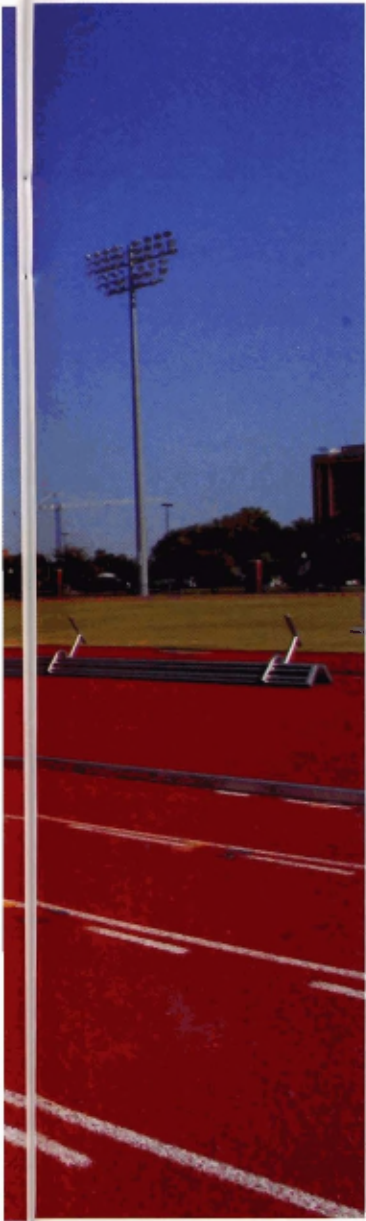




Robert Taylor/OU Athletics Media Relations

Martin Smith, inset, may not work miracles, but he sure can coach track and field. In just his second year as the Sooners' head coach, Smith brought his teams back from the depths to capture the Big 12 men's outdoor title and a basketful of individual honors.

Back on



New coach Martin Smith has OU athletes running, jumping, vaulting and throwing better than ever—and bringing home the honors.

By his own admission, Martin Smith is no miracle worker. He possesses no super powers or secret recipes for success.

But there is no denying the fact Smith brings a magical quality to his job, as attested by the level of success he has achieved in his 28 seasons as a Division-I track and field, and cross country coach. During that span, he has helped guide teams to 25 conference titles and five national championships.

Smith has earned coach of the year honors a total of nine times in three different major conferences. On two occasions, the Virginia native has been named National Coach of the Year, and he has long been respected as one of the top figures in collegiate track and field circles.

The latest addition to Smith's resume unfolded during the recently concluded spring 2007 semester, when the University of Oklahoma men's squad finished first at the Big 12 Conference Outdoor Championships, thus earning the Sooners their first conference crown in 29 years.

When OU hired Smith to take over its track and field program prior to the 2005-06 season, Athletics Director Joe Castiglione was no doubt counting on the veteran coach to bring a little of that past magic with him. But with both the men's and women's squads struggling for respectability over the last decade, no one could have imagined that even Smith could produce

such impressive results so expeditiously.

"It goes without saying we are extremely excited about what Coach Smith and his teams have achieved in such a short period of time," says Castiglione, who hired Smith after a seven-year stint at the University of Oregon. "We knew all along we were getting a quality coach in Martin Smith, and we were obviously excited about the possibilities when we hired him. I don't think anyone is surprised by what he has done here so far, but I don't believe anyone expected it to happen so quickly."

The revival began shortly after Smith arrived on campus in July 2005. After piecing together a staff of assistants that included Dana Boone and Jeremy Fischer—both of whom were honored by the U.S. Track and Field Coaches and Cross Country Coaches Association this spring for their work under Smith—OU's entire program underwent a significant rebuilding process.

Smith and company initially looked at creating a more positive atmosphere for future generations of Sooners. To do that, they basically started from scratch.

"The program was at a point where it needed a lot of work and a lot of rebuilding," offers the 54-year-old Smith. "We identified a number of areas that needed immediate attention to make us a competitive program again, and we put all of our energy into those needs. *continued*

Track

BY JAY C. UPCHURCH

“We’ve got incredible new facilities and a strong commitment to the program. We are excited about the future.”

“Our initial focus was all about laying a strong foundation and establishing an environment where our athletes didn’t necessarily focus on winning and losing, but rather on believing they could be competitive at this level every single day.”

The strategy implemented by Smith and his staff combined with the hard work of OU’s student-athletes began producing modest results almost immediately. The OU women earned a program-best tie for fourth at the Big 12 Indoor Championships, while the men garnered a fifth-place finish at the outdoor conference meet.

“It’s been fun to watch things fall into place, piece by piece. You could see how each of the changes Coach Smith made eventually played into our overall success,” says Kevin Bookout, a three-time All-America shot putter whose efforts were key to the Sooners’ 2007 success.

“One thing that is hard to measure is the amount of confidence Coach Smith brings to a team. He’s so smart, and he knows every event—and I believe everyone in the program feeds off of that.”

Smith believes in keeping things simple when it comes to his basic formula for success. But he is not afraid to think outside the box when the situation calls for it.

“There are so many variables when it comes right down to it. But one thing we tend to do well is work very diligently to take the components we have and make



Steve Moshley/OU Athletics Media Relations

Former Sooner basketball star Kevin Bookout, above, dominated the shot put this season, winning both indoor and outdoor conference titles and Midwest Region title and earning his third All-America honor at the NCAA outdoor national championships in July 2007.



Micchi n/OU Athletics Media Relations

It had been a long time coming, and second-year head coach Martin Smith’s OU men’s track and field team were one happy group of guys as they hoisted the 2007 Big 12 Conference Outdoor Championship trophy. It was the first time in 29 years that either Sooner men or women had brought a conference track and field title back to Norman.

them the best they can be,” explains Smith. “There were a number of quality athletes already here who have worked extremely hard to improve. Add that to the fact we’ve been able to bring in some new

faces who’ve made an impact, and that’s a good combination.”

That combination of veterans and newcomers made significant strides during the 2007 Big 12 Conference Indoor

Championships, where the OU men finished third and the women were again fourth. By the time the outdoor season rolled around, the Sooners were back on the national radar.

Another positive factor in the turnaround, according to Smith, has been the support he and his programs have received from the Athletics Department and the entire administration.

More than a year before Smith was hired, OU had begun taking the necessary steps to attract a top-notch coach capable of rebuilding the program. Completed in the spring of 2004, a \$3.5 million renovation project turned the John Jacobs Track facility into an Olympic-quality venue and training center.

“Once we got here and started taking the steps needed to accomplish our goals, things evolved quicker than we initially anticipated. All of the variables kept feeding off of each other, and that has allowed us to be more successful faster from a performance standpoint.”

Oklahoma’s pace of success took full stride during the spring when Smith’s charges set or matched nine individual event records, and eventually equaled a school record by earning 14 All-America honors at the 2007 NCAA Outdoor Championships in Sacramento, California. Smith now has coached 198 All-Americans during his career.

“I think the environment they established and all the change they brought,

While Goff was the lone OU competitor to earn double All-America status, the roster of Sooner All-Americans included seven men and five other women.

Bookout, the Big 12 individual champ in the shot put, finished fifth at nationals. Marcus Pugh won the conference title in the 100-meter, and he teamed with Jacobi Mitchell, Frankie Wright and Ronnie Pines to finish fourth in the men’s 4x100 relay in Sacramento. Demillo Wise was eighth in the long jump, and Chip Heuser earned All-America status for the second time in as many seasons with a team-best third-place finish in the pole vault.

Goff joined Leslie Cole, Scottesha Miller and Larica Urbina for the women’s 4x100 relay unit, which finished fifth at nationals. Jessica Eldridge was seventh in the 1,500-meter run, while Toni Smith wound up 10th in the women’s triple jump.

Several other Sooners made key contributions, including junior Shardae Boutte, who won the Big 12 men’s triple jump title and set a meet record in the same event at the Midwest Regional.

“Some of the pieces simply started to fall in place. It was a neat year just from the perspective we did have so many kids step up and perform well,” says Smith, who was tabbed 2007 Coach of the Year in both the Big 12 Conference and the Midwest District. “We feel we are on the right track here. We’ve got incredible new facilities and a strong commitment to the program. We are excited about the future.”

On top of all the success the program experienced in the competitive arena, a dozen OU men and women combined to earn Academic All-Big 12 honors. Just another reason to make Castiglione and other OU officials smile.

“We are obviously very happy with everything that is happening within our track and field program. Coach Smith has done an excellent job,” Castiglione concludes, “and we feel the ingredients are in place for even bigger and better things for our track program.”

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Yolanda Goff, left, earned All-America honors in the 100-meter dash and as part of the 4x100-meter relay unit, which finished fifth at the 2007 NCAA outdoor national championships in Sacramento. Other members of the relay team were Leslie Cole, Scottesha Miller and Larica Urbina.

The rest was just a gut feeling.

“Even during the interview process with Mr. Castiglione, I got the sense he really cared about the University and was very committed to doing things the right way. He was genuine in his excitement about making OU’s track and field program truly competitive on a national level,” says Smith, who began his college coaching career at George Mason University in 1980.

including the different coaching style, have been the biggest factors in our success,” says Tulsa senior Yolanda Goff, who earned All-America honors in the 100-meter dash and as part of the OU women’s 4x100-meter relay unit. “Coach Smith expects every single person to compete with everything he or she has—no regrets. (This staff) inspires you to be the best you can be, and I think that showed this season.”