

The Castiglione Era: **Great Expectations**

Realized

By Jay C. Upchurch

photos courtesy OU Athletics Media Relations

When Joe Castiglione looks at the sweeping success surrounding the University of Oklahoma's athletics program, he sees people. Good people. Make that great people.

To be sure, Castiglione is in tune with the detailed infrastructure involved in building such a tradition, but it is his belief the best collegiate sports programs are only as good as the character and heart reflected in their leadership—from university administrators, right down to every single student-manager and trainer working behind the scenes.

"Ultimately, it's all about our people and the synergy that exists amongst all of our sports, our coaches and our student-athletes," explains OU's vice president for athletics programs and director of athletics when discussing his program's overall prosperity in recent years. "It's about all of us sharing a vision, a mission and values that make it possible for us to set some rather lofty goals and then truly feel a confidence that we can make them happen."

During Castiglione's 12-year reign as athletics director, that so-called synergy has translated into the Sooners winning six national team championships and more than three dozen conference titles in various sports. Over that same period, the program has seen its budget increase from \$24 million to almost \$75 million annually, and OU has become one of only a handful of athletics departments nationally to consistently make a profit over the last decade.

"Joe Castiglione is a coach's administrator. He's a savvy businessman, as the growth and development of our athletic department aptly reflects. But at the heart of his leadership are student-athletes and the coaches who mentor them," explains Sherri Coale, OU women's basketball coach. "He demonstrates impeccable vision and an indefatigable spirit for the mission of intercollegiate athletics. Those of us who work at the University of Oklahoma are the envy of our respective professions because we work for Joe Castiglione."

Castiglione is quick to deflect credit to other factions, pointing to University President David Boren's unwavering support,



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along with that of OU's Board of Regents as being instrumental to the program's ongoing success. The 52-year-old Florida native also calls "The Campaign for Sooner Sports—Great Expectations," the piece of the overall puzzle that made all things possible.

"We wanted to try to build upon the wonderful tradition that already existed at Oklahoma and create a program that could be one of the models, if not *the* model by which all others are compared," says Castiglione.

To accomplish such aspirations, OU needed a whole new game plan.

The Great Expectations campaign, initially launched in 1999 with a proposed goal of \$100 million to be used specifically for facility improvements, changed everything almost overnight. It helped raise more than \$125 million by 2004 and eventually accounted for almost \$200 million in donations directly responsible for helping transform OU's previously antiquated facilities into a first-class athletic village that ranks among the best in the country.

"It meant more than just what might define a successful fundraising campaign since it crystallized everything we were trying to do. With the Great Expectations plan came an incredible amount of hope, because there was a way we could engage everybody, from current and prospective donors to faculty and staff to fans," says Castiglione. "It supplied an incredible amount of energy and momentum, and basically defined the blueprint for our future, at least in terms of providing those resources our programs dearly needed for success.

"One of the unique elements about that special campaign is the fact it included something for every sport we sponsor. It engaged everybody, and I would say unified us in a lot of ways."

Talk to any of the more than 550 student-athletes currently on campus about the atmosphere surrounding OU's athletics department, and the words "unity" and "family" are bound to find their way into the conversation.

"You definitely sense a special bond the moment you walk onto campus at OU. It's something you share with all of the student-athletes and coaches and the people involved in athletics because they are such a big part of your life," explains Ronnell Lewis, a sophomore linebacker for the Sooners. "A lot of schools talk about having a family environment, but it is definitely a reality here."

First-class facilities, a staunch support network, unparalleled dedication and commitment to the University—all part of the formula and synergy that has propelled OU athletics to unprecedented success during Castiglione's time on campus. And according to the Sooners' point man, there is plenty more to come.

"We haven't reached any particular destination; we are simply at a point in time when we are starting to see some of those investments come to fruition. What's even more exciting is to see how well so many of our athletic programs are set for future success," adds Castiglione.

"We have so much to look forward to here at the University of Oklahoma."

Football

Joe Castiglione's first and most significant hire, Bob Stoops, led OU to its seventh football national championship in 2000. And while it took Stoops only two seasons to resurrect "Sooner Magic" at Owen Field and beyond, the fact his program is surrounded by comprehensive state-of-the-art facilities has played heavily in the Sooners' favor.

Besides the \$70 million raised for renovations and expansion to Gaylord Family Oklahoma Memorial Stadium, upgrades to the Barry Switzer Center football facility include a new locker room, upgraded training space and equipment areas, as well as high-tech meeting rooms and film rooms, and new coaches' offices.

During Stoops' first dozen seasons at OU, the Sooners have forged a 117-29 record, which includes winning six Big 12 Conference titles. That level of success makes OU football an economic engine powerful enough to allow the entire athletics department to be completely self-sustaining.

Men's Basketball

The Sooners have been a hit-and-miss proposition during Jeff Capel's first four seasons in Norman, including an Elite Eight appearance in 2008-09 behind national player of the year Blake Griffin. Since taking over for former coach Kelvin Sampson, who guided the Sooners to NCAA Tournament appearances in 10 of his 11 seasons (1995-2006), Capel has seen his patience tested at times, especially this past season when everything seemed out of sync, and the Sooners experienced their first losing season in 30 years.

But another solid recruiting class coupled with continued renovations to Lloyd Noble Center—the men's locker rooms are being refurbished in time for the 2010-11 season—have optimism





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OPPOSITE: Basketball support facilities for both OU women and men are second to none with expansion and renovation of Lloyd Noble Center.

ABOVE: The women's softball complex, with its recently completed indoor practice facility, is a fitting home setting for Coach Patty Gasso's team's perennial pursuit of national honors.

LEFT: Both OU men's and women's gymnastics teams are national powers, now training in one of the nation's top facilities, the completely renovated Sam Viersen Gymnastics Center.



on the rise again in Capel's camp.

The Great Expectations campaign was responsible for a \$17.1 million expansion and renovation to LNC in 2001, when full-sized practice courts for both the men's and women's programs were added, along with new state-of-the-art team film rooms, weight and training facilities, and locker rooms.

Women's Basketball

Since the formation of the Big 12 Conference in 1996, no program and coach have combined to win more league games and championships than Sherri Coale and the Sooners. During her initial 14 seasons at OU, Coale's teams have racked up 147 regular-season conference victories and 10 Big 12 titles—six regular season crowns and four of the postseason variety.

The 2009-10 season was highlighted by 27 victories from a team that was supposed to be in rebuilding mode—topped off by the Sooners' second straight Final Four appearance and third of the Coale era. OU has appeared in 11 consecutive NCAA tournaments under Coale—and over the past decade, the Sooners have averaged 26 wins per season.

The OU women have benefited from the \$17.1 million expansion and renovation project that not only added a new practice facility, but also was responsible for new administrative offices, film rooms, weight and training rooms, and the Legacy Court exhibit hall, featuring tributes to the teams, players and coaches who have played key roles in OU's long-running hoops success.

Baseball

It has been said Joe Castiglione has a "Midas Touch" when it comes to evaluating talent and hiring coaches. Of course, it never hurts when a bit of good fortune enters the equation as well. That was the case in 2005 when OU was looking to replace longtime head baseball coach Larry Cochell.

The job came down to two candidates—OU interim head

coach Sunny Golloway and Wichita State's Gene Stephenson, who got the nod and accepted only to change his mind 24 hours later. Castiglione then turned to Golloway, who has proven to be an excellent choice over the five seasons since.

During that span, Golloway has led the Sooners to a pair of NCAA regional titles and one College World Series appearance this spring. In fact, OU finished the 2010 campaign with 50 wins and ranked No. 5 nationally. Making their success story even sweeter was the fact the Sooners had lost nine players in the 2009 Major League Baseball draft.

OU figures to lose only one key contributor from this year's CWS squad, making the future look bright for Golloway's program. Aiding their cause will be the new \$1 million indoor hitting and practice facility added this past fall.

Softball

Few NCAA softball programs can even begin to compare recent success stories with Coach Patty Gasso and her Sooners, especially when looking back over the past decade. During that span, OU has averaged almost 50 wins per season, captured an NCAA title (2000), made four other Women's College World Series appearances and won four regular-season and three Big 12 Conference tournament titles.

It is safe to say Gasso has done her part to put OU softball on the national map, and with six starters and all of her pitching back next spring, the Sooners figure to be in the mix again for a possible national title run. That should make the home crowds perk up in their collective seats at Marita Hynes Field, the centerpiece of the OU Softball Complex, which last year added a 6,020-square-foot indoor practice facility.

Wrestling

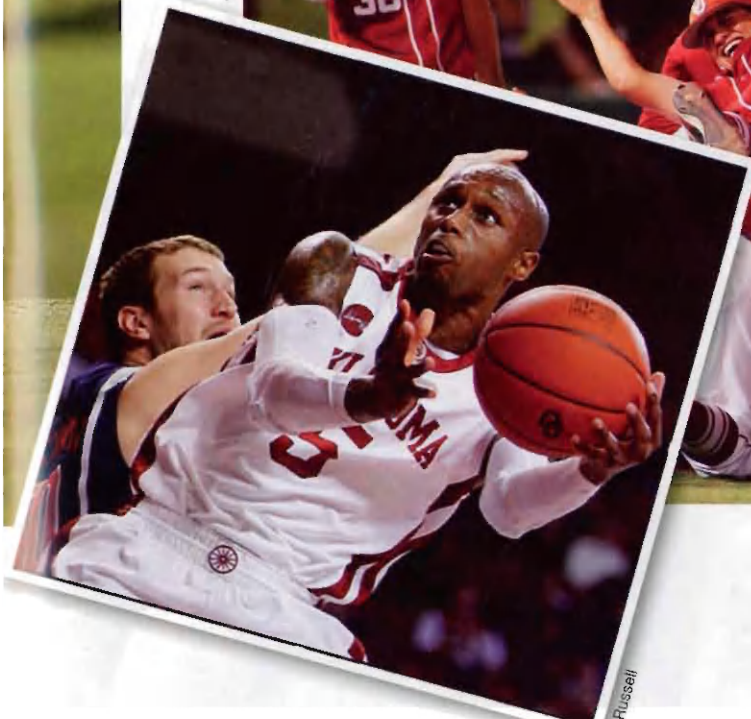
At the very heart of the OU campus is the Howard McCasland Field House, longtime home to the University's wrestling,



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OPPOSITE: OU's golf teams and their new coaches, with a re-amped course and learning center, are rebuilding, as is men's basketball AT LEFT, while ABOVE the baseball team is enjoying great success in expanded and improved L. Dale Mitchell Field.



gymnastics and volleyball programs. The historic venue, built in 1928, received \$6 million in renovations five years ago that included major interior upgrades to enhance the facility for all three sports.

Prior to that, Jack Spates' wrestling program had seen its practice facility improve dramatically with the 2001 completion of the \$2 million Port Robertson Center, named for the legendary wrestling coach and one-time athletics counselor.

The Sooners have experienced their share of success during Spates' 17 seasons at the helm, including earning seven Top-5 team finishes at nationals over the last decade. OU has captured a pair of Big 12 team titles under Spates, while picking up 49 All-America honors and crowning six individual national champions.

This past spring, OU finished fifth at the NCAA Championships and had four wrestlers earn All-America honors, the team's most since 2006.

Volleyball

After suffering through some lean years earlier this decade, Oklahoma volleyball has enjoyed a major resurgence under the direction of head coach Santiago Restrepo, who enters his seventh season with the Sooners this fall. Restrepo needed only two rebuilding seasons to transform the once-floundering program into a title contender.

In 2006, the Sooners won 28 matches and finished with the best winning percentage in program history (.824). They beat Texas for the first time ever that season, finished second in the

Big 12 race and earned only their fourth NCAA Tournament berth. A trip to the Sweet 16 topped things off, along with a No. 12 ranking in the final national poll.

Playing in the newly renovated McCasland Field House, the Sooners continued their rise in 2007, when despite being picked to finish ninth in the preseason, they went 22-10 and wound up fourth in the Big 12.

Last season proved bittersweet for Restrepo and the entire program. The veteran coach lost his son, Javier, to leukemia just a few weeks before the Sooners began a successful quest for their third NCAA berth in five years.

Soccer

Sustained success has not come easy for the OU soccer program. Since their inaugural season in 1996, the Sooners have managed to produce only five winning campaigns and one NCAA Tournament appearance.

Randy Evans spent nine seasons as head coach and saw the program make solid strides during a six-year stretch from 2000-05. But two losing seasons later, Nicole Nelson was brought in to take over the reins.

OU finished 7-10-2 last fall, doubling its win total from 2008, and with senior Whitney Palmer poised to become the program's all-time goal scorer, the Sooners have cause to be optimistic this fall.

The biggest positive where OU soccer is concerned has to be the \$4.5 million stadium expansion that took place in 2006. John Crane Field received a new pressbox and more grandstand seating.

Gymnastics

Plenty of good things are happening with the OU men's and women's gymnastics programs these days, including the recently completed renovation and 7,000-square-foot expansion of the Sam Viersen Gymnastics Center. Built in 1982, the Sooners' longtime home is once again considered one of the top training facilities in the country.

The project features an overhaul of the practice gym, new locker rooms, an upgraded sports medicine training area and an awards showcase room stocked with plenty of national championship and conference championship trophies.

Women's coach K.J. Kindler's squad provided the newest additions to the trophy case in April with a runner-up finish at the 2010 NCAA Championships in Florida. Along with their first-ever appearance in the Super Six Team Finals, the Sooners earned a school-record seven All-America honors and saw Kindler bring home National Coach of the Year honors. Two months after the season ended, senior Hollie Vise was named Big 12 Sportsperson of the Year, along with Kansas football player Darrell Stuckey.

The Sooner men have done more than their share over the last decade to stock the Viersen Center shelves with awards. In his 11 seasons as head coach, Mark Williams has guided OU to five national championships and eight conference titles. During that same dominating span, the Sooners have earned 68 All-America honors, and Williams has been named National Coach of the Year five times.

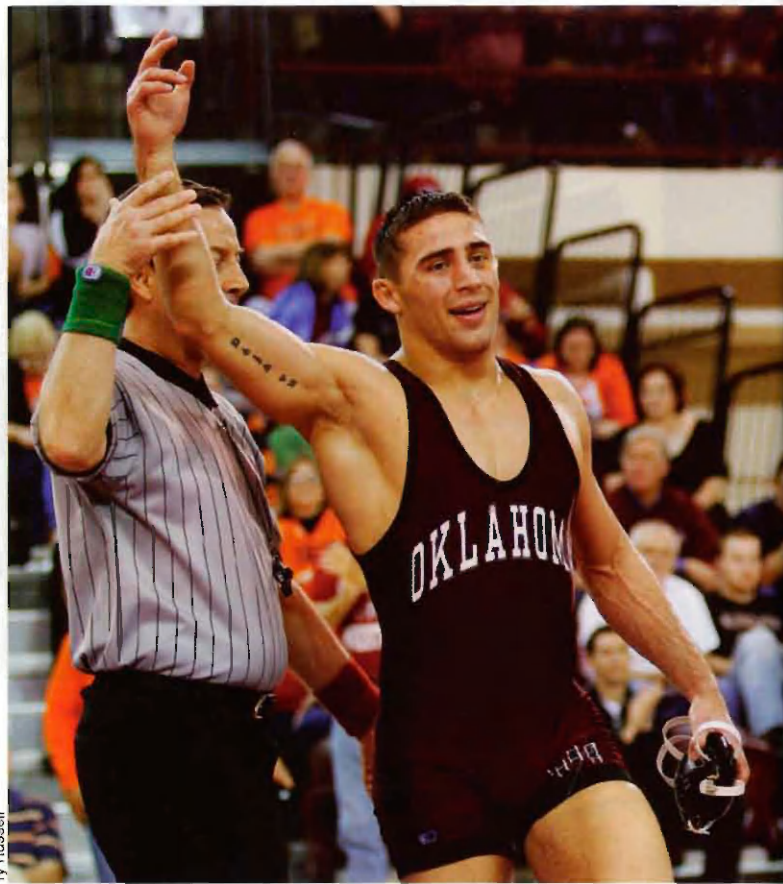
Golf

The OU golf teams have experienced some changes over the last year, as two new head coaches arrived at the Charlie Coe Golf Learning Center with some high expectations in tow. While both programs figure to be in rebuilding mode at least for a while, both Ryan Hybl and Veronique Drouin are anxious to establish solid roots.

Hybl is on record saying OU is a place with unlimited potential, and he believes the Sooners will be vying for championship titles again in the not-too-distant future. He is well aware of the Sooners' rich history on the links and is not afraid to dream big.

Over the summer, Hybl signed the nation's top junior college prospect, Abraham Ancer, to play for the Sooners, adding him to an already highly regarded class of recruits for 2010-11.

Meanwhile, Drouin knows patience will be required as she works to re-establish the Sooner women as a viable Big 12 power. There were a handful of promising signs during her first season on the job, including a pair of second-place tournament finishes and especially the play of Ellen Mueller whom she can build around this coming season.



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Tennis

The summer of 2009 was a busy one for Castiglione, but he managed to fill all of his needs in one particular spot—Athens, Georgia. Well, sort of.

While Castiglione did hire a pair of University of Georgia assistants to take over the men's and women's golf programs at OU, John Roddick already had departed as an assistant for the Georgia men's tennis team in 2002. The older brother of professional tennis star Andy Roddick was in San Antonio when OU came calling.

Although Roddick was doing well with his Roddick Total Tennis academy, he saw the OU job as a great opportunity. Once in Norman, it did not take long for his Sooners to start making some noise, as they defeated Texas in the Round of 16 and advanced to the NCAA quarterfinals.

The OU women were also productive under second-year coach David Mullins' direction. The Sooners earned a berth into the NCAA Championships for only the sixth time in program history, re-establishing themselves as a potential force on the national scene.

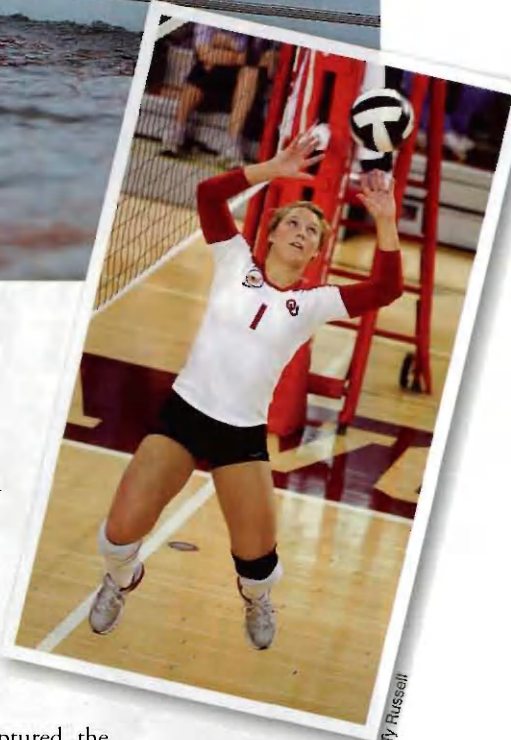
One element that should help both programs is the first-rate indoor venue completed last year as an expansion of the Headington Family Tennis Center.

Rowing

The newest program at OU is women's rowing, which was officially added as a varsity sport in the spring 2009 to keep the University in step with Title IX gender equity standards. While



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OPPOSITE: Wrestling received one of the first major upgrades with the addition of the Port Robertson Center and complete renovation of historic Howard McCasland Field House, also home to the volleyball team RIGHT. A similar future awaits the new OU rowing team ABOVE.

it figures to take second-year coach Leanne Crane some time to establish the Sooners as contenders on the water, her 45-person roster already seems comfortable on the Oklahoma River, located just south of Oklahoma City's Bricktown district.

In May, the young Sooner squad finished second at the Big 12 Championship, just behind Texas. Two weeks later, Crane's crew entered the NCAA South-Central Regional as the sixth overall seed and finished seventh in the points standings.

To further demonstrate OU's commitment to the program, plans are in the works to build an on-campus workout facility specifically devoted to rowing, as well as a new state-of-the-art boathouse on the Oklahoma River that will serve as the Sooners' home.

Cross Country

The OU men's cross country team expects great things in 2010, especially since it returns every key contributor from a squad that produced the most successful season in the program's history a year ago. Included in that mix for Coach Martin Smith's team are four All-Midwest Region runners who will be looking to improve upon the team's third-place finish at the Big 12 Championships and 12th-place finish at nationals, both school bests.

While Smith has helped elevate the OU men to another level, the women's side is still looking to find its stride this fall. After redshirting a year ago, 2008 All-Big 12 performer Kelly Waters returns to provide a much-needed boost.

Track & Field

In 2005, when OU track and field seemingly needed some new blood to help revitalize the program, Castiglione decided to go a different direction. He opted for experience—or old blood, if you will. His hiring of Martin Smith, who had enjoyed great suc-

cess at both Oregon and Wisconsin, has proven to be just what the doctor ordered.

Record-breaking performances and All-America honors have become the norm for the Sooner men, who captured the 2007 Big 12 men's conference title and have established themselves as contenders again on the national scene.

Meanwhile, the OU women had nine qualifiers for the NCAA Track and Field Championships this past spring, and Smith is hoping to continue to build on that momentum moving forward.

Definitely aiding the track and field program's recent success had been the upgraded facilities on campus. The John Jacobs Track and Field Complex received \$3.5 million in renovations in 2004. Included in the project was a 25,000-square-foot building complete with new locker rooms, a training room and a video teaching room. Two years later, the Mosier Indoor Facility was updated with a new weightlifting room.

Retooling for the Future

Having checked off the last item on his Great Expectations laundry list of 1999, Castiglione is already looking to what can be accomplished as Sooner athletics go forward. You can bet that his ambitions will be based on making University life better for the people who depend on him.

Jay C. Upchurch is editor in chief of Sooner Spectator and writes freelance OU sports articles for Sooner Magazine.