



prologue.

Should we care as much as we do when our Sooners win the big one? You bet we should.

The day after the Sugar Bowl, one of our staff suggested that this column should be written that very day, before the euphoria wore off. Normally a good suggestion, but he needn't have worried. The grin on Bob Stoops' face, as recorded on the inside back cover of this issue, was replicated by Sooner fans all over the country before the confetti even reached the ground—and still can be seen whenever that seemingly unlikely victory is mentioned.

OU was not supposed to win this game. Ask anybody. Injury-plagued. Unable to find a quarterback. Underperforming. It had been a disappointing season until a totally unexpected win over OSU handed the Sooners the dubious honor of becoming cannon fodder for mighty Alabama in New Orleans.

Over the month-long build-up, there was not a lot of respect shown our Sooners—like none. Some knowledgeable analysts questioned the propriety of the matchup. ESPN lined up a bevy of human interest features to keep viewers from turning away if the score got too out of hand: A. J. McCarron's life story; his glamorous girlfriend, the lovely Miss Alabama; his super fan mother; Nick Saban, the NCAA's greatest active coach. And sad to say, even OU fans didn't give their team much of a chance. The No. 1 Crimson Tide had stumbled its way out of the national championship game; such a mishap surely wouldn't happen again.

But the staff and players in Norman didn't buy it. They quietly went about the business of becoming the team

Alabama didn't expect, wasn't prepared for and couldn't adjust to. On the practice fields, in the film room, in the coaches' offices, the plot was hatched, always remembering that Oklahoma was no stranger to playing and winning the big game; this was not their first turn in the spotlight.

The rest is history—from two-touchdown underdog to two-touchdown victor, a quarterback firmly in control now and for the future, and a team playing inspired football. Maybe Alabama was the best team in the nation, as we were told—but not that night.

You don't have to be a football fan to appreciate the lessons learned. Prepare. Persevere. Keep the faith. Don't listen to the naysayers. Go all out. Remember who you are. It's the other side of a college education.

Some have always argued that intercollegiate sports—and they mostly mean football—have no place on the college campus, that juxtaposing higher education and athletics is a betrayal of the academic mission, even more so if the athletics program is big and successful and expensive. Critics point to towering stadiums, expansive arenas and manicured playing fields, to coaches' salaries that exceed that of the president of the institution and the governor of the state. They have a point.

At Oklahoma that argument was addressed many years ago with the decision that the Athletics Department would pay its own way through sale of tickets, merchandise, advertising, endorsements, corporate sponsorship, conference revenue sharing, television and radio broadcast rights and private fund raising. That's everything: salaries, scholarships,

facilities and maintenance, insurance, etc.

All well and good, but with the state picking up less and less of the University's budget, what about the effect of athletics fund raising on institutional fund raising? Most development officers find that life is good on both sides of the ledger when the team is successful, that happy donors are generous donors—and the Athletics Department is one of those generous academic donors to the educational enterprise. Face it: The donor who will only give to athletics isn't going to give to the English department even if athletics disappear.

A few years ago, a geographer named Blake Gumprecht, who was researching a book on that unique animal, *The American College Town*, made the rounds of various campuses, including OU, his alma mater. One of his devil's-advocate kind of questions was whether it was the business of a university to expend its resources providing entertainment for the citizens of the town and beyond. He wasn't just talking sports but also other ticketed events such as fine arts performances—or creating the gorgeous landscaping that has turned campuses into destination points.

In the University of Oklahoma's case, the answer is emphatically "Yes." It is the business of this university to share what's here, whether it's touchdowns or tornado forecasts, parks or museums. And whatever the University offers should be first rate.

What Big Game Bob and his crew accomplished at the Sugar Bowl fits that description. You might even say that what they did was educational—and it certainly was fun.

—CJB