

# Greatest Sooner Passers

[Sports Review]

By Harold Keith

**A**T a Columbia, Missouri, hotel on a hot, cloudy afternoon in 1913, a Sooner football squad, stunned by the Missouri ultimatum that the Oklahoma team could either play the game without its great senior fullback, Claude Reeds, or go back to Norman without collecting its guarantee, dressed in grim silence.

Reeds was the star of the youngish, lightish Sooner team, the indispensable source from which the strongest Sooner plays stemmed. Without him Oklahoma would have very little chance against the powerful Tiger team coached by Chet Brewer and Henry "Indian" Schulte.

The Missouri charge against Reeds, and also against Buster Ambrister, veteran Sooner quarterback, was that by playing non-conference games as freshmen they had forfeited their senior eligibility. Eligibility rules were new in that early day and members of the Oklahoma team of 1913 have always resented Missouri's forcing of her own Missouri Valley conference eligibility requirements on a non-conference opponent (Oklahoma did not belong then), especially since Kansas, Texas, Colorado and all the other teams on the Sooner schedule that year did not protest Reeds.

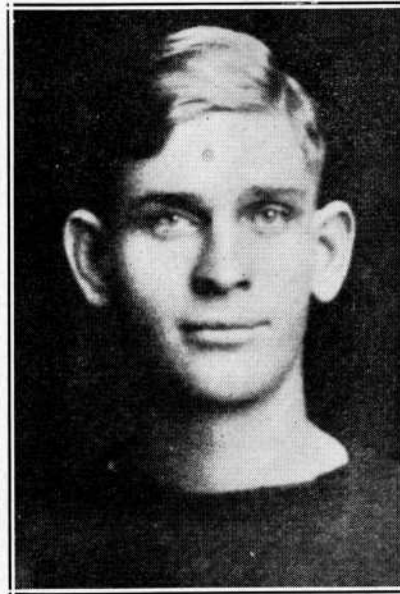
It was a difficult decision for Bennie Owen, the Sooner coach. If Owen bowed before the Missouri mandate, his team would be severely crippled without Reeds and Ambrister. If he refused to yield and took his team back home, the school would lose about \$3,000 expense money, a staggering sum in those days. No matter how Owen decided, it seemed Oklahoma's team would be the loser.

Six hundred miles from home, the Sooner coach talked it over with the boys. The upshot of their conference was that the youthful Sooners decided to play without Reeds and Ambrister. And to make arrogant Missouri pay, if they could.

Into Reed's fullback spot went Parke Geyer, a lanky, stoop-shouldered 164-pound substitute sophomore fullback who had played at Norman High School. Ambrister's substitute was Montford Johnson, also a sophomore who had played at Norman High.

The game began. Missouri received the opening kickoff and tearing huge holes in the light Oklahoma line punched the length of the field for a touchdown without ever surrendering the ball. Oklahoma drove back doggedly with the following kickoff until stopped on the Tiger 30, from whence Ray Courtright booted a field goal.

The infuriated Sooners took the lead, 10 to 6, when Courtright returned a Missouri



*Spot Geyer in his student days*

## Geyer

They speak with awe of Sammy Baugh  
But the best I've ever seen  
Was a passin' fool who went to school  
Back about '15.

You've never heard of Geyer? Say!  
When he pegged that ball  
A living flame shot through you,  
You couldn't breathe at all.

Though Monty'd run his fastest  
For fifty yards or more,  
Old Spot could hit his finger tips  
Three times out of four.

They sent no blockers back for Spot  
He'd run and dodge and fade  
And slap the tacklers to the turf  
With a hand as big as a spade.

He'd fade so fast and fade so far  
That Bennie used to boast  
Old Spot got splinters in his tail  
Off his own goal post.

But all the time his head was up  
And he was keen to see  
Hap Johnson loose—or Indian Fields—  
Or Capshaw in the free.

Then he'd cock his arm and whip the ball  
Out along the sky,  
A spinning soaring leveled shoot  
Sixty yards on the fly!

Down the field Montgomery'd leap  
To palm the ball in stride,  
And you'd oughta heard those Sooners roar  
When he gave it a touchdown ride.

Yep, Ernie Lain had a glorious reign  
And Davey O'Brien too,  
The Trojan rave is Doyle Nave  
And Friedman's shots were true.

And they speak with awe of Sammy Baugh  
But the slickest I've ever seen  
Was the passin' fool who went to school  
Back about '15.

punt 35 yards to the Tiger 15 and Trim Capshaw whirled across from there for a touchdown. But Missouri's greater power told and when the last quarter started, the Tigers led 20 to 10 and Oklahoma's gallant little team was apparently whipped.

Then Geyer, Reeds' kid understudy playing his first full college game, went into action. He began raining forward passes, the straightest, truest passes the Tiger fans had ever seen, and Oklahoma drove to a touchdown from kickoff, Geyer pitching a short one to Tom Lowry for the score. Missouri 20, Oklahoma 17!

There were only a few minutes left to play but with young Geyer coolly riddling the Tiger defense with his thrilling aerials, the Sooners again moved bravely upfield, crossing chalk line after chalk line. The final seconds were flying. Now it was a contest, not between Oklahoma and Missouri, but between young Geyer and the clock, because nothing the Missourians did could stop this lanky boy's throwing.

From midfield, Geyer hit Courtright with still another pass and Corky ran 40 yards to the Tiger 10-yard line. But the clock won, time was up after this play and the Sooners disconsolately walked off the field defeated, 20 to 17.

With Reeds back, Geyer played very little in the rest of the games that fall. But Bennie Owen never forgot those whizzing passes by the gangling Norman boy. Reeds was graduating in the spring and Oklahoma would need a new fullback. And the cunning little Sooner coach already had him picked out—Geyer. Owen had also decided on the style of the Sooner offense in the future—forward passing. The most brilliant forward passing the midlands had ever seen.

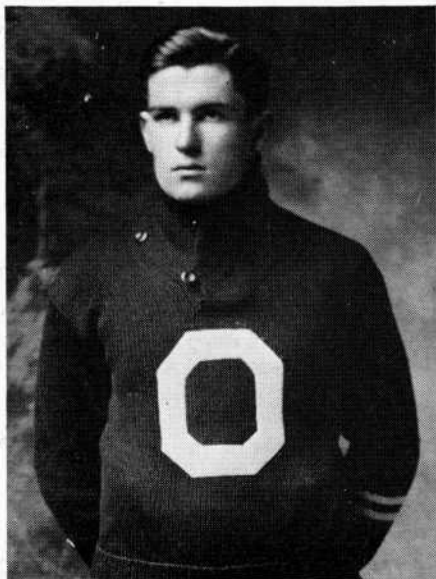
How "Spot" Geyer, as he came to be known, made good in 1914 and 1915 is a Sooner legend. Every old-time Sooner knows it. The green Norman kid became the Peerless Pegger of the Prairies. The Oklahoma team of 1914 lost but one game and the Oklahoma team of 1915, which Geyer captained, was all-victorious. Like Jove's thunderbolts, Geyer's deadly passes seared the foe. In 1914 Geyer completed more than one mile of forward passes. In 1915 he duplicated this feat. Nobody had ever seen such slinging. Geyer was so accurate with a football that given a wagon load of them, he could have played *Boomer Sooner* on a xylophone from a distance of 30 yards and sounded every note with a running throw.

One of the most important qualities of a great forward passer is coolness, but it's hard to be cool with half a dozen burly enemy linesmen trying to rush you and

smash you to the ground. No player in football is exposed like a forward passer. He's "naked," as the players say. He wants to look at his charging foes but he can't. He's got to see them out of the corner of his eye and concentrate on his receivers down the field.

Coolness was one of Geyer's greatest traits. He was always wonderfully calm and relaxed, even to the point of nonchalance. He could pick his men so wonderfully even with enemy tacklers viciously cutting at him, that on some plays Owen gave him his choice of three or four men to throw to.

Geyer proved he had no fear of rushing opponents in the Oklahoma-Haskell Indian game of 1914 at Kansas City. The undefeated Haskell team that year was probably the roughest, dirtiest aggregation a Sooner team has had to face in the 45-year-old history of football at the state uni-



*Phil White*

versity. They were out to stop Geyer any way they could and they clipped, slugged and roughed him so mercilessly every time he faded back to pass that two of them were banished from the game.

But Geyer took his punishment gamely and beautifully. He revenged himself upon his tormentors in the way he knew best—forward passing—completing 10 of 17 passes against Haskell for 175 yards, one of them a 45-yard touchdown shot to End Homer Montgomery. After that hotly-waged battle, which Oklahoma won 35 to 12, the grinning Geyer was a mass of bruises and "charley horses" and Owen sent him direct to Claremore, Oklahoma, to recuperate for a couple of days in the baths there. The Indians had given him a terrific beating but they hadn't stopped him, or even slowed him.

After his graduation, Geyer became president of the Marland Oil Company of Texas. Following two years of ill health, he died from pneumonia in 1932 at Fort Worth, Texas.

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Was "Spot" Geyer the greatest forward passer ever developed at Oklahoma?

No Sooner passer, or any pitcher either, in these parts, has come anywhere near equalling Geyer's phenomenal yardage. "Humpy's" critics assert it wouldn't be possible nowadays against carefully organized modern pass defenses, and yet "Trim" Capshaw, Geyer's teammate, has a pretty good answer for that.

"What would you use," Capshaw asks, "against our long-punt setup with the ends hepped wide and three good receiving backs placed up close enough to the line to be able to spread into the clear quickly? That way we had five receivers, all close to the scrimmage line, and in Geyer a passer who was deadly accurate up to 50 yards. What would you use against that?"

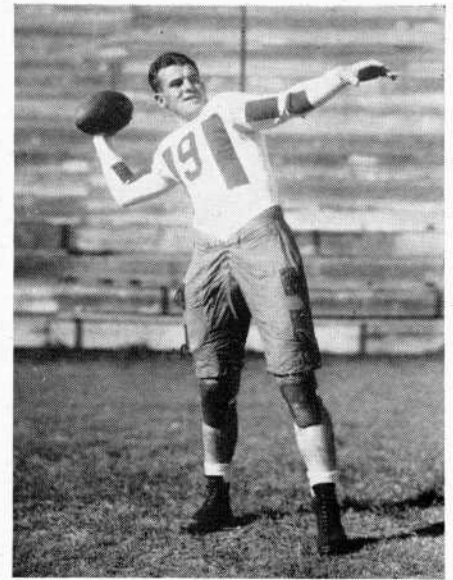
While you're figuring out what you'd use, let's pass to another great Sooner passer, a big 205-pound fellow who is probably one of the most underestimated Sooner backs of all time, Phil White of Anadarko and Oklahoma City, now an Oklahoma City physician.

Although White played in 1918 and 1919, he was only an average player until 1920, the year Owen turned out his undefeated Missouri Valley championship club. Most fans know White was a great kicker and also a terrific hitter who ran over tacklers with high knee action. But it probably isn't realized that he was also a fine forward passer and a swell pass defense man, too.

The game that made White was the Washington-Oklahoma battle at old St. Francis field in St. Louis early in the 1920 season, Oklahoma's first Missouri Valley Conference clash. In the first half Washington worked the screen pass, later barred, for two touchdowns. Their line would purposely let the Sooner line sift through to the passer, meanwhile blocking the Sooner linebackers clear off the field and clearing the way for one of their backs to delay and then race in just beyond the scrimmage line to catch the pass. At the half Washington led, 14 to 3, and then it began to rain!

Things looked bleak for the Sooners but during the intermission Coach Owen quickly reorganized his defense, bringing White, Myron "Little Tub" Tyler and Quarterback Frank Ogilvie into the game for the first time and instructing his ends, on a forward pass situation, to drop back a couple of yards and cover the Washington ends while his halves came up to break up the pass.

White was one of those defensive halves and he took charge. "Choose 'em, gang!" he yelled and that became the team's battle cry. Led by White, who slapped off the charging Bear linesmen and leaped high to intercept throw after throw, some of them with one hand, Oklahoma stopped the screen pass and came back in the rain to beat Washington 24 to 14. White, who was a great mudder, had a large part of the offense as well as the defense. He for-



Bob Dunlap

ward-passed the wet ball to Tyler for Oklahoma's final touchdown and kicked all three goals.

He was a great player in all Oklahoma's games the rest of the season. At Columbia, in Oklahoma's surprise defeat of Missouri 28 to 7, White set up Oklahoma's first touchdown by passing 22 yards to Jap Haskell to the Tiger one-yard line. In the second quarter he passed 40 yards to Haskell but Missouri stopped that march. In the third period he passed 30 yards to Tackle Pott Johnston, setting up another score, and in the fourth he passed 25 yards to Haskell who ran 25 more for another touchdown.

He also helped beat Kansas with his 27-yard shot to Tyler who ran to the Jayhawker three, and in the final game against Drake, White forward-passed three touchdowns outright, two of them to Pott Johnston and one to Haskell, and in the final moment of play hurled a long 50-yard flip to Tyler who ran to the Bulldog one-yard line. Oklahoma's passing arithmetic in that game, which the Sooners won 44 to 7, was 11 completions in 26 throws for a total of 185 yards.

Was Phil White the greatest forward passer ever developed at Norman? Was he as good or better than Geyer?

The third standout passer of the University was Bob Dunlap, the big 190-pound fellow from Haskell, Oklahoma, who quarterbacked Ad Lindsey's Sooners of 1931 and Lewie Hardage's Sooners of 1932 and 1933. Unlike Geyer and White, Dunlap played on mediocre Sooner teams and consequently didn't shine with the effulgence of the other two. And yet he ranks with Reeds, White, Hugh McCullough and little Beryl Clark as the finest Sooner triple-theater of all time.

Dunlap's three-year passing record was 97 completions in 287 throws for a grand total of 1,641 yards and nine touchdowns thrown outright, not at all bad for modern football. His best year was 1932 when

he hit 47 of 125 for 832 yards which was more net yardage than the Sooners earned on their running game that season. His best game was probably the 10-17 loss to Texas at Dallas in 1932 when Dunlap hit 7 of his first 11 passes for 117 yards. He was as good at long passes as he was on short ones, twice hitting Art Pansze and Ab Walker for touchdowns after throws nearly half the length of the field against Kansas State at Norman in 1932.

Dunlap's handicap, and it is a terrific one for any passer, was that the Sooner rushing game was so weak all three years he played that the enemy could set back and lay for his passes. Also his receivers were usually small men of only average receiving ability. And yet if he could have played on the powerful Oklahoma teams of 1920, 1938 or 1939, Dunlap might easily have been an All-American because he could kick, run, pass and defend with the best of them.

Was Bob Dunlap the greatest Sooner forward passer of all time? Or if he wasn't, could he have been, with a stronger supporting cast?

Tom Stidham's powerful Sooner teams of the past three years have been built around three remarkably accurate forward passers at short range. In 1937 Jack Baer of Shawnee ranked second in the nation to Ed Boell of New York U. in percentage of forward pass completions, hitting 40 of 80 for .500. In 1938 Hugh McCullough of Oklahoma City led the nation in percentage of completions, cashing 70 of 111 for a percentage of .631 that has never been surpassed. Last year Beryl Clark of Cherokee fired 64 times, ringing the bell 38 times for a percentage of .594 which also topped the United States.

Perhaps one of this modern trio deserves to be ranked as Oklahoma's top football pitcher of them all.

All three were given good protection and all save Baer were aided by slashing running games. However, the average yardage gained was much shorter than in the old days, Baer averaging 10.75 yards per each completed pass, McCullough 9.24 and Clark 11.39. Where Geyer would hit 1,800 yards per season and White and Dunlap around 800, Baer's total was 430, McCullough's 647 and Clark's 433. And yet all three were corking throwers.

Little Clark probably performed a feat never before equalled by any Sooner when he completed nine consecutive passes without missing against Kansas and the Oklahoma Aggies at Norman last fall and ran his string to 17 completions in 20 shots through a hot streak in the Iowa State and Kansas State games for an extraordinary percentage of .850 before mud and an injured shoulder stopped him at Manhattan, Kansas.

The University has produced several other fine passers besides this sextet, men like Reeds, '13; Skivy Davis, '19; Frank Potts, '26; Bus Haskins, '28; and C. C. Buxton, '30. Perhaps one of them deserves the top forward passing accolade.

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