



prologue.

The President and the AD: A Profitable, if Unusual, Partnership

David Boren is not too crazy about surprises. At least not since he came to the University of Oklahoma's presidency from the U.S. Senate in late 1994 expecting that the office would offer its holder time for a modicum of scholarly contemplation. He found a few things had been omitted from his job description.

He was not completely stunned to learn that his political acumen and fundraising skills were going to be as much in demand in Norman as they had been in Washington. His biggest shock came from a totally unexpected source—the OU Athletics Department. The historically self-supporting intercollegiate sports arm of the University was deeply in debt.

How this situation occurred and how it went undiscovered by the parent university is another story. Basically receipts from advance season ticket sales had been used to balance a previous year's expenditures, then the process was repeated in subsequent years until the yearly overdrafts were more than the receipts could cover.

The only solution left to the department was to turn to the University for help. Boren's solution was to bring in the person who could put Sooner athletics back on solid footing.

Joe Castiglione arrived in Norman in April 1998, already a respected and experienced professional athletics administrator, breaking the tradition at OU, as elsewhere in the intercollegiate world, of coaching as training ground for athletics directors. He accepted the job knowing that the financial situation was bad; neither he nor Boren knew just how bad.

His first and wisest move was to form an enduring partnership with the president—one which both men claim is unusual, perhaps even unique, among their respective colleagues throughout the country. Castiglione promised Boren con-

stant communication and no more surprises, and he has been as good as his word.

Joe C., as he has become known at Oklahoma, began turning over rocks, looking into every facet of his operation, determined to get every problem out in the open, to deal with the entirety. All told, the debt was \$15 million.

Through cost containment, lean budgets, revenue enhancement and corporate partnerships, he was able to whittle away the deficit to \$12 million. Then he went to a consistently supportive Board of Regents to formalize a completely businesslike loan to be repaid to the University by 2021. He never intended for the restitution to take that long—and it didn't. This loan will be satisfied this year, 10 years ahead of schedule. At the same time, the department finished in the black each of the last 11 years and instituted a highly successful donor program.

While restoring financial independence was a good thing, Castiglione felt strongly that separation from the academic life of the institution was not. Knowing that having the University bail out athletics was greeted with faculty dismay, he moved quickly to establish direct and meaningful ties to academic departments.

His first move in that area was to form an alliance with the University Libraries, whose dean, Sul Lee, has become his friend and most ardent proponent. Athletics is building a \$1 million endowment for the libraries, with an initial \$250,000 coming from merchandise sales and significant contributions from several individuals in athletics. The two departments also co-sponsor the popular annual exhibit, "Books That Inspire."

The myriad of facility projects over the past few years has provided opportunities for interaction with students and their professors in engineering and architecture. Some 50 journalism students are employed to design and launch images

for the video boards at the stadium and Lloyd Noble Center. Relationships also exist with business and education, the latter, where he now teaches a graduate class, allowing Castiglione to fulfill an item high on his bucket list. It took five semesters and many all-nighters to complete his master's degree.

Considerable effort and resources have been invested in creating an academic support center, headed by the highly regarded Gerald Gurney. As a result, student-athletes have a GPA that compares favorably with that of the general student body, in spite of the extra demands on their time. The career counseling, life skills and psychological services provided have garnered national recognition.

Castiglione revived the Athletics Council, which includes faculty/staff representation, and speaks regularly to the Faculty Senate. Several years ago, he accepted a student suggestion that a \$3 Academic Enhancement Fee (now \$5) be added to the cost of each football ticket. Through direct and indirect support, OU Athletics provides more than \$7 million annually to OU Academics.

The national honors Castiglione has received for his program and personally, capped by two National Athletics Director of the Year designations, are numerous. But more important to the man in the president's office is the integrity his vice president for athletics programs and director of athletics brings to OU's, most visible, immensely popular and minutely scrutinized program.

"We have complete trust in each other," Boren says. "If there is ever a problem, I'll hear about it immediately, and I know that he is already on the job correcting it."
—CJB

"Great Expectations Realized," on Page 17, provides a sport-by-sport rundown of the Castiglione Era.