

TEAMWORK BRINGS VENABLES BACK TO OU

A familiar face returns to OU to lead the Sooners into a new era and a new conference.

Cheers erupted as the private jet began its descent from the night sky into a glow of television lights on the tarmac of Max Westheimer Airport. Like giddy children waiting for Santa, hundreds of true believers stood on tiptoe and craned their necks to get a better view. When the door of the plane opened and a familiar figure in an Oklahoma ballcap came into view, the OU marching band struck up the fight song, fireworks exploded in the darkness and euphoric fans nearly did, too. Brent Venables had come home to deliver them from mayhem.

During the past decade, the former OU defensive coordinator and associate head coach for Bob Stoops had been racking up accolades in similar roles in the ACC for Clemson University. Under Venables and head coach Dabo Swinney, the Tigers celebrated two national championships—both against SEC rival Alabama.

For Venables to leave Clemson, he said, would take something “really special.” And for the former Sooner coach, that is exactly what happened. Only a week before his arrival, OU had bid an unplanned adieu to former head coach Lincoln Riley when he announced pre-Alamo Bowl that he was leaving for the University of Southern California.

And, while Venables was the man in the spotlight, not enough credit can be given to the A-team that worked behind the scenes—OU President Joseph Harroz Jr.; Athletic Director Joe Castiglione, who famously keeps a list of prospective coaches at the ready; and former OU head football coach Bob Stoops, who walked off the golf course in the middle of a round to accept the interim head coaching position.

Stoops calmed the Sooner Nation, hit the recruiting trail and dusted off his visor to coach the Sooners in the Alamo Bowl on Dec. 29. The only time he took off was for his Dec. 7 induction into the College Football Hall of Fame in Las Vegas.

At the bowl game in San Antonio, Stoops was on the sidelines to congratulate his son, junior wideout Drake Stoops, on his touchdown catch in the second quarter, helping the Sooners beat the Oregon Ducks 47-32, and increasing the “winningest coach in OU football” record from 190 to 191.

Asked about the selection of Venables for his former job, Stoops said, “Brent’s the absolute perfect fit for OU,” citing his experience at eight national championships, knowledge of the SEC and most importantly, love for OU.

“This is an incredibly special opportunity,” said Venables. “Julie and I and our family are extremely grateful for the belief in us—and certainly in me—to be the next head coach at Oklahoma, one of the winningest and most tradition-rich programs in college football history ... The OU logo has never been stronger.”

For more on Venables, visit sooner-mag.oufoundation.org.



Trey Young/OU Daily

Brent and Julie Venables arrive at Max Westheimer Airport amid fireworks and crowds of cheering fans on Dec. 5, 2021.

“It’s been very surreal,” said Venables about his return to OU as head football coach. “Coming back to this is just absolutely overwhelming ... I’m just very, very thankful and very fortunate.”

Ty Russell/OU Athletics



Travis Caperton

OU Athletic Director Joe Castiglione presents Brent Venables with a pair of crimson athletic shoes at his first press conference as Sooners head coach on Dec. 6, 2021.



Trey Young/OU Daily

Former OU head football coach Bob Stoops passes the visor to his former associate and current head coach Brent Venables after Stoops led the Sooners to a 47-32 victory over the Oregon Ducks at the Alamo Bowl in San Antonio on Dec. 29, 2021.