

25 Guys Pulling on the Same Rope

These Sooner baseball players weren't supposed to win the Big Eight regular season—and they didn't. They weren't slated to win the conference tournament—and they didn't win that either. But the canny coach, Larry Cochell, was saving the best for last. Carefully pacing his team through a grueling schedule, Cochell's raiders peaked at just the right time and took it all—the second NCAA national baseball championship in University history.

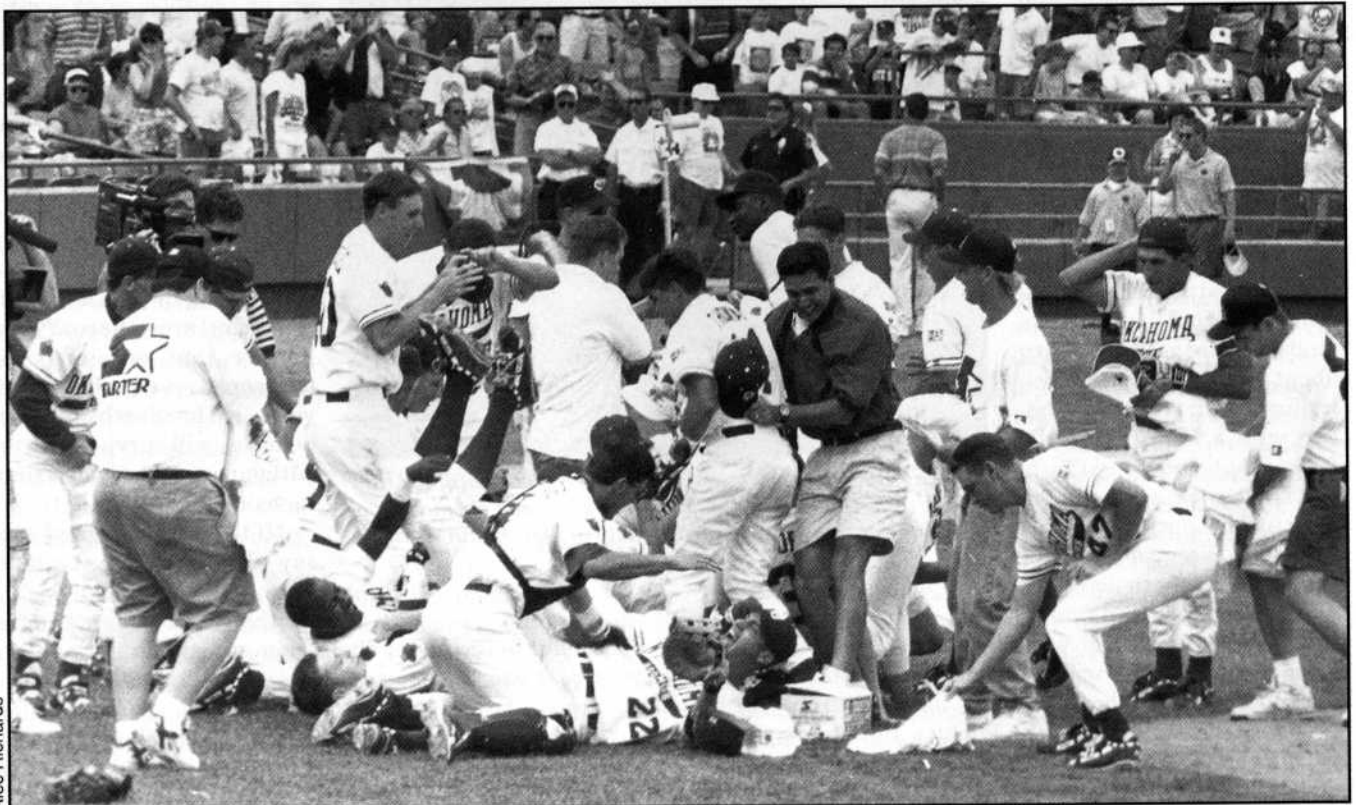
One columnist called them "blue-collar ball players," a no-name team built on teamwork and tenacity. They were going to make it through the season, their coaches insisted, with "25 guys pulling on the same rope," a motto that became their battle cry.

Lightly regarded in some quarters after a runner-up finish in the Big Eight tourney in Oklahoma City, the Sooners' 42-17 record with the second-toughest schedule in the nation was enough to earn a first seed in the NCAA regionals in Austin. There Oklahoma calmly started on an eight-game run that swept away Arkansas State, Stanford and Texas (twice),

before moving on to the College World Series in Omaha, taking Auburn, Arizona State (twice) and Georgia Tech.

The largest crowd in CWS history—21,503—watched the Sooners manhandle Tech 13-5 in the final game, collecting 16 hits to lead the tournament in both hitting (.327) and pitching (2.37 ERA) and finish second defensively with only five errors. Center fielder Chip Glass was named the CWS Most Valuable Player, joining pitcher Mark Redman, first baseman Ryan Minor, right fielder Darvin Traylor and second baseman Rick Gutierrez on the All-Tournament Team. Subsequently Cochell was voted the NCAA Coach of the Year.

The victorious Sooners returned home on a Sunday morning to a noisy crowd of supporters at the Oklahoma City airport. Meanwhile a jubilant throng of approximately 3,500 fans waited more than an hour in the blazing midday sun for the newly crowned heroes to arrive at OU's L. Dale Mitchell Park. On hand were Charles Pugsley and Bill Harrah and their coach Jack Baer, part of the storied team of 1951, the last Sooner nine to win the national championship. —CJB



Alec Richards

After pulling together all season long, 25 Sooner guys can drop the rope long enough to pile onto the field and on top of each other to celebrate their national NCAA baseball championship victory at the College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska.