



ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH

With back-to-back Super Bowls to his credit, OU alumnus Pat Bowlen has known both peaks and valleys as owner of the NFL's Denver Broncos.

University of Oklahoma alumni often know all the answers when it comes to football trivia, but here are a few questions that are not often asked:

What National Football League team is owned by an OU graduate?

What NFL training facility is named for an OU track athlete?

What NFL team's owner might stake a claim to being one of the world's first professional triathletes?

Okay, so they are easy questions. The NFL team in question—in all the questions, as a matter of fact—is the Denver Broncos, back-to-back Super Bowl champions in 1998 and 1999.

The Broncos' majority owner, president and chief executive officer is Pat Bowlen, who was awarded degrees from OU in 1966 and 1968 in business administration and law. "Back then, OU had what was called the 'three-and-three' plan, which ended with an undergraduate degree in business and a three-year program in law," Bowlen says. "While I was in school, I didn't really know what I was going to do. Maybe some people have a great vision in college, but I didn't. For me, college was a time for maturing.

"Most important was the independence of it all—living in the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity house, encountering real learning experiences and knowing guys who were slightly older and who proved to be good mentors. At 21, I was in law school, living and studying on my own. Life became more difficult than it had been up to that time. But, when you have to, you learn to look after yourself. I made decisions—not always the right ones—and it sometimes surprises me that I'm still around. Those years are important in my memory and really the foundation for everything to follow. I have great affection and nostalgia for those years at OU."

continued

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Pat Bowlen, owner and CEO of the Denver Broncos, pauses in the lobby of the Paul D. Bowlen Memorial Broncos Centre, headquarters for the team and its corporate activities.

BY JUDITH MURPHY

photos courtesy of Rich Clarkson and Associates
and the Denver Broncos



Pat Bowlen, center, shares locker-room triumph with Broncos running back Terrell Davis, left, and quarterback John Elway following the 1999 Super Bowl.

After a few years practicing law in Edmonton, Alberta, and developing real estate in Canada and California, Bowlen welcomed the opportunity in 1984 to buy majority ownership of the Broncos from a Canadian business friend, Edgar Kaiser. Before the end of the next year, he had convinced family members to join him in gaining 100 percent ownership. Bowlen's previous professional sports experience included involvement with Canadian football's Montreal Alouettes and the Calgary Flames of the National Hockey League.

"I wanted more from athletics," Bowlen said of his opportunity to purchase the Broncos. Those words may represent a theme for the life of the second-generation OU alumnus.

His late father, Paul D. Bowlen, was a 1938 OU graduate who used his engineering degree and the luck of a wildcatter to build an oil company, Regent Drilling, from the petroleum reserves under the expanses of Canada's Alberta province. While at OU, the senior Bowlen was a letterman on the OU track team and a member of a record-setting 4-by-440-yard relay team. He died shortly after his son bought the team in 1984. When the new team headquarters in Englewood, Colorado, was completed in 1990, it was named the Paul D. Bowlen Memorial Broncos Centre, and a huge portrait of Paul Bowlen adorns the reception area.

Two of Pat's younger siblings also attended OU. Mary Beth Bowlen Jagger, a 1968 graduate in interior design, now lives in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, where she owns Jagger Interiors. William A. "Bill" Bowlen, a 1971 business graduate, heads Regent Resources Ltd. in Calgary,

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His image reflected on a giant stadium screen, owner Pat Bowlen holds the Lombardi Trophy high after his Denver Broncos beat the Green Bay Packers in the 1999 Super Bowl for a second straight NFL championship. Others, from left, are Denver coach Mike Shanahan, Bowlen's wife, Annabel, and Terry Bradshaw, television commentator and former NFL player.

Alberta. Younger brother John eluded the family's OU tradition by attending Notre Dame University. Bill, John and Mary Beth's husband, John Jagger, join Pat on the Broncos' board of directors.

Athletics always have played an important role in Bowlen's life. He played high school football in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and had a brief career as a walk-on for the Sooners.

"I soon realized that I wasn't going to play major college football," he says. Two decades later, however, he returned to intense training for a different sport—the triathlon.

"I did two Ironman triathlons in Hawaii and California, and I was really serious for three or four years." The Ironman version of the triathlon requires an ocean swim of 2.4 miles, a 112-mile bicycle race and a run of

26.2 miles. "The sport was new then, and I did some kind of triathlon once a month. At my peak, I was considered one of the top five or ten 40-year-olds. Of course, that and a quarter can get you a ride on the bus. I was invited to enter the first professional triathlon in Hawaii, 'Kauai Loves You.' The race featured total prize money of \$25,000, which was a lot of money for the sport at that time. I won 50 bucks in Kauai. I probably cashed the check, but now I regret not having had it framed.

"At the time I bought the team in 1984, I was training 6 or 7 hours a day. With the Broncos, I couldn't do that anymore. In retrospect, that was a blessing.

"Anyone who trains that hard for long has to wean oneself away. You can't just quit. So I continued for a couple of years and got back to 'normal' road races. I still run 30 miles a week, instead of the 60 I used to do, but I found that the bike was dangerous." For example, he notes, "On a ride to Greeley, I hit a pothole and broke my collarbone. I was hit by a car in Hawaii. Now what I do—when it seems really hard—is what I used to consider a light day."

On those "light days," he may take time to lift in the expansive weight room of the Paul D. Bowlen Memorial Broncos Centre. To describe the weight room as "the size of a basketball court" would offer a mixed metaphor and perhaps be a slight exaggeration, but it nevertheless houses an enormous array of machines, free weights and treadmills to meet any training or re-hab regime. At that, the weight room is just one relatively small corner of the 60,000-square-foot facility on 13.5 acres. In addition to administrative and coaches offices, meeting rooms, media rooms, computer operations, equipment rooms and a vast trainers' area, the complex includes four practice fields and a separate building with two racquet-

ball courts. Two of the fields are full-sized at 100 yards, with one boasting "prescription turf"—grass growing over 18 inches of sand and gravel embedded with 25 miles of wire that heats to prevent the field from freezing in Colorado winters. Another 50-yard natural grass field is used for specialized workouts, and an indoor 70-yard artificial turf field is housed under a bubble cover.

The facility appears to be the result

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The playing field is reflected in Pat Bowlen's sunglasses as he watches a Broncos game.

of a vast meeting in which everyone in the Broncos organization listed everything they had ever dreamed of having at their fingertips—then having every wish-list completely fulfilled. The entryway, reception areas and Bowlen's office also serve as the owner's personal art gallery. Contemporary paintings and bronzes with both athletic and Western themes set the tone. The decor includes at least a dozen large bronzes by Frederic Remington, with a prominent position for the Western artist's sculpture "Bronco Buster."

Bowlen attributes the presence of the art—in a round-about way—to his wife, Annabel. "I've collected over the years, but my wife is not a fan of Western art. She prefers antiques and more classical art at home, so I've brought these pieces here."

A native of Canada, Annabel brings visible pride to Bowlen. "She was a world-caliber figure skater and expert skier. She competed in figure skating until right before the Olympics in 1976."

Bowlen has seven children, including two daughters by a previous marriage—Amy, 31, and Beth, 29. Amy is married, with two children of her own, and Beth is the marketing director for Denver's new Niketown store.

(One sign of a loving father: Niketown's grand opening last summer, according to *The Denver Post*, featured the prominent display of the Lombardi Trophy, awarded to the two-time Super Bowl champion Broncos.)

Together, Annabel and Pat have had five more children, ranging in age from midteens to nearly two: Patrick, John, Brittany, "Little Bel" (whose real name is Annabel, after her mother) and Christina. The family home backs up to Denver's prestigious Cherry Creek Golf Club.

Pat and Annabel also are civic leaders in a wide range of charitable activities. He is president of the Denver Broncos Charities Fund and has served since 1987 on the board of trustees for the University of Denver. Among other leadership roles for non-profit organizations, he has been honorary chairman of the Colorado Special Olympics for 13 years.

"I'm asked to serve on charitable boards all the time," Bowlen says. "But if I commit and then can't attend the meetings, I feel guilty, so I'm very selective about what I do. I don't want to say I'll do something then not show up. If I wanted to, I could attend black-tie charity events at least once a week."

Created in 1994, the Broncos Fund is in partnership with the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation of Chicago. "We give away \$3 million to \$4 million a year to local charities.

Essentially, we put on functions, and McCormick matches whatever we raise. Our rules are that the money can't be spent for bricks and mortar, but only for programs and scholarships. A couple of dozen independent people, not necessarily connected with the Broncos, form the board of the charity."

The fund focuses on three missions: programs designed

to impact young people in the areas of education, athletics and life skills, with efforts aimed at disadvantaged and at-risk youth; programs devoted to physically and mentally challenged individuals; and programs for the hungry and homeless. Through 1999, 20 galas, golf tournaments, food drives, benefits and other fundraisers were staged by the Broncos Charities Fund.

Bowlen is proud of the forward strides made by the University of Denver in recent years, giving most of the credit to Daniel L. Ritchie, former CEO of Westinghouse, who was named DU chancellor in 1989. "We've just completed a \$65 million field house and wellness center; we've taken athletics back to Division I; and academically it's a great school," he says. "Previously, DU had almost no endowment, but Dan Ritchie has raised about \$250 million for the school so far."

Above all, however, Bowlen is enthusiastic about the Denver Broncos—not just the victories, the coaches and the players, but about all of the staff people who contribute to the enterprise, as well.

"In any organization, your people are your greatest asset," Bowlen says. "You've got to give people the right environment and let them know they're appreciated. That's why nobody ever leaves. Some might retire,

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Pat Bowlen, his wife, Annabel, and their son cross the field following the Denver Broncos' repeat Super Bowl win in January 1999.

but they don't quit." Pause. "Okay, one person left for a much, much better job. . . .

"Players and coaches want to be here," he says. For example, he notes, "Attendance was outstanding for off-season practice sessions. Forty-five players made perfect attendance for 60 different workouts! There's always been some of that—people *want* to play and coach in Denver."

As a perennial name on *The Sporting News* annual list of "100 Most Powerful People in Sports," Bowlen takes an active role within the NFL owners group and the league hierarchy. He has been cited as a key figure in negotiations for the league's collective bargaining agreement with the players' union and instrumental in renewing the NFL's television contracts. He has served on the NFL Management Council Executive Committee and is the current chairman of the NFL Broadcasting Committee. In addition, he is chairman of the NFL Enterprises/NFL Films Executive Committees and holds memberships on the NFL Finance Committee, the International Committee, the Board of the NFL Europe League (formerly known as the World League) and a special committee to look at professional football business strategy and long-range planning.

Closer to home, he found himself in the middle of local controversy

when he asked the Denver taxpayers to help fund a new stadium home for the Broncos with an additional sales tax of one cent per \$10. "Politics are alien to me, but nothing about that stadium deal *wasn't* political," he says. Nevertheless, his "secret weapon" prevailed at the polls on Election Day 1998, and the new stadium is scheduled to open in 2001.

"Our only secret weapon was that we'd won the Super Bowl that January, and our record was 9 and 1 on the day of the election," he explains.

Through his nearly 16 years with the Broncos, Bowlen has encountered the emotional extremes that go with both great and unbearable seasons. "Losing seasons—those are miserable times. Football is basically a war game. You play once a week, no weeks off. The worst feeling is when you reach the end of a (bad) season and know you're really done. Then we made it to three Super Bowls in the '80s and lost by blowouts.

"Now we've won two Super Bowls. I learned you've got to be patient," he says. "Maybe the highs and the lows all come out the same.

"Somebody said, 'Winning isn't anywhere as big a thrill as losing is despair.'"

Bowlen's patience was tested this year by the retirement of superstar quarterback John Elway and the rebuilding Broncos' failure to make the playoffs for Super Bowl XXXIV.

So the question had to be asked: Is Pat Bowlen a good loser?

"What do you think?" he fires back.

Probably not. But Pat Bowlen always has wanted *more* from athletics . . . and from life.