
PROLOGUE

A day off from relevance: confessions of a football fan

*The time has come, the Sooner said,
To talk of other things;
Of red—and white—and slanting Os—
Of crimson—and of cream—
And quarterbacks and marching bands
And prospects for our team.*

with apologies to Lewis Carroll

Staying journalistically focused on the academic mission of this University is not too difficult—most of the time. The faculty, in general, are fascinating people, in the classroom and out—and so are their students. With the administrative support staff, they serve up a continuous menu of programs, projects, performances and appearances that satisfies the intellect and fires the imagination. Yes, most of the time, color me centered on the important stuff—but not in August. August is my month to ponder peripheral issues.

In August, I cast expectant glances out the office window across the street to the Pride's practice field, an ear cocked for the first strains of "Boomer Sooner" and other sacred anthems. In August I drive cautiously down Jenkins Street, watchful of the overmuscled young men who claim the right-of-way between the athletic dorms and the stadium. In August I check the schedule and stock up on enough sunscreen to see me through four sweltering Saturdays in September. Then I note that one is a night game and wonder why not the other three?

For several years now, I have convinced myself that this yearly ritual wasn't fun anymore—and for several years, it wasn't. But this year a new spirit is abroad in the land; this year could be different. I have to admit the awful truth: I still love football.

I don't claim to be a student of the game. I don't rush to the newsstand for the preseason previews. I don't pore over some sportswriter's position-

by-position analysis of conference teams. I can tell when we are playing well or poorly, and sometimes I know why. I go to all home games, rain or shine, and I don't tolerate bad-mouthing of my beloved Sooners.

To be perfectly honest, I probably like the football season as much as the game itself. I love the color and the music and the crowds. I love the tailgaters, the vendors on Campus Corner, the ponies pulling the Sooner Schooner, the cheerleaders.

The past few years, the lack of enthusiasm for fall foolishness has bothered me. There ought to be pep rallies and students camping out to get season tickets and victory parties—pre-supposing victories, of course. The Spirit Council started on the road back last year with the Big Red Rally, now a tradition before the first home game, and Friday night bonfires are planned for every home game. And there are other signs of awakening expectations—most emanating from OU's new coach, Howard Schnellenberger.

There is nothing subtle about Schellenberger. He launched a nine-day, 30-city barnstorming tour this summer, in addition to dozens of previous appearances in Oklahoma City, Tulsa and out of state. He packed them in—even in Aggie territory, signing autographs for 3½ hours after one speech. This coach is brutally frank about what he expects from team and fans alike, blatantly predicting victories, promising championships and demanding a packed stadium.

On this, the 100th anniversary of Oklahoma football, Schnellenberger intends to add his own touch to the tradition. He has ordered the team uniforms redesigned. For the first time since 1946, the team will spend Friday nights before home games on campus—in OCCE's Sooner House—rather than secluded in an Oklahoma

City hotel. Then Schnellenberger will march the squad down Asp Street to the stadium, accompanied by a pep band and anyone else who wants to come along. The classics department should give outside credit for attendance at this spectacle. How Romanesque can you get?

Since he is on such a roll, there are a couple of things I wish the new coach would insist upon as a favor to me. First I would like an official determination of just what red is OU red, my personal choice being the classy dark red Kelvin Sampson and Larry Cochell selected for their basketball and baseball teams, burying forever the fire-engine Nebraska red and the Texas Aggie maroon seen in certain sectors. Then I would like some public support for straightening the interlocking OU logo back to the perpendicular as nature intended.

Unfortunately some of the elements missing this season from the Memorial Stadium production cannot be restored. The volunteer PA announcers and the faculty ticket takers, for instance, went the way of big-time game management several years ago, and now a new voice must be found to ask the Almighty's indulgence on the contest about to be joined. Dr. J. Clayton Feaver, whose wonderfully ecumenical, all-inclusive invocations had preceded the kickoff since 1972, died July 14 at the age of 84.

Kingfisher College professor of the philosophy of religion and ethics, David Ross Boyd professor of philosophy, architect and first director of the Scholar-Leadership Program, recipient of the Distinguished Service Citation, Clayton Feaver was the most delightfully good-humored intellectual I ever knew. He had so many admirable qualities, I don't know where to begin. I suspect, however, that in August his attention wandered, too. —CJB