



Limited Statistics

The mailbag contained a letter that grabbed my attention. The correspondent was Jack W. Janssen, of Lyons, Kansas, a loyal alumnus and Sooner fan, and Jack was perplexed. Then the phone rang, and the caller was my mother, also a Kansan and avid OU fan; perplexed does not begin to describe her state of mind. As the saying goes: “When Mama ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy.” This was getting serious.

The cause of their consternation was a pair of editorials, in *The Lyons Daily News* and *The Wichita Eagle*, justly lauding the University of Kansas for its Final Four appearance and contending that the admirable graduation rate for Jayhawk men’s basketball players, as released by the NCAA and reported in *USA Today* and elsewhere, was more important than the national championship they had failed to win. No problem so far. But then the editorial writers went on to cite another Final Four team, the Oklahoma Sooners, with a NCAA-calculated graduation rate of zero, as proof that some schools prefer to win at any cost.

Jack and Mom figured there must be more to this story—and there is.

The NCAA formula for determining graduation rates is as simple as it is inflexible and can be downright misleading. Only athletes who enter a given school as freshmen and graduate from that school within six years are part of the calculation—period. An athlete transferring from another school to OU and subsequently graduating within the allotted six years is not credited to OU and in effect counts against his or her former school and vice versa. An athlete leaving OU to play professionally or for other personal reasons, who later completes his degree requirements beyond the six-year limit, similarly does not count.

For traditional men’s basketball powers like Duke or Kansas, accustomed to filling their recruiting classes with na-

tionally ranked high school graduates, the numbers work. But for teams in a building mode—like OU of the mid-90s—the road to success is through the junior colleges—signing those transfer students the NCAA does not recognize.

The most recent graduation reports, those reflecting the zero rate for OU, are for the freshmen classes of 1991-94, Billy Tubbs’ last four recruiting classes. Kelvin Sampson came in 1995, and when the next NCAA report is issued on that recruiting class, Sooner fans will have to swallow another grade of zero. But that class at OU consisted of one freshman, Bobby Joe Evans, who is Sampson’s favorite success story, the NCAA notwithstanding.

Evans was a prize recruit in 1995, some thought a possible NBA player. A knee injury ended that dream, and Evans had a family to support. He went to work but continued taking courses, and finally graduated in May 2002.

Had Evans completed his degree a semester earlier, OU’s 1995 NCAA figure would have been 100 percent, with no footnote on class size. Of the three players in the OU class of 1996, two graduated within the NCAA limit, a 67 percent graduation rate.

Fifty-three student athletes have played men’s basketball at OU during the Sampson era, 14 of them on the team featured in this issue of *Sooner Magazine* and not included in the following figures since their academic careers are still in progress. Of the 39 remaining, 10 graduated from OU, four of whom were juco transfers. Of the 29 who did not graduate, 11 transferred to other schools, 10 are playing or did play professional sports, three show their degrees to be “in progress,” one was dismissed from the team and four simply did not graduate.

In men’s basketball more than any other sport, players have opportunities for professional careers, in the NBA and on

international teams. A number of former Sooners put their degrees on hold for six-figure salaries, many intending to graduate later, and some do, the classic example being Alvan Adams, who left OU in 1975 and completed his degree in 1998.

While the NCAA report threw the spotlight on men’s basketball due to the Final Four appearance, academic attention at home is spread throughout the athletic programs. Dr. Gerald Gurney arrived at OU in 1993 to overhaul the Student Life area for Sooner athletes in all sports. He doubled the number of academic advisors, spearheaded development of a first-rate Academic Center and rode herd on individual performances. By 1998, OU was the recipient of the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills Program of Excellence Award, a lifetime distinction for the nation’s most innovative programs supporting academic achievement and student athletic welfare.

This spring’s Athletics Department academic awards event recognized 288 Sooner Scholars—64 percent of all student athletes—with 3.0 term or cumulative grade point averages, 60 of them with a perfect 4.0, for one or both of the previous two semesters. Eleven of 16 sports averaged a 3.0 or better last fall and 10 of 16 this spring. The overall GPA for fall was 2.96 and for spring 2.93, the highest ever for OU student athletes. And in case you wonder about Sherri Coale’s women basketball players, their fall GPA was 3.44 and spring 3.39. Gurney anticipates that when the NCAA releases its report for recruiting classes entering in 1996, OU’s overall graduation rate will be at least 70 percent—at or near the top of the Big 12.

So hang in there, Jack, and especially you, Mom. Sooner athletes are competing well in the classroom as well as on the field and on the court and in all those other sports venues. They will continue to make you proud. —CJB