

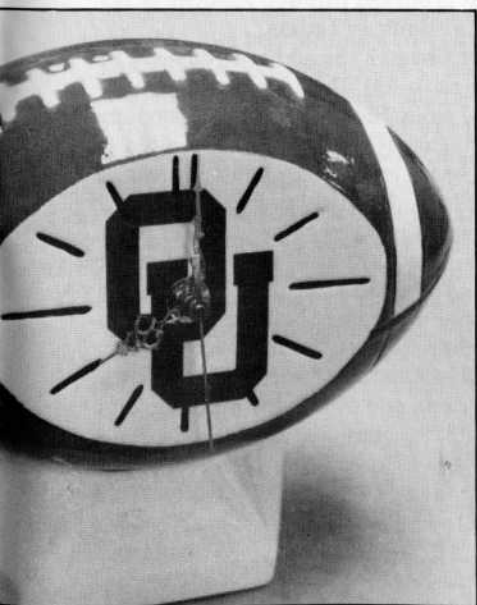


*Inside the OU Novelty Shop, handy at the south end of the stadium, fans can choose any Big Red souvenirs — all licensed — that their Sooner hearts desire.*

# my shirt says I'M A SOONER

By EVE SANDSTROM  
photos by Gil Jain





Sooner fans wear their affections on their sleeves.

Also on their shirts, hats, jackets, shoes, socks, wrist watches, umbrellas, belt buckles and sunglasses.

Millions of fan dollars are spent each year on items bearing one of the University of Oklahoma's 33 registered trademarks. Under the University's relatively new licensing program, the OU Athletic Department gets a cut from every sale.

OU licensing representative Danny Davis reports that income from the program was more than \$250,000 for fiscal year 1986-87. The profits (after \$35,000 in operating expenses) go into a general revenue account, earmarked for women's athletics.

The \$250,000 represents an 8 percent royalty on licensed items sold by a wide variety of manufacturers. This means that manufacturers sold goods with a wholesale — repeat, wholesale — value of approximately \$3,125,000. The retail value would be much, much greater.

That's a bunch of T-shirts.

"Licensing is a relatively new phenomenon, especially in colleges," Davis says. "Nobody knows much about it yet."

As recently as 1980, OU had no licensing program, the situation Stanley M. Ward found when he took over as chief legal counsel to the University in 1979. Ward served in that position until entering private practice in Norman this year.

"I had lived on the West Coast for years, and I had seen how successful USC and UCLA had been at marketing their marks," he recalls. "One of the first things I asked for in the OU office was the trademark file—and there was none. Whoever wanted to take advantage of OU's marks and logos did so."

Ward's next concern was that the University might have lost control of its trademarks by allowing this indiscriminate public use. When a trademark attorney assured him this was not the case, he moved to protect the University's symbols.

"We got the athletic department to pay for the cost of registering the

marks, with the understanding that the funds were to be earmarked for women's athletics," Ward explains. "Traditionally, women's athletics are not revenue-producing events."

Ward estimates that the athletic department had to invest about \$15,000 for attorney and registration fees.

"We started on a shoestring basis," he says. "The office of the legal counsel handled the registrations, and the athletic department was involved in marketing. They had no one full time until Danny, and Danny has done a sensational job of going out there and working out marks as a commercial operation."

Both Davis and Ward stress the dual purpose of licensing for the University—reputation and revenue.

"First, you do control your marks," Davis says. "This keeps a university's symbols from being used in ways detrimental to the University. Some universities have actually gone out and seized merchandise because of this factor. We want the University's best foot forward.

"Second, there's the revenue side."

Davis, a boyish 30-year-old with a quiet sense of humor, has an office on the second floor in the north end zone of Oklahoma Memorial Stadium. His desk, his bookshelves, his windowsill and his walls are covered with bookends, caps, tennis shoes, pictures and plaques—all bearing an OU logo of some type.

Davis grew up in Irving, Texas, but came from a family with Oklahoma roots. He earned a physical education degree at OU in 1980 and as an undergraduate worked for the football equipment manager. After teaching and coaching in a Houston area school for a year, he came back to earn a master's in athletic administration.

Work for the degree included an internship in the OU athletic department, putting him on the scene to apply when the department decided to hire a full-time licensing manager two years ago. In the first year the program had Davis' undivided attention, the income jumped from \$41,000 to approximately \$125,000. *Continued*



Danny Davis, OU licensing representative, models but a tiny portion of the items available to create "the look" of a well-outfitted, loyal Sooner fan.

# SOONERS™



Only manufacturers, not retailers, are licensed.

"Mostly people contact me about wanting to use our logos," Davis says. "They call me about a licensing agreement. Normally this is a three-year contract."

The contracts, he explains, call for an 8 percent royalty, but also set a minimum fee, usually from \$100 to \$500 a year.

"They sign the licensing agreement first," Davis says. "Then I furnish them with anything they need to make up a sample, such as camera-ready artwork."

Davis must OK the item before the licensing agreement is final.

"The only things I can remember turning down were of poor quality. They can't just make a cheap little plaque of plaster of Paris and put an OU seal on it," he insists.

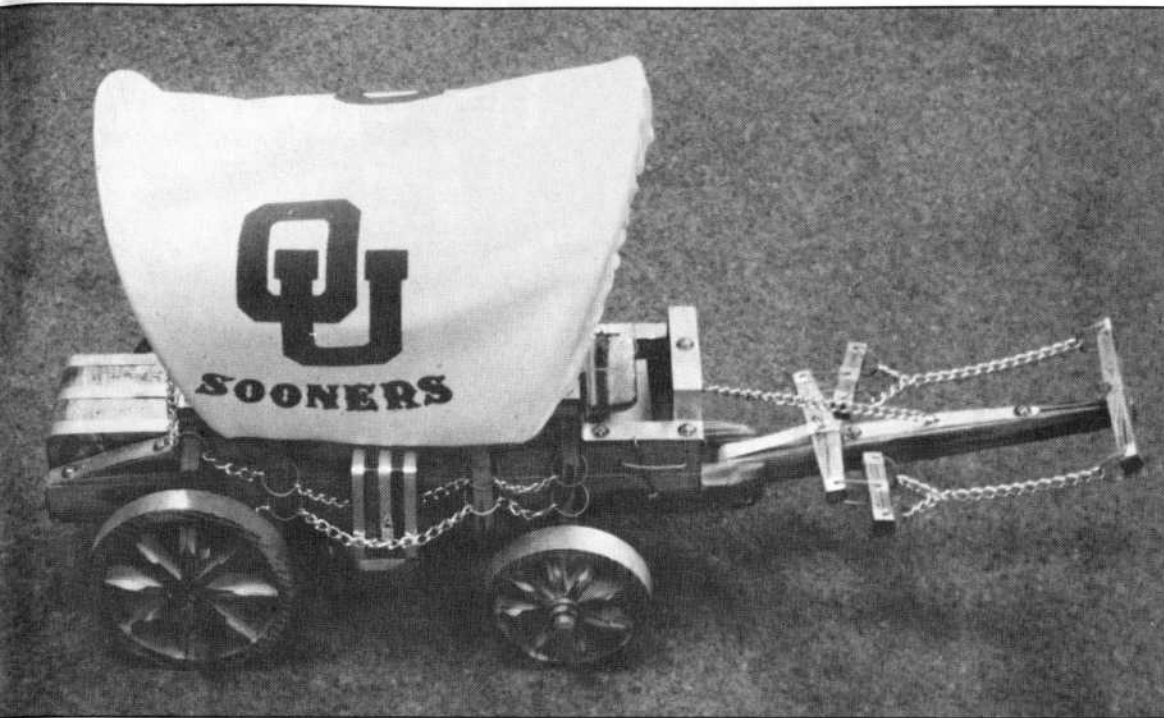
"I've also turned down bumper stickers with sayings that were not in good taste."

The majority of licensed items are clothing, with the numerous licensed sweatshirts, T-shirts and baseball-style caps bringing in the most revenue. But the variety of items is amazingly wide. License plates, stadium blankets and afghans, clocks, souvenir bowling pins, bookends, popcorn tins, tire covers, a small grill (for a tailgate party), glassware, car floor mats, baby clothes and stationery are offered.

"We also licensed a credit card," Davis says. "OU gets a quarter of the annual fee, plus 10 cents every time the card is used." The MasterCard is offered through Associates National Bank in Dallas.

Businesses throughout Norman, as well as the OU Book Exchange on campus, stock Sooner souvenir merchandise. The OU Novelty Shop, located at the south end of Oklahoma Memorial Stadium, handles thousands of OU items. Displayed there are golf bags, reflective sunglasses with "Boomer Sooner" written across the lenses, a Sooner Schooner belt buckle and a bright red cotton "Sooner Sunbonnet."

"It seems that each year there's a hot item, one everybody jumps on and wants to manufacture," Davis says. "Last year it was the cardboard-type sunshades for cars. This year it looks like the hot thing to produce is tennis



*The Sooner Schooner is a popular "vehicle" for memorabilia manufacturers. Even common logos and the words "Sooners" and "Boomer Sooner" are registered trademarks.*

shoes. I've got three or four tennis shoe companies."

Reaching onto a shelf behind his desk, he pulls out a sample—a good-looking white shoe with a red sole and a small "Sooners" embroidered near the shoelaces.

"Our agreements are non-exclusive. If I've got 50,000 people who want to do tennis shoes, I can license them. We do get requests for exclusives, but I feel that as a state institution we can't do that."

As a matter of policy, alcoholic beverages may not be licensed. Attorney Ward recalls that in past years both whiskey and beer tie-ins were refused, as well as toilet paper and toilet seats.

"You run into some odd deals," he says. "Some pasta manufacturer from the Midwest did an extensive market survey and decided an OU connection was the most marketable item in Oklahoma. They made a deal providing free pasta products for the athletic dining tables in exchange for the use of the OU logos on their packages."

Davis finds manufacturers becoming more and more accustomed to licensing.

"Licensing has been around long enough that the companies in the field have pretty much accepted it," he says. "They know to get into the program. Five years ago, that wasn't the case. We had to force them in."

Any problems that arise usually come from "mom-and-pop" or "backyard" operations. Davis believes that 80-to-90 percent of all products offered are legally licensed. Still, he checks up on it. Game day Saturdays in the fall are busy for Davis. He makes the rounds of the hawkers who ring the campus and visits the major souvenir shops in Norman shopping centers and malls.

"I don't give the retailers any trouble," he insists. "I contact the manufacturer."

When traveling, he and other OU athletic staff members make spot checks in other parts of the country.

"Somebody who's been in Utah, for



# BOOMER SOONER<sup>TM</sup>



Davis surveys manufacturers' licensed items neatly arranged in OU novelty shop, awaiting the fall onslaught of eager fans.

example, will come back and say, 'Hey, Danny, in Salt Lake City I saw this T-shirt . . .' Ninety percent of the time I'm able to tell him it's a licensed item."

But how can OU fans tell for sure that the Sooner souvenirs they buy are supporting the University?

"They can call my office," Davis says. "We'll tell them."

Standing to remove a picture of Owen Field from his wall, he points to the bottom of the frame.

"Some items are marked like this one," he says. "Officially licensed product of the University of Oklahoma. Then you can be sure."

"The trademark symbol doesn't mean as much. If they're bold enough, they'll put that on there even though it's not a licensed item."

Usually a letter to the manufacturer explaining the trademark violation is enough. Occasionally a followup letter from the program's attorney is needed, and Davis has filed charges in stubborn cases.

In his policing efforts Davis also

keeps his eyes open for products which use the names of current OU players. This usage is forbidden by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

"When I find people using players' names, I do take action," he said. "This year we had a lot of trouble, with Brian Bosworth T-shirts mostly. I chased them down and did what I could."

Coaches, on the other hand, are free to endorse products under NCAA rules. Their actions are unrelated to Davis' program.

Licensing is no sure-fire road to profit for the manufacturer, Davis says.

"We don't have an ignorant buying public. If it's a sorry product, sticking an OU on it is not going to make a hill-of-beans difference. It won't make an item that won't sell, sell."

OU is a charter member of the Association of Collegiate Licensing Administrators, a group formed two years ago by about 50 universities. This organization helps Davis meet fellow licensing executives and gives him a network of acquaintances he can use to check references and otherwise head off problems.

Intercollegiate cooperation, not competition, is the byword here, Davis says.

"For about two or three weeks before

the Texas game, we spend a lot of time on the phone talking to the Texas University licensing people."

He grins. "I'm not sure the alumni would approve of this, but we have a very good working relationship with Texas. In fact, during both of the past two years they stopped the selling of T-shirts that were detrimental to OU, and on one occasion they actually seized the shirts."

Davis drops his eyes and doesn't offer to tell what the shirts had said.

To the University, this ability to control the standards of products bearing the name and symbols of the University of Oklahoma is probably the most important factor in licensing.

But while the money earned by the OU licensing program is not yet a major component in the self-supporting athletic department's \$11 million budget, the program seems destined to expand.

Davis is conservative in his estimate of the possible growth of licensing. The nation's top university licensing programs bring in only about \$300,000 a year, he says, and a lot depends on the continued popularity of college-related merchandise.

Attorney Ward is more optimistic. "In my opinion," he insists, "it's only a beginning." 