stools, also labeled—*Frederick Leader, Beaver Herald Democrat, Oklahoma Daily.*

Dozens of photographers are down on the field, and the lowest level of the press box contains darkrooms for them and for those on duty on the top deck. A snack room for the press also is located on the bottom level.

Mike Treps, OU sports information director, says that the largest number of press credentials ever issued was more than 700 for the 1985 OU-Nebraska game. More than 600 writers and photographers had credentials for this season's UCLA game.

"You go through a lot of emotion during the course of a Saturday," Treps says. "But Sunday is our busiest day, because we're catching up after the game. Friday is our easiest, because everything's already done."

The final gun signals the beginning of another job, the cleanup of the stadium by members of the three wards of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints—the Mormons of Norman and Noble. Church members have had this job for the last 17 years.

The Mormon families begin to arrive as the game ends. Elley and Mike Cowan and their three children are among the group.

Are there special tricks to the giant cleaning job?

"We use brooms and scrapers and lots of plastic bags and lots of sweat," Elley Cowan says.

Larry Michaelsen, an OU associate professor of management and bishop of one of the wards, coordinates the stadium cleanup. The project began when the church was new and had many members who were graduate students with families, Michaelsen says. The students did not have much money, so they came up with the cleanup as means of paying what they felt was their share of church expenses.

Although the cleaning is put out for bids, so far only the Mormons have bid for the job. The church receives $5,000 per game.

"It's really been helpful to us as an organization," Michaelsen says. "We have a nice church building. The money from the stadium didn't build the church, but it helped.

"Within the community, it's given us a reputation for being hard working and dependable. That's helped us all."

Meanwhile, the crowd straggles across the campus, happy to have seen the home team win. Music pours from an open window at Kirk House in the Cate Center housing area.

The song is "We Are the Champions."

Gil Jain