

A DOUBLE DOSE OF DEDICATION

Two of the six national finalists for the 2006 Wooden Citizenship Cup were OU athletes—the eventual winner, Jackie Dubois, and Jacob Gutierrez. Their lives illustrate what it means to give back to the community. **By JAY C. UPCHURCH**

Sacrifice is a word that gets thrown around a lot when it comes to athletes and athletics. Ditto for the term “hero,” a popular choice anytime some competitor or team produces a performance considered above and beyond the realm of everyday accomplishments.



Jacob Gutierrez



Jackie Dubois

schedules who somehow find the time, energy and passion to go out and try to help others any way they can,” says Joe Castiglione, OU’s director of athletics. “We would hope all of our student-athletes have the kind of charitable dispositions that Jackie and Jacob

In truth, sacrifice and acts of on-the-field heroism are fairly common in the sports world, particularly at the Division I collegiate level where student-athletes are endlessly tested by the rigors of daily schedules that begin with early morning workouts, are filled with classroom work and demanding practices and end with a few hours of study hall. While long days of total dedication and perseverance are the norm, finding time for a personal life within these parameters is a challenge.

Jackie Dubois and Jacob Gutierrez have jumped all the requisite hurdles, yet neither has been deterred from making their lives count for something more. During their time at the University of Oklahoma, both have excelled in their respective sports, as well as in the classroom, but what they have done beyond the scope of everyday college life is the most impressive.

“We are talking about two young people with overwhelming

have demonstrated while being part of the Sooner family. It is no wonder they both were nominated for this year’s Coach Wooden Citizenship Cup.”

Dubois and Gutierrez were among six finalists who were originally part of more than 100 nominees from around the country, both amateur and professional. OU was the lone university with more than one representative in the group of finalists honored on January 24, 2006, at a formal presentation ceremony in Atlanta by the organization Athletes for a Better World. The Coach John Wooden Citizenship Cup is awarded to an athlete who the selection committee believes has made the greatest difference in the lives of others.

“The mission of Athletes for a Better World is to use sports to develop character, teamwork and citizenship through commitment to an athletic code for living that applies to life, and to

Photo provided



After meeting in a group Bible study, OU runner Jackie Dubois, right, became a mentor to Norman North High School sophomores Caroline Carter, left, and Haley Hudson.

create a movement that will play a significant role in the transformation of individuals, sports and society,” says ABW founder and president Fred Northup.

This year’s collegiate winner was Dubois, who delivered an emotional acceptance speech after receiving a standing ovation from an intimate crowd at Atlanta’s East Lake Country Club that included her parents, Martin and Twyla Dubois, and several other family members and friends.

“It was an incredible feeling just to be a part of that group of amazing [nominees]. To actually win the award was beyond my imagination,” said Dubois after returning to Norman two days later. “Honestly, I was sitting there at the ceremony thinking about all of the other athletes who had been introduced and the stories that had been told, and I felt honored just to be there.”

Dubois’ story is inspirational on many levels, considering she was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at birth, a chronic and progressive disease that can cause breathing disorders and lung disease. She was



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Jackie Dubois overcame the challenges of cystic fibrosis to run cross country for OU and become the only athlete in school history to win all four of the Athletics Department’s top honors, as well as the national citizenship cup.

not expected to live to see her 21st birthday.

But Dubois, 22, has never allowed that initial prognosis to hold her back. She began running as a pre-teen and quickly discovered it helped in her battle with CF. The Kansas native eventually earned All-State honors twice as a prep cross-country performer, which helped her earn a track and field scholarship to the University of Oklahoma.

“My exercise and lifestyle have been beneficial. Our family raised us to be active, and it has definitely made a difference in our lives,” says Dubois, whose sister Leslie also suffers from the disease.

A four-year letter winner with the Sooners, Dubois was a key contributor on an OU squad that earned the cross country program’s first national ranking. That same group also helped the Sooners to their best-ever showing in the Big 12 Cross Country Championships in 2004.

Besides earning First Team Big 12 All-Academic honors three times each in both cross country and track, Dubois somehow found time to volunteer with the Special Olympics, the American Red Cross, Norman Public Schools and the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, among others. For a person who understandably could be caught up in her own daily struggles, Dubois demonstrates extraordinary enthusiasm for reaching out to others.

“I considered it a blessing every time I stepped out onto the track or onto a cross country course at OU.

I’ve always been grateful for my opportunity to be in that situation. No matter whether I finished first or last, I felt fortunate to be there, competing,” says Dubois, who will gradu-



Lazling Photo

Sooner football fans learned last season what students at Madison Elementary School have known for a long time: At 5-foot-6, 185 pounds, running back Jacob Gutierrez is the complete package.



Regina Bell

As part of Madison Elementary's reading program, Jacob Gutierrez earned such an outstanding reputation as a popular role model that two other Norman schools drafted him; then the schools backed his selection as the 2005 United Way Youth Citizen Volunteer of the Year.

ate in May from the OU School of Meteorology.

Dubois takes the same approach to life outside the competitive arena. Although her schedule is jammed with schoolwork and other activities, like representing the cross country team on OU's Student Athlete Advisory Board, Dubois is never short on time when it comes to helping others.

Last April at OU's annual Scholar-Athlete Honors Breakfast, Dubois became the first student-athlete in school history to earn all four major awards—the 2005 Big 12 Conference Medal, the Athletics Council Achievement Award, the Athletics Director's Leadership Award and 2005 Athletics Council Service Award.

"Jackie has made a habit of defying the odds. She is so vibrant and upbeat—she is an inspiration to everyone she comes in contact with," says Debbie Copp, publications coordinator for

OU Athletics Media Relations. "I know she works with kids who suffer from cystic fibrosis, and what better gift to give than the gift of hope? They can look at Jackie and how she lives her life, and be inspired."

Like Dubois, Gutierrez devotes much of his spare time to helping various community causes, particularly public education. A red-shirt sophomore running back for OU's football program, he was honored last spring with the Youth Citizen Award, given by the United Way and the Junior League of Norman in recognition of his volunteer work with local schools.

Even Dubois marvels at the labor of love Gutierrez has committed himself to within the Norman school system. "Jacob is an incredible person, so involved in the community and very selfless in his work. It was great having the chance to spend some time together in Atlanta and get to know him as a person," says Dubois.

Gutierrez' realization that football provides him with an opportunity to positively influence other peoples' lives prompted him to sign up to assist with a reading program that sends members of OU's football team to Madison Elementary School in Norman. He became such a popular contributor, he since has been asked to read and interact with students at Cleveland Elementary and Irving Middle School.

"Jacob is amazing in the classroom. He works so well with the students and has become such a role model for so many of them," says Regina Bell, a music teacher at Cleveland Elementary. "Jacob has basically become part of our family here at the school."

"You can always find time to help others," says Gutierrez. "It may cut into your TV watching or naptime, but it's a pretty small sacrifice when you are talking about doing something for young people. Going to schools and reading is such a great experience, because you can see their faces light up, and they are so excited just to have you there. And they're very attentive to what you do and say. To see you can have a positive influence on someone makes you feel good inside."

Gutierrez has been a positive influence on OU's football program, as well. The 5-foot-6, 185-pounder made the most of his first career start this season when he ran for 173 yards and two touchdowns in the Sooners' 37-30 win over Baylor. He is a top-notch special teams performer and a player who should factor heavily into OU's future.

"Jacob is a solid, caring individual. It is gratifying to see him recognized for all that he is as a citizen, a student and a football player," adds OU football coach Bob Stoops. "There is no way you can place a value on what it means to have someone of his character on our team and on our campus."

Gutierrez suffered a serious knee injury during the Holiday Bowl win over Oregon and underwent surgery on January 25 that will require some rigorous rehabilitation. Neither prospect, he insists, will keep him from returning to the Sooners' lineup—or to the classrooms where his most important fans expect him to be. 🍷

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postscript. Tradition of the OU Flag

When a muscular Ruf/Nek runs onto Owen Field waving the huge, unwieldy OU flag, the crowd knows to jump to its feet and unleash the manic vocal support that ushers the home team into the stadium. A similar scene greets the OU basketball crowds when their teams take the floor in Lloyd Noble Center. The flag and other manifestations of Sooner spirit are meant to send a message to fans and foes alike: This is our house.

The big school flag whipping through the air at sporting events is tradition now, at Oklahoma and most other college venues around the country—but at OU this particular custom was born more of desperation than calculation more than 30 years ago.

Ted Jacobs, a sophomore from Waco, Texas, and grandson of legendary Sooner track coach John Jacobs, had been named to the OU cheerleading squad just prior to the 1975 football season. The tryouts, by his own admission, were not exceptionally strenuous, the only requirement being an ability to perform “double stunts” with a partner. This Jacobs could handle.

He quickly learned, however, that he was the only cheerleader who did not have in his repertoire the typical individual gymnastics moves that have become so routine—handsprings, front somersaults, cartwheels, flips and the like. Jacobs loved his place on the squad, and just days before the first game, he was frantic for a way to keep his gymnastics shortcomings from being exposed to 70,800 game-day spectators.

Driving down Lindsey Street, Jacobs passed a car dealership flying several OU flags. He screeched to a stop and inquired



Robert Taylor

Ted Jacobs led the 1975 national championship Sooner football team onto the field with this orange-juice stained flag, which he gave back to OU to be framed and hung in the Union's Crossroads Restaurant.



Robert Taylor

The OU flag carried by the Ruf/Neks today has grown in size and tradition in the 30 years since a cheerleader named Ted Jacobs established the custom.

where such a flag could be purchased. Then he convinced the OU cheerleader sponsor, Chris Purcell (then assistant director of the Center for Student Development and now vice president for University governance), to buy a flag and allow him to lead the team onto the field.

While tradition was born, Jacobs' standing in the school spirit world was short-lived; the following year gymnastics skills were added to the tryout requirements, and Jacobs was out. He cannot swear that he originated the now-universal school flag practice across the nation, but he insists he knew of none other, certainly not in Big 8, except for the banner used by the Texas band in halftime shows.

By today's measure, Jacobs' flag might be considered puny. While the cheerleaders launch themselves airborne with increasing daring on the sidelines, the OU Ruf/Neks have assumed responsibility for leading the team with a much larger version of the University's standard, and using it to celebrate touchdowns, victories and to exhort the fans to greater frenzy.

The original flag landed in Jacobs' possession. Now the director of the Energy Management Program in OU's Price College of Business, Jacobs donated the historic relic to the University several years ago. It was framed and is displayed in the recently renovated Crossroads Restaurant in Oklahoma Memorial Union.

Close inspection reveals some stains on the white “OU” portion of the flag, which Jacobs claims came from oranges tossed onto the field during a 35-10 trouncing of Nebraska. That win earned the Sooners the 1975 Big 8 title and sent them to the Orange Bowl, where a 14-6 victory over Michigan gave Oklahoma its second back-to-back National Championships.—CJB