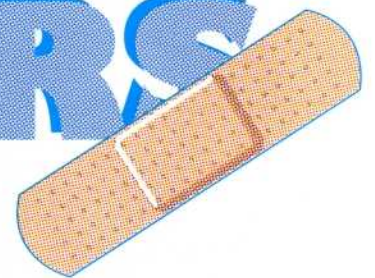




THE BRUISE BROTHERS

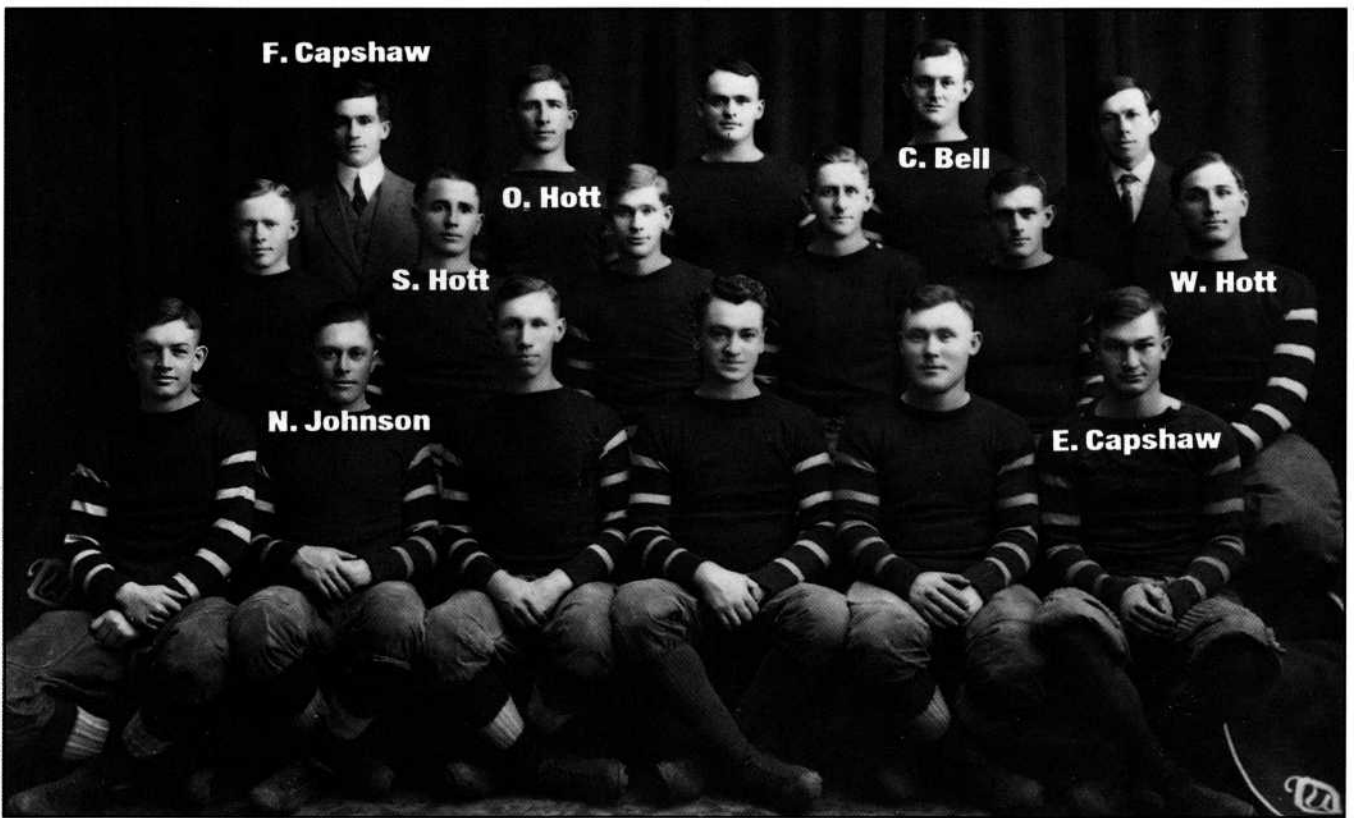
by BEN FENWICK



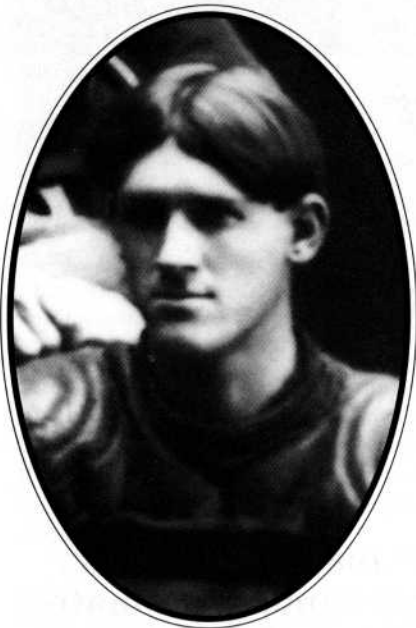
Sooner football was a no-holds-barred free-for-all barely two years old when the sport became a family affair. Much to the dismay of their fearful father, Fred Merkle left the farm in 1897 to join his brother Joe, a charter OU lineman.

The mother of Chester and Clarence Reeds was sufficiently horrified by the dangers of the gridiron to keep her eldest son home from a key 1902 road trip. However, Chester overcame this maternal obstacle to become a star on the 1903 squad, and Clarence was a

Just ask anyone who ever played football; there is a brotherhood that binds teammates. And if the teammates are already brothers? Well, that's another story.



ABOVE: Brothers abounded on the 1913 Sooner football team: two Capshaws, three Hotts, the first of two Bells and the first of four Johnsons. BELOW: Chester Reeds in 1904 set the early standard for three more brothers, Clarence, Artie and Claude.



creditable sub by 1905. Artie Reeds in 1907-09 and Claude in 1910-13 carried on the brotherly tradition that has been repeated with regularity throughout Sooner football history.

Harold Keith in *Oklahoma Kickoff* describes an early-day trio of brothers from Wakita, known as “The Terrible Hotts.” The eldest and the first to make the team was Sabert Hott. “Sabe” was a 157-pound German farm boy who came to OU in 1910 to study engineering. On the defensive line, he would make up for his size by bracing himself with his nose literally against the ground, his hands far apart and fingers dug in. He continued playing even after losing an eye in a construction accident. The specter of Sabert Hott, eye-patched, grimaced, springing from the ground and barreling down the field must have helped OU halt more than a few opponents.

Sabert was followed by his younger brothers, Oliver and Willis. The three played together on OU’s 1913 team, a foreshadowing of the Selmons yet to come. The younger Hotts were Wakita legends, and those stories followed

them to Norman. Willis, tagged “Big Hott,” once retrieved a kickoff that blew 42 yards past his team’s goal, and as the tale goes, ran the ball for a 142-yard touchdown.

Stories about Oliver, or “Little Hott,” follow along in the same vein. He once ran the ball to the wrong end of the field, realized his mistake, turned around and ran back for an 83-yard touchdown.

Something magical seems to surround brothers who play together on the same team, perhaps harkening back to a time when families not only ate Sunday dinner together, but also lived their lives together. The farm was handed down generation to generation; the hardware store employed the entire family; the firm’s name read Johnson, Johnson & Sons.

Family traditions haven’t disappeared altogether from modern culture, but such bonded closeness seems no longer commonplace. Yet when the leaves begin to turn and autumn’s chill hits the air, memories return of playing touch football in the back yard with your brothers. And on game-day

Saturdays, we long for those times.

For two Sooners of the '90s, playing on the same team is just an extension of everyday life. Perry and Terry Collier, 20-year-old twins from Munday, Texas, are sophomores at OU. Perry plays safety while Terry is an inside linebacker.

"We don't know what it's like *not* to play on the same team," says Perry.

Brother Terry explains that they also played together on their high school football team. While the two are aware that their relationship sets them apart, Terry insists that on the field it's no big deal. "We're just two guys playing ball."

The same could have been said in triplicate of the 1914 team, which featured Oliver and Willis Hott (Sabe having departed) and two other sets of brothers: Hap and Neil Johnson of Norman, and John and Curry Bell. The team also included Elmer Capshaw, whose brother Fred, a four-year letterman himself, was the assistant coach. Such a concentration of family teamwork was rarely seen again until 1973, when Eufaula's celebrated trio, the Selmon brothers, burst on the OU scene like a thunderclap.

The Selmon saga began at OU in 1971, when Lucious Selmon broke into the starting lineup. He was followed shortly by his "little" brothers Lee Roy and Dewey. All three started on the defensive line in 1972 and 1973, all

"We practically *were* the defensive line at OU. One did not want to let down and make the other two look bad," says Lucious Selmon.

became collegiate All-Americans and left a glow that still shines in the memories of Sooner football fans. The Selmons are remembered not only as the terrible triumvirate of OU's defense but also as the soft-spoken sons of a former sharecropper, spotlighted for their spectacular play and respected for their leadership on and off the field.

"I think the main thing about seeing brothers on the team is that it represents an idea of family closeness. People always like to identify with that," says Dewey Selmon, now the president of his own construction company, Selmon Enterprises of Norman. "In our case, it was an added dimension that there were three of us."

Lucious played middle guard, flanked by Dewey on the left and Lee Roy on the right. The three had natural talent, enhanced by their own brand of interaction, the ability to read each other's cues, making their moves in relation to one another. Three skilled athletes who had played together since childhood became a unit unto themselves.

"We practically *were* the defensive line at OU. One did not want to let down and make the other two look bad," says Lucious Selmon, now an assistant coach at OU. "You were always trying to hold up your end. What one did was complementary to the others. We had our own little codes to determine what way one would go. It gave us a better opportunity to get to the other side's quarterback."

In practice, the brothers played both against each other and for each other. There was competition between them, Lucious admits, but it was a matter of keeping up with, rather than outdoing, one another.

"It helped me in practice—it was motivational," Lucious recalls. "We would be running wind-sprints. The coach yelling at us didn't really affect me that much. My picker-upper was keeping up with Dewey and Lee Roy."

By the end of 1973, there were only two Selmons left on the squad. Lucious, sidelined by an injury during a game with OU's arch-rivals, the Nebraska Cornhuskers, remembers the realization that hit him as he left the field.

"It was a moment of reckoning . . . that it would be the last time I'd play with Dewey and Lee Roy. It was one of those times . . . the end of a great, great experience," Lucious says.

When Dewey and Lee Roy graduated in 1975, they went on together to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Lee Roy as the first player drafted overall and Dewey in the second round. Dewey was overjoyed to continue playing beside Lee Roy, but the brother act ended eventually when Dewey was traded to San Diego.

The 1973 season was Coach Barry Switzer's first, but Dewey remembers it as his own best year in football, overshadowing even the national championship teams that followed for the younger Selmons in the next two years. 1973 had a dreamlike quality even then.

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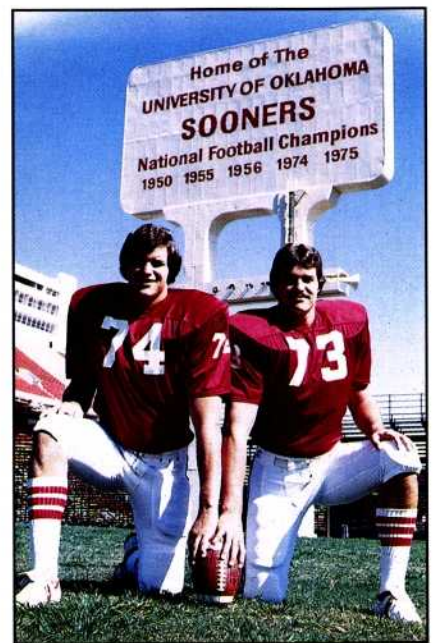


Not since "The Terrible Hotts" of 1914 had a brotherly trio of Sooners commanded the respect on field and off as that accorded the Selmons—Lee Roy, left, Lucious and Dewey.



J. Pat Carter

Last year Chris and Corey Wilson formed the team's brother act; this year that distinction goes to the Collier twins—safety Perry, left, and linebacker Terry.



Standout linemen Phil, left, and Paul Tabor made a 1978 game program cover.

"I loved the thought of playing with my brothers. I'd think 'It doesn't get much better than this.' In every sense of the word it was special," Dewey says. "The timing was perfect. We had a supporting cast of fine athletes in a great era of football."

In addition to the Selmons, the 1973 Sooners included the brothers Tinker and Jim Owens, both following in the oversized footsteps left by their brother Steve, OU's second Heisman winner.

"It was a real neat deal," Lucious agrees. "We not only had our brother act going, but they had theirs. It unified the team. All the brothers were good players."

Tinker Owens, who now operates an insurance business, also remembers the unity of the team. It was the heyday of Switzer's wishbone offense.

"We just had so many good players at that time," Owens says. "Our defense was always so good."

But he also remembers the pressure of following brother Steve.

"There was pressure when I came, but I had a real good game (in 1972) against Nebraska on television. I caught five passes in the game. We were down at halftime and came back 17-14. After that, nobody talked about my being Steve-o's little brother anymore."

Although feeling the need to live up



Tinker Owens, left, plays golf today with brother Steve, a Heisman winner, but his gridiron teammate was brother Jim.

to Steve's example, more often Tinker says he drew strength from his brother's achievements and from the OU tradition.

"We always pulled for each other in our family," Owens says. "We came from a poor family, and without the scholarships, we wouldn't have been able to come to OU . . . just like a lot of guys at that time. The tradition at OU is great, and a lot of brothers like us have gotten to play because of it."

Steve Owens, too, thinks that tradi-

tion is what led his brothers to OU. Both Jim and Tinker used to watch him play on Owen Field, and he was pleased that they wanted to follow his example.

"I think that coming to Norman to watch me play might have seeded something in them to want to be Sooners," Steve says. "When Tinker graduated from high school, that's where he wanted to go, and Jim, too, when he graduated."

Steve Owens, who owns Steve Owens & Associates in Norman, understands the pressure awaiting those who choose to play on their brother's team—especially that of a successful brother.

"When brothers follow brothers, that puts pressures on them," Owens acknowledges. "But Tinker was the kind of player who represented himself really well. He became an All-American. He had respect for what I'd done, but he did his own thing."

The Burris clan from Muskogee was a similar OU dynasty—only larger. The first Sooner was Paul "Buddy" Burris, who in 1946-48 became one of the first OU players to be named All-American after the end of World War II. Buddy soon was followed by four of his five brothers, perhaps setting the OU record for family participation.

Bobby Burris, who joined the Soon-

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Courtesy: Buddy Burris

By 1950 Oklahoma All-American Buddy Burris (in tie) had moved on to the Green Bay Packers, but four more sons of Paul Burris Sr., left, were lined up to be Sooners: Kurt (next to Buddy), Bobby and the twins, Lynn and Lyle.

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Janice Higgins/ The Norman Transcript

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Richard Clifton

Tim Lashar, left, was the OU kicker for four years (1983-86), succeeded in 1987 by his brother R.D., right, who went on to set the Big 8 all-time kick scoring record.

ers in 1953, came somewhere in the middle of the Burris onslaught. He remembers not only the competition he felt in following his older brother, Kurt, who played from 1951-54, but also the inspiration it provided him.

"There's nothing better than to have a brother ahead of you," Bobby says. "You think, 'Maybe I'll be there.' I think in our older years, it's actually more important to have it to look back on. Loyalty to the family is the most important thing there is."

The last of the Burrises to come to

OU packed a double punch. They were twins Lynn and Lyle, now both presiding district judges in the Tulsa area. They joined the team in 1955.

"Our brother Bobby was a senior at OU that year, and he was a tough act to follow," says Lyle. "When your older brothers include a three-time All-American (Buddy), and a unanimous All-American and runner-up to the Heisman (Kurt), we tried the best we could to keep up."

In spite of having so many acts to follow, the Burris twins did manage to

get in some good plays, Lyle says. He played in the backfield while Lynn played on the line.

"Naturally it helped for him to be there," Lyle says of having Lynn up front. "He'd support me, and I'd support him. When you're raised with someone, you are in tune to what he's thinking. He opened up a lot of holes for me. I'm not sure if he liked me running over him or not, a cleat or two on occasions."

So far the team's newest twins, the Colliers, have yet to play together in an OU game, but they both say that the support is still there. Terry, who has surpassed his brother in weight gain, has broken into the Sooner starting lineup; Perry is working hard to catch up and make his contribution. In the meantime, he doesn't see what all the fuss is about, the fact that they are twin brothers.

"I really don't think much about it," Perry says. "I'm just trying to find my place on the team so I can get on with it."

But what about that time when the Colliers, like the Selmons, won't be together on the same team? The twins glance at each other and shrug, as if the thought never had occurred to them.

"We're so used to doing things together," Perry reiterates. "I wouldn't know what to think. That would be weird." 