

Alumni Coaching Staff

[Sports Review]

By HAROLD KEITH

BIGGEST news of the year in the Sooner sports sphere was the installation in February of the graduate football coaching system at the University of Oklahoma with Lawrence "Jap" Haskell, popular Sooner baseball coach of the past fourteen years and builder of the great Sooner football line of 1938, appointed athletic director and Dewey "Snorter" Luster, Tom Stidham's canny backfield coach in 1937, '38 and '39, the new Sooner head football coach.

Luster is already back on his home heath, busily at work drilling that uncertain portion of the Sooner football squad not hit by the draft or military enlistments in the Oklahoma spring football practice now in progress at Owen field.

Captain of Bennie Owen's undefeated Missouri Valley championship Oklahoma eleven of 1920, the 135-pound Luster, a shrewd tactician who spent the past season as backfield coach of Steve Owen's New York Giants professional club, succeeds the burly Stidham who resigned recently to accept a three-year contract as head coach at Marquette.

Both Luster and Haskell, who captained Bennie Owen's Oklahoma football team of 1921, came into power here as a result of the new economy policy for Oklahoma football determined upon by the University board of regents.

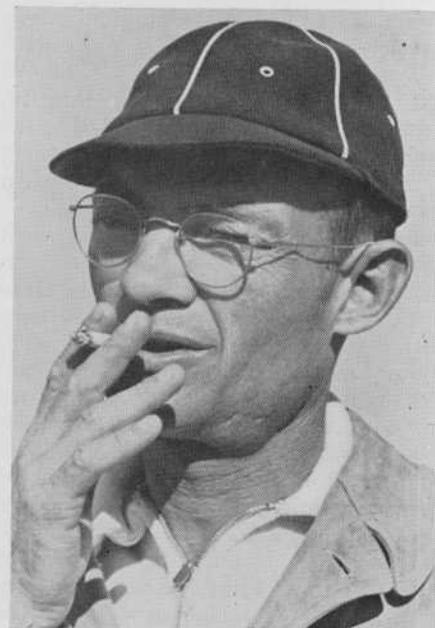
This new policy favors a smaller coaching staff, a smaller football coaching salary budget and the employment of well-qualified Sooner alumni for University coaching jobs whenever possible.

It was designed to eliminate entangling long-term coaching contracts, top-heavy salary budgets and unreasonably high salaries for coaches.

In accordance with it, the Oklahoma regents gave both Luster and Haskell year-to-year contracts like those received by University faculty members. No coaching salary at Oklahoma will go as high as \$5,000 in the future, the regents decided. The Sooners will get along with only three varsity coaches, Luster naming Athletic Director Haskell his line coach and Dale Arbuckle, quarterback on Bennie Owen's Sooner team of 1926, his new backfield coach. Arbuckle was one of Stidham's staff of five varsity coaches.

A full-time freshman coach, preferably one who can also double as coach of another sport, will be hired later, Luster said.

Stidham is taking Robert "Doc" Erskine, his backfield coach, and Pete Smith, end mentor, to Marquette with him as



Here is the first all-alumni O. U. athletic administration. Left, Jap Haskell, the new athletic director, and right, Dewey Luster, head football coach

assistants. Stanley Williamson, Sooner line coach under the Stidham regime, hasn't yet placed himself but the Oklahoma regents voted to pay him salary until June 1 although normally his resignation would have been accepted immediately.

Athletic Director Haskell denied that the economy policy at Oklahoma meant de-emphasis of Sooner football. We'll go on playing strong schedules," Haskell said, "and we will try to go on building strong Oklahoma teams."

Although twenty-two Oklahoma lettermen were left over from Stidham's Oklahoma team of 1940, the new coaches are alarmed at the way the experienced men are melting away before the selective draft and other branches of the military service.

Guard Olin Keith and Captain Gus Kitchens have been lost to the air corps, Guard Paul Woodson has quit school, Ends Lyle Smith and Louis Sharpe are advanced R. O. T. C. students and may be called at any moment while six other lettermen, among them several outstanding players, have low draft numbers.

"Looks like the only ones we are sure of are the married boys who have children," Luster declared, wryly.

"We may have to hold another spring practice in August," Haskell added.

The new Sooner coach quipped freely with newspapermen in his first press conference, held at the Union building February 8, despite the fact he hadn't slept

for thirty-four hours, having sat up all night discussing plans for Sooner football with Haskell and Arbuckle after his arrival the preceding night by train from New York City.

Asked to predict what Big Six conference team would extend Oklahoma for the Big Six championship this fall, Luster replied: "I am not going to pull a Bill Terry and rule anybody out."

Questioned concerning the possibility of Quarterback J. S. Munsey's being able to play football again this fall despite a shoulder injury sustained in the Nebraska-Oklahoma game of 1939, Luster said:

"I'm no physician, but if he can rack five-inch pipe in the oil field like he's been doing the past few months, I don't see why he couldn't give football a try."

Asked if Oklahoma would forward pass much under his coachship, Luster replied:

"Every team I've ever coached has always thrown the ball."

Another reporter pointed out that Oklahoma would be favored this fall to win the Big Six title and that with the excellent Sooner material now available, a coach might put to good use the psychology of being the favorite. To which Luster answered with a smile:

"I'd rather have the material and furnish my own psychology."

Luster told the press conference that football was "70 per cent material, 20 per-

cent psychology and 10 per cent other incidentals”

Opponents of the Sooners may be looking at three new formations this fall when Oklahoma has the ball, Luster said.

“Personally, I like a box with a spread, the single wing and the double wing,” Luster disclosed. “And we may have a man in motion.”

Scribbling with a pencil on the white table cover, Luster drew the box formation for the scribes.

“I saw the New York Giants make 21 points against the Chicago Bears forward passing all over the lot from this set-up,” Luster added, as he diagrammed.

“Yes, its my own formation,” he later revealed, in reply to a question, “So it may not be worth anything.”

Luster refused to get out on a limb concerning the caliber of the returning Sooner football material.

“These are turbulent times,” the Sooner coach pointed out, “with the army, navy and air corps taking your best players, a football coach who tries to evaluate his personnel now is crazy.”

Luster doubted if he would use a shift here, pointing out that often the defense moves after the offense has shifted.

“I think we will set so our boys can look across the scrimmage line and see the enemy move,” he asserted.

Asked about installing the T formation at Oklahoma, Luster said he would not.

“I don’t know enough about the T,” he explained, “I don’t think it would be smart to use something you don’t know pretty thoroughly.

“There is nothing magical about the T,” he went on, “The Chicago Bears lost three games using it this year. They got by because they had the best football material I ever saw. They could have used Aspirin formation and won just as easily.”

Luster thinks the new rule permitting the ball to be handed forward will open up a new field of deception.

“I’m going to fiddle with it in spring practice,” he confessed. “A coach can learn things in spring practice same as his boys. We’ll ‘fool’ with the double wingback some this spring. I believe there’s a fine possibility for deception with that new rule.”

Luster is rated by other coaches who know his system as a strong believer in fundamental football. However he believes in supplementing it with deception in both his running and passing game, and his “stuff” should be chock-full of surprises.

“He has always been a coach who could adapt his system to his material,” one coach declared. “When he didn’t have power, he’d come up with strong forward passing and beautiful deception off the double wing to break his small backs loose.

“He never, in all his life, played anybody for a tie.”

“You can’t beat him when it comes to pointing for an opponent,” another coach

declared, “When he was at Norman High in the middle 1930’s, he was always having to point for some bigger school that had bigger and better material. He’d always combat this situation by coming up with something new.”

His little Norman team beat Blair Cherry’s big Amarillo, Texas, team which had much bigger players and a terrific running game, by piling up Amarillo’s power team with an eight-man line. He knew they were a poor passing team and decided to gamble defensively to halt their running. Meanwhile he scored four touchdowns himself with long, short, spot and delayed forward passes nearly all of which started out as running plays.

Luster’s surprises were legion. In 1924 and ’25 he ran from the T formation, shifting into the Notre Dame box. Later he sprang a box formation of his own, running from it or shifting out of it into single and double wing or short punt. He even dreamed up a triple wingback formation once and used it with telling effect. All of these were surprises designed for certain games.

The new Sooner coach smokes cigarettes, drinks countless cups of coffee, and has an unbounding sense of humor.

Bennie Owen, Luster’s old coach here, gave him his nickname of “Snorter.” Luster was a boxer in his youth and even when carrying the ball in football, had the habit of breathing loudly through his nose. One day back in 1916 Owen needed a back to catch punts.

Looking around he spied freshman Luster whose name he didn’t recall although he did remember Luster’s habit of breathing like a boxer when running in football.

“Here, Old Snorter-Puffer-Snorter, you catch some!” Owen called to Luster, and the name stuck.

CATCHING up with other Sooner sports:

BASKETBALL—Coach Bruce Drake’s Oklahoma basketball team has won four and lost four Big Six conference games at this writing and has two more to play, engaging Missouri at Columbia March 1 and Kansas at Lawrence March 7.

The heart-breaking thing about Oklahoma’s basketball season has been the fact that the Sooners have lost no less than seven games this season by close scores, to Southern Methodists 55-57, to St. Johns 41-45, to Temple 26-32, to Kansas State after an overtime period 36-41, to Iowa State 33-35, to Bradley Tech 45-49 and to Nebraska 42-43.

Three of the four Big Six conference defeats came in the final seconds of play, two when enemy squads scored a long desperately-thrown one-handed field goal from the center of the court and a third one a carelessly-thrown Sooner pass that was intercepted and turned into a long solo dribble to the goal.

Oklahoma was leading in all three of these games and needed only to hold onto

and protect the ball a few seconds longer, a simple but sometimes difficult feat that would mean the Sooners would be leading the Big Six today with seven wins and one defeat.

Most tragic of all the Oklahoma defeats was to Nebraska’s gigantic second-place club at Norman February 22. Coach Drake’s Sooners attacked superbly in this game to build a lead of 28 to 9 in the first half and 36 to 14 at one point in the second half. With only ten minutes left to play Oklahoma still led by 20 points, 37 to 17, only to have Nebraska suddenly start hitting running one-handers from all over the floor, the Oklahoma margin melting speedily and finally collapsing with a roar, like wet snow sliding off a sloping roof, as the determined Cornhuskers scored two goals in the final 15 seconds of play when Substitute Max Young fired a long one-hander from 30 feet away.

INDOOR TRACK—Terrifically short-handed, Coach John Jacobs took a ten-man Oklahoma track team to Lincoln, Neb. February 22 to meet Nebraska’s powerful squad. The Cornhuskers won, 73 to 31, but the Sooners put over one stunning upset when sprinter Orv Mathews, who because of his participation in spring football hadn’t laced on a track shoe for ten days, defeated Gene “Red” Littler, Nebraska’s world’s record holder for 300 yards, by two feet in the 60 yard dash.

Bill Lyda ran a great race to push Littler to a new indoor record of 49.4 seconds in the 440, Lyda losing by one yard, and then Lyda came back to win the 880 in 1:59.1. Broadjumper Tomy Harrison won that event for Oklahoma at 22 feet 8½ inches while Highjumper Ray Mullen tied for first.

WRESTLING—Also pitifully short-handed, the Sooner wrestling team absorbed two quick spankings during a northern trip, winning but one match against Iowa State and three against Kansas State. Hoy Stone, veteran Sooner 135-pounder from Tulsa, won both his matches.

At Kansas State, Oklahoma swept the first three bouts and led 11-0, Charles Frye winning at 121 pounds, Bennie Young at 129 and Stone at 135. But thereafter the Wildcats had their way and another defeat was chalked up against Oklahoma.

SWIMMING—The Sooner swimmers, like the Oklahoma track and wrestling teams, have only two or three men of top-flight ability and while defeating Kansas in a dual meet, lost twice to Kansas State and once to Nebraska and to the Oklahoma Aggies.

Mike Travis, sophomore breast-stroker from Tulsa, appeared the most promising man on the team and hasn’t been defeated but once. Zeigler McPherson, sophomore backstroker from Oklahoma City, has swum some good races in spite of three defeats in five meets.