

The natives were restless when Bob Stoops arrived. But after a single season, the faithful are convinced that this coach can appease the ghosts and satisfy the expectations of a storied program badly in need of a leader.

OU Athletic Media Relations

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BY JAY C. UPCHURCH

### Rarefied air.

The kind that swirled in the wake of Bud Wilkinson's effortless stride and blew down the sidelines every time one of Barry Switzer's teams stormed the field.

The kind that is thick with tradition and carries with it the redolence of loyalty, faith, character and sacrifice.

Most of all, the kind that externalizes pride and, ultimately, success.

There was a time when this air filled Memorial Stadium every football Saturday. It was the very element that lured throngs of fans and made the University of Oklahoma football program a perennial contender for the national title.

# New Sheriff in

The Sooners won six national championships in the course of four decades, and while the distinction of those glory years is still a great source of pride, the lack of success over much of the last 10 years had gone far in tempering crimson spirits.

During one stretch from 1994-98, the floundering Sooners had practically become a source of embarrassment, producing a 23-33-1 record with only one bowl appearance under a trio of coaches that included Howard Schnellenberger and John Blake, who combined for only 17 wins during their four seasons at the helm.

Morale was at an all-time low, not only within the program, but also in every corner of Soonerland. Every OU fan craved a return of the tradition and all it stands for. But, even simple respectability figured to be a good start.

Luckily, in late 1998, when OU Athletic Director Joe Castiglione went searching for the person to charge with restoring the Sooners' good name, he already had someone in mind. Castiglione's choice from the start was Bob Stoops.

While not exactly a household name, Stoops was possibly the hottest commodity within collegiate coaching circles. During his three seasons (1996-98) as assistant head coach and defensive coordinator for Steve Spurrier at Florida, he helped lead the Gators to a national title and an overall mark of 30-5.

Stoops was no stranger to Castiglione, who literally had watched him come up through the ranks, beginning with his playing days at Iowa and as an assistant at Kansas State and Florida. Stoops' defensive wizardry had proved to be the missing piece of Florida's national championship puzzle.

"I was aware of Bob's career at every juncture. I kept an eye on him long before he was at Florida," explains Castiglione. "I talked to people who knew Bob all the way back to when he was a high school player, and one of his biggest assets is the fact he's been the type of person other people look to for leadership. He's always been the captain or a leader in some way, and he's always embraced that responsibility and excelled at it."

Stoops clearly had excelled as he made the transition from successful player to successful coach. But in signing a multi-year deal with Oklahoma, he was about to take on the biggest challenge of his life.

Bob Stoops thrives on this kind of challenge. In his first season, he led the Sooners to a 7-5 mark and their first bowl appearance in five years.

Ironically, Stoops claims that his initial season at Oklahoma fell short of some rather lofty expectations. Still, there

were marked improvements throughout the program.

"I'm not much on rating things, but I felt it was a positive start—a good beginning," says the 39-year-old Stoops, who became the 21st head coach at Oklahoma on December 1, 1998. "I said before the season we expected to win every game, and while we fell short of that goal, we had the chance to win every game. I feel good about the fact we made strides, but it is just the beginning. We have to remember that, and we have to push forward and continue to improve."

Stoops and his staff managed to blend just enough new talent with an existing roster of players, who more than anything needed a large dose of confidence. The result: the 1999 Sooners improved in practically every offensive and defensive category, as well as on special teams, ranking 13th nationally in total offense and 18th in scoring defense.

"I had felt all along and said that this was a program that should be doing more than it was doing. I looked at the tradition and the history of winning and the recruiting base," says Stoops. "When I took the job, I thought the potential was here to get back to those winning ways and to become a contender again. But the players here had a lot of things to learn; there was a lot of rebuilding to do in some ways."

Stoops' first mission, besides bringing aboard a qualified staff and stabilizing the recruiting situation, was to supply the primary ingredients the program was missing prior to his arrival. That included heightened work habits, team confidence and discipline.

"Those things were missing, and you have to build those in your kids," says Stoops.

The new coach's master plan was mapped out over an extended period of time but demanded immediate results. The dedication and enthusiasm Stoops brought to the program were contagious. The results were apparent in his first recruiting class, which included quarterback Josh Heupel, who went on to earn Big 12 Offensive Newcomer of the Year honors, and it spread through the legions of OU fans. For the first time since 1987, every home game was a sellout. Not so suddenly, the foundation for future success seems in place, and Sooner mania is back at full vigor.

"People should never underestimate how difficult it is to move from even the top assistant spot to be the head coach. It's no small transition," says Castiglione. "Bob has made that transition look easy by the way he's handled himself in so many situations. It's almost uncanny how he assembled a new staff, a new work ethic, new system and then got players to buy into that plan."

"It's a lesson in organizational management, to say the least."

Castiglione points to Stoops' pedigree as an explanation for the young coach's vast knowledge and leadership skills. After all, Bob Stoops comes from the ultimate coaching family. His father, Ron Sr., was a high school defensive coordinator for 28 years, while brothers Ron Jr., Mike and Mark are all currently in the coaching business. In fact, Mike is a member of Bob's staff, serving as associate head coach and co-defensive coordinator with Brent Venables.

Football is in his blood, and Stoops has used his heritage to help produce winners everywhere he has been during a career that spans 17 seasons. That continues to be his goal

# Town



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we've made major strides in those areas.”

Stoops' passionate, yet calculated approach has seemingly steadied the ship and turned the Sooners in the right direction. With 17 full or part-time starters returning this fall, along with a recruiting class ranked 15th nationally, the 2000 Big 12 title does not seem out of reach.

The 18 months since his arrival in Norman have been a whirlwind for Stoops. Besides dealing with the daily demands that come with building an on-field contender, Stoops has had more than two armfuls to handle away from the office and the sidelines. His home team expanded by two last summer when wife Carol gave birth to twin brothers, Drake and Isaac, for big sister Mackenzie, now 4.

Stoops says the pressures of coaching do not compare to those of everyday life, even when you are trying to live up to the ghosts of the past and create your own supply of rarefied air.

“I don't hesitate to say I've got some big shoes to fill from the past. And I'll certainly be hard-pressed to match some

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Bob Stoops' plan for restoring Sooner football fortunes is pretty simple—assemble a top-notch staff, raise the bar on work ethic and discipline, build team confidence—and expect to win every game. Sharing the sideline intensity here are, standing from left, co-defensive coordinator Brent Venables; assistant strength coach Scott Bird; tight ends/special teams coordinator Jonathan Hayes; assistant head coach and offensive coordinator Mike Mangino (wearing headphones); and Stoops.

at the University of Oklahoma.

“We're not going to sit around talking about national championships. Our focus is the Big 12 championship first,” insists Stoops, a native of Youngstown, Ohio, who was a four-year starter at Iowa and a two-time All-Big 10 selection. “Take care of that business, and then you can talk about the other if you are fortunate. The tradition here is among the best in all of college football—that's our heritage, and we have to try to live up to that. Expectations are good, and no one has bigger expectations than we do. But you have to be realistic at the same time.

“Last year, these kids had to learn a lot of things, like how to handle success,” Stoops explains. “They are still learning how to handle the lead in a big game—making the plays that make the difference in close games. I felt

Lisa Hall

While he believes the 1999 season was a good beginning on the long road back, Stoops admits that his team is still learning how to handle success, how to handle the lead in a big game, how make the plays that make the difference in close games.

of the numbers those guys put up,” admits Stoops. “But it's exciting. It motivates me, and I welcome the challenge.

“I have always thought (Oklahoma) was a very special job. Everyone loves football here; football is important. We have great leadership and commitment from people like Joe Castiglione and President (David) Boren, and that's a major factor in your program's ability to grow. My job is to bring it all together and make it work.”

So far, so good.



**F**or his 2000 Sooners to achieve the success he anticipates, Bob Stoops is banking on championship performances from some familiar figures and a few newcomers among the coaching staff and players. Key personnel at a glance are:

### THE SOONER STAFF

**MARK MANGINO**  
*Assistant Head Coach/  
Offensive Coordinator*

Needing just one season to stabilize Oklahoma's offensive line, Mangino is ready to tackle an even bigger challenge this fall, as he takes over as offensive coordinator from the departed Mike Leach. The pass-happy Sooners probably will go with a more balanced overall attack with Mangino calling the shots.

**MIKE STOOPS**  
*Associate Head Coach/  
Co-Defensive Coordinator*

Younger brother of head coach Bob Stoops, Mike joined the OU staff after seven seasons as an assistant at Kansas State, including the last three as defensive coordinator. Having helped build K-State's defense into one of the best in the nation, Mike was instrumental in the Sooners' defensive turnaround last season.

**BRENT VENABLES**  
*Co-Defensive Coordinator*

The fiery and always-animated Venable bled Kansas State purple as both a player and assistant coach for the eight years prior to joining the OU staff last season. The 29-year-old Venable is the storm to co-defensive coordinator Mike Stoops' calculated calm.

**JONATHAN HAYES**  
*Tight Ends/Special Teams  
Coordinator*

After spending a dozen seasons playing in the NFL, Hayes has made a successful transition to coaching. His first season as an assistant came last fall with the Sooners, and he made an immediate impact, helping shore up the tight end situation and put the word "special" back into OU's special teams.

**CHUCK LONG**  
*Quarterbacks Coach/  
Passing Game Coordinator*

When Mike Leach departed for Texas Tech, Long was brought in to keep the Sooners' aerial attack in full flight. A one-time All-American quarterback at Iowa and 2000 inductee to the College Football Hall of Fame, he spent the last three seasons as the Hawkeyes' QB coach. His knowledge of the passing game definitely will complement Mark Mangino's playbook.

**CALE GUNDY**  
*Running Backs Coach*

The all-time leading passer in Sooner history before Josh Heupel arrived, Gundy showed his versatility as assistant coach last season, showcasing his overall knowledge of the offensive backfield. While OU's offense certainly was pass oriented, Gundy helped establish a running game in which three backs averaged more than 6.2 yards a carry.

**JACKIE SHIPP**  
*Defensive Line Coach*

Shipp made a triumphant return to Norman last season as he helped fortify a Sooner defense that had struggled mightily in recent years. An All-American linebacker during his playing days at Oklahoma, Shipp made eight coaching stops before earning a spot on Bob Stoops' staff.

**STEVE SPURRIER JR.**  
*Wide Receivers Coach*

Spurrier helped provide QB Josh Heupel with plenty of targets last season, giving the Sooners one of the top receiving corps in the conference. He was a member of his father's staff at Florida for five seasons before making the move to Oklahoma with Bob Stoops.

**BOBBY JACK WRIGHT**  
*Defensive Ends Coach*

The Texas connection, Wright is the senior member of the Oklahoma staff, having begun his coaching career at Texas A&I in 1979. His veteran influence was one reason why the Sooners' defensive ends and special teams stepped it up a notch or two last fall.

### TOP RETURNERS

**Josh Heupel, Sr., QB**  
A junior college transfer named Big 12 Conference Offensive

Newcomer of the Year after rewriting almost every Oklahoma passing record last season, Heupel is being billed as a possible Heisman Trophy candidate in 2000. The crafty southpaw displayed a strong, accurate arm while connecting on 62 percent of his passes as a junior.

**Rocky Calmus, Jr., LB**  
Described as the best player in Oklahoma's defensive lineup last season, Calmus lived up to the hype by earning first team All-Big 12 honors. As a sophomore, he led the Sooners with 114 tackles despite playing the final two games with a fractured bone in his leg.

**Torrance Marshall, Sr., LB**  
Marshall was selected as Big 12 Defensive Newcomer of the Year after finishing third on the team in tackles with 97, including 66 of the unassisted variety. His speed and a good nose for the ball make Marshall a major threat to opposing offenses.

**Roy Williams, So., DB**  
Williams wasted little time becoming one of the Sooners' top defensive players last fall. After returning from a back injury, Williams recorded 75 tackles as a redshirt-freshman, including 57 unassisted stops. He earned Freshman All-American honors for his efforts.

**Antwone Savage, So., WR**  
Soft hands and fast feet made Savage one of Josh Heupel's favorite targets in 1999. In fact, Savage set single-season records at OU for catches (31) and yardage by a freshman, earning him Big 12 Conference Freshman of the Year honors.

**Corey Callens, Sr., DE**  
A third-team All-Big 12 selection last fall, Callens is expected to play a major role again in 2000, especially from a leadership standpoint. He led all OU linemen in tackles (48) as a junior, with 30 of those coming during the final five games.

**Quentin Griffin, So., RB**  
Forced into action last season due to a lack of depth in the backfield, Griffin made the most of this collegiate debut, averaging 6.5 yards every time he touched the ball. Griffin was OU's first true freshman to run for 100 yards in a game (123 vs. Iowa State) since James Allen did it in 1993.

### NEW FACES

**Nate Hybl, So., QB**  
Not exactly a new name to OU followers, but Hybl will be making his Sooner debut at some point this season. Hybl sat out last season under NCAA transfer rules after arriving from Georgia as one of the most hyped quarterback recruits in the country. Big play capability makes Hybl the QB of the future.

**Jimmy Wilkerson, Fr., LB**  
A versatile Blue Chip recruit from Omaha, Texas, Wilkerson figures to make an immediate impact with the Sooner defense. The 6-foot-4, 230-pound linebacker was a two-time All-State selection as a prep.

**Teddy Lehman, Fr., LB**  
After producing an all-everything type of career at Fort Gibson High School, Lehman is expected to make a quick transition into the college ranks with the Sooner defense. A SuperPrep All-American, the 6-1, 228-pound Lehman will join fellow recruit Wilkerson as a top candidate for a starting linebacker spot.

**Marcus Chretien, Jr., DE**  
During OU's spring drills, the transfer from Kilgore, Texas, displayed some of the talent that made him a JUCO All-American. Chretien's size (6-4, 240) and speed give him a legitimate chance at plenty of playing time this fall.

**Howard Duncan, Jr., OL**  
With the loss of All-American Stockar McDougale, the Sooners may look to the 6-4, 300-pound Duncan for immediate help on the offensive line. Duncan proved himself as one of the top JUCO linemen in the country at Butler County CC last season.

**Terrance Simms, Jr., DB**  
Another talented JUCO transfer, Simms was the Defensive Back of the Year in the Jayhawk Conference last season. The former prep All-American has the speed and read capability to cover man-to-man.

**Brian Odom, Fr., RB**  
Considered the top running back prospect in the state, Odom did it all last season at Ada High School, running for 2,490 yards and 40 touchdowns. The 6-0, 195-pounder could complement an OU backfield that is in search of depth and overall stability.