

Earning a place at the table for women's athletics has been a long, exhausting struggle, but OU's **Marita Hynes** never tired, never backed down.

GOING THE DISTANCE

By JAY C. UPCHURCH

THE FIRST RECESS OF THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL IN FIRST GRADE. That is how long it took Marita Hynes to land in the principal's office. Her offense? Fighting. The principal? Her mother. Not exactly the introduction to education that might have been expected of a future "administrator of the year."

Then again Marita McAfee Hynes was not exactly model-student material during her early school days. She was more of a hunting, fishing, lawn-mowing



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Shelving her graduate degree plans and taking a pay cut, Marita Hynes seized the opportunity to move from the high school to university level as coach of the OU women's softball team, sensing that the potential was there for a whole lot more.

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tomboy who measured her small steps by her father's shadow and was never too far away from mixing it up in the dirt of a playground game.

A day after the altercation at Lincoln Elementary, Ruby McAfee drove her daughter across town and enrolled her in Noble Elementary School.

“Mother was pretty embarrassed by the whole deal—her daughter fighting a boy on the playground at recess. My first day of school, no less. So instead of my being sent to her office, she figured she'd let someone else discipline me at school,” says Hynes, a mischievous smile lighting her face at the memory.

Little did Mrs. McAfee know that her work as a teacher and principal would have a profound influence on her daughter's life and career.

The same can be said for her father, Robert Fay McAfee, who began teaching his only child to throw a baseball and dribble a basketball by the time she could walk. He took her along on hunting and fishing trips at a very young age and gave Marita her first job working in his furniture store before she was 10.

“He dragged me along everywhere he went. We were best friends,” Hynes says of her father.

Growing up in the modest Oklahoma town of Okemah, population 3,056, Hynes never could have imagined where the winds blowing outside her childhood home on South Seventh Street would take her. The crumpled and cracked pavement wound its way through the quiet hamlet, turning into Atlanta Street and Broadway Street and eventually State Highway 62, leading her west to Norman and an exciting and accomplishment-filled future.

More than three decades later, Hynes finally can reflect on her life and the path she ultimately chose. Just a few weeks removed from her final days as associate athletics director and senior women's administrator for the University of Oklahoma, Hynes finishes a round of golf at the Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort,



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As OU's softball coach, Marita Hynes displayed the same intensity that would mark her administrative career as she championed women's athletics, promoted OU sports and built a national reputation for professional expertise and integrity.

just a stone's throw from her retirement getaway in Ruidoso, New Mexico, and looks back across 650 miles, three states, a time zone and a few thousand tumbleweeds and wonders.

“Sometimes, you turn around and don't realize how far you have come,” says Hynes, who spent 27 years as both a coach and athletics department administrator at OU. “There were lean times, and there have been great times—all of which have made for many wonderful memories.”

Hynes, 56, has been called “a pioneer” in women's athletics over the last quarter century. Growing up in an era when females were treated as second-class citizens in the sports arena, she spent much of her adult life championing equal rights and a level playing field.

In almost three decades at OU, Hynes helped promote and nurture the 1972 Education Amendment Title IX, designed to eliminate sexual bias and discrimination in all federally funded educational programs or activities. She was there every step of the way as opportunities for female

athletes multiplied, and their status in the sports world slowly evolved into that of respected peers instead of underlings.

“We all have a chance to leave a legacy of some kind and in Marita's case, it's spectacular and historic,” says Joe Castiglione, OU director of athletics. “Since the inception of women's athletics on this campus, she has touched and inspired countless lives from student-athletes to coaches to administrators to faculty and staff, and she has done so locally, regionally and nationally.”

Hynes' “legacy” almost never came to fruition, thanks to another school fight.

This battle, however, had nothing to do with clinched fists on a schoolyard playground. Instead it was waged between Hynes and her own personality, which she claims was not ready for the rigors of college life when she enrolled at OU in 1965. After floundering for a semester, she dropped out of school and would not return for three long years.

“At the time, I was not a good student. I wanted to have fun and didn’t want the responsibilities that went with attending college,” admits Hynes, who took a job running an Oklahoma City dry cleaning shop.

The business world helped Hynes’ maturation process, and she eventually went back to school, this time at Central State University in Edmond. There she lettered in three sports—field hockey, volleyball and softball—while earning her teaching certificate. Finally mom’s influence was paying off.

Hynes began her teaching career at Apollo Elementary in Bethany and eventually wound up at Putnam City High School, where she taught physical education and coached several sports, including volleyball, softball and tennis. She guided the Lady Pirates to the 1976 state softball title and began to think about moving to the next level in some capacity.

“I decided to get my master’s and applied for graduate school at Arizona State. I got accepted there, and that was my plan after I resigned from Putnam City,” explains Hynes. *continued*



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OU associate athletics director Marita Hynes savors the moment of victory at the 2002 Big 12 Women’s Basketball Tournament in Kansas City, part of a very successful year culminating in the final game of the Final Four in San Antonio.



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By the time Marita Hynes, here with player Belinda Selvey, left active coaching for athletic administration, her Sooner softball teams had amassed 256 victories and participated in four AIAW College World Series, in the days before women’s sports came under the NCAA.

But before she could complete the paperwork and pack her bags for Tempe, a phone call from OU made Hynes rethink her decision.

"Amy Dahl, the women's athletics director at OU, offered me a job as softball coach. This was an opportunity that piqued my interest, and I decided to take it," says Hynes, who actually took a cut in pay to go from the high school level to college.

"Financially speaking, I could have done a lot better. But I could see the potential. I don't know that I had the vision to see that it might eventually turn out so well, but the possibility and excitement surrounding women's athletics was unmistakable."

To help supplement her income, Hynes worked an array of odd jobs. She umpired softball on the weekends and was an official scorekeeper for hundreds of games and tournaments. Her duties at OU also included being head field hockey coach, although that would be short-lived (OU dropped the sport in 1979).

With Title IX fueling opportunities for female athletes, especially at the college level, Hynes was at the forefront of a revolution, of sorts. Under her guidance, the Sooners won 256 softball games and participated in four AIAW College World Series. But just when it seemed she had found her niche, her role evolved in a different direction.

In 1984, Hynes became OU's marketing and promotions coordinator. She saw it as a chance to expand her horizons and still remain a vital part of the athletics department.

"I took on a lot more administrative duties, which were instrumental in my becoming associate athletics director (in 1995)," says Hynes. "I missed a number of aspects of coaching, but I can look back and honestly say I have no regrets about my decision."

Hynes has made her mark in women's athletics over the last decade, and her fingerprints are all over the University of Oklahoma's athletics program. She was a driving force behind OU's Great Expectations campaign, which has provided across-the-board funding for new and improved athletic facilities. And her influence



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Sooner women's basketball head coach Sherri Coale, left, notches her 100th win during the 2002 season and receives the commemorative game ball from her biggest fan, Marita Hynes, who battled the doubters in 1995 to bring the successful young Norman High School coach to OU.

extends to the national stage, where she has been recognized repeatedly for her vision and achievements.

"Marita is a legend in this business," says Dru Hancock, Big 12 Associate Commissioner and a long-time contemporary. "She's meant so much to women's athletics, not only at the University of Oklahoma but also at every stage of her career and at so many different levels.

"She has long been at the top of the list in this field. I know Joe Castiglione and that administration realize how much she's meant to every life she has touched."

During Hynes' tenure as associate athletics director, the Sooners have won national championships in softball and men's gymnastics, as well as football. One of her fondest memories occurred on a trip



The athletics department brass—Marita Hynes and Joe Castiglione, back row, second and third from left—were on hand in Boise, Idaho, to celebrate with the 2002 NCAA West Regional Champions as the Oklahoma Sooners women headed to the Final Four.

to the 2002 Women's Final Four, although the Sooners fell a game short of the national title.

Six years earlier, Hynes had gone to bat for a young high school coach named Sherri Coale, as OU desperately searched for the right person to breathe life back into its women's basketball program. While critics seemed to spring from every direction, Hynes managed to convince then athletics director Donnie Duncan and the OU Board of Regents that Coale was the right person for the job.

"Marita's willingness to take a chance on Sherri was incredible. All you have to do is look at where that program is today to realize that," says Michelle Perry, director of the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Championship. "Marita blazed that trail in women's sports when there was not a lot of money or opportunities or guidance. In the process, she's created a model that other young women in this business can follow."

Standing on the floor of a jam-packed Alamodome, awaiting OU's national title showdown with No. 1 Connecticut, Hynes soaked in what she describes as a "surreal moment."

"Just being there in that atmosphere was special. To see what Sherri had done with that program, with those student-athletes, and to have a front-row view of it—that's amazing," says Hynes in a whisper as she relives some of the emotions of that career-defining moment.

"Marita is an inspiration for me and for this program, not to mention every other coach and student-athlete whose life she has touched," offers Coale. "Marita defines women's athletics at the University of Oklahoma, in my opinion. Look at all of the success she has helped produce during her time here.

"To see how far women's athletics have come over the last 25 years, it's one of those things few people realize in their lifetime, or career. Marita has watched something start at ground zero and grow and evolve into something extremely significant."

On the heels of OU's trip to the 2002 Final Four, Hynes was named the Women's Basketball Coaches Association's Administra-

tor of the Year. She also earned the 2000 Governor's Distinguished Service Award, presented by the Oklahoma Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. The honor that probably means the most to Hynes, however, was the naming of Marita Hynes Field, the playing surface at the new OU Softball Complex, which she labored so long to secure.

Besides her tireless efforts involving OU athletics, Hynes is renowned for her work as tournament director for the NCAA Women's College World Series, as well as the Big 12 Softball Championship. Under her direction, the WCWS, held at Hall of Fame Park in Oklahoma City, has grown into one of the most popular collegiate women's sporting events in the country.

Although she officially retired from OU on July 1, Hynes has promised to continue her role as coordinator for many of the championship events the University hosts each year, including the WCWS. In 2004 alone, OU will play host to a NCAA women's basketball regional, the Big 12 Outdoor Track and Field Championships, the Big 12 Tennis Championships, the Big 12 Softball Tournament and the WCWS.

"It's a lot of work, but it's something I really enjoy doing. I look forward to staying involved," says Hynes, whose position as associate athletics director has been filled by former University of Texas-El Paso official Stephanie Rempe. "My plan is to maintain a vital link to this wonderful university and all of its traditions."

"(Marita) is virtually irreplaceable," says OU President David L. Boren. "I am very glad that she has promised to continue to be involved with the University."

According to Hynes, there is room for improvement in women's athletics. "We've still got a ways to go. It's been a fight at times, but we're getting there."

Hynes, of course, is a fighter. She has proven that from day one. And while she picks her battles a little more carefully these days, Hynes figures to go the distance if the cause is close to her heart.