

The Conference Moguls Made Him—

A Young Man With a Thorn

By Jack Heaney

Sooner Special

Lindell Pearson, left halfback of Oklahoma's unbeaten 1949 squad, won't be playing any more football—at least for O.U.

He was ruled ineligible for further competition in the Big Seven at a meeting of conference faculty representatives in Kansas City March 3. The final vote was the same as that recorded at a December discussion of the motion—6-1.

Pearson, a junior majoring in business administration, has played two years of varsity football for the Sooners.

The conference's action touched off blast after blast from sports writers, fans and faculty members, each separate explosion a variation on the theme "unfair." President Cross led the faculty forces with a biting comment, saying in part:

"Possibly never in the history of college sports has a greater injustice been done a young man by a group supposedly interested in the welfare of youth."

The president also pointed out that while the Big Seven was stopping the athletic activities of a high school graduate, they have in the recent past allowed as much as four or five years to older athletes in the conference.

Pearson's troubles have their source in a change-of-mind he made in the fall of 1947 when, as the outstanding highschool halfback in the state, he left Oklahoma City's Capitol Hill and entered the University of Arkansas. He immediately started playing on the Razorback freshman squad. The Southwest conference, of which Arkansas is a member, permitted its members to combine their varsity "B" teams with the freshmen in their games against other schools.

So, under those rules, Pearson played in three games with the Arkansas freshman team. Two were against Northeastern State at Tahlequah and Little Rock Junior College at Little Rock. The other was against the University of Missouri "B" team, a further complicating factor, as all the players on a "B" team are upperclassmen who aren't quite good enough to make the grade with the varsity, but are good enough to stay around for some more experience.

But the 190-pound flash was unhappy at Fayetteville, and after almost four weeks there he enrolled in O.U. on the Saturday the Sooners played Texas A.&M.

"Coach Wilkinson told me that if I got in school inside the first 4-week period, I would have three years on the varsity," Pearson said. "After my sophomore year, he told me a question had been raised about my eligibility and I gave him all the dates and facts. He said he was sure it would be worked out and I could finish my three seasons."

Pearson's mind wasn't completely eased by Wilkinson's statement, however, and he was worried about the situation again last summer. Again, Wilkinson told him everything would work out all right.

That the danger of the case was not unknown early last fall was shown by President Cross' comment at a press conference early in October, when he remarked that there was a possibility that Pearson would be declared ineligible, but that he

personally felt the matter could be straightened out.

But a leak from the December meeting of the conference representatives proved Dr. Cross to be too optimistic. First picked up by a Kansas City paper and later exploded by the *Daily Oklahoman*, the story revealed that Pearson was out of action for good. The first vote was the same as that of the March meeting—6-1.

(Although the meeting involved the faculty representatives of the conference schools, it is acknowledged that each faculty representative confers with the athletic director of his university before he leaves to cast his ballot on any issue.)

Pearson, just turned 21, is still undecided as to what to do. It is possible for him to wait a year, then go to any Southwestern conference university and play one more year of football with them. Thus, theoretically he could play against O.U. in 1951.

However, he could also join the professional football ranks if he chooses for next season, as the conference ruling making him ineligible does away with the necessity for his having to wait until his class graduates to play with the pros.

"As for pro ball," he said, "I may play some time but I'm not so enthusiastic about it that I'm going to forget my other goals—an education comes first, and I'm not sorry I came to O.U. at all. It's been an honor and a privilege to play at Oklahoma."

His plans are also vague on anything he may do after the end of the current semester.

"I'll stay in school until this semester is over," he says, "I'm going to get a college degree and I hope to go into business in Oklahoma City."

But as to whether he'll get his degree at O.U. or at some Southwestern conference school, he's still undecided.

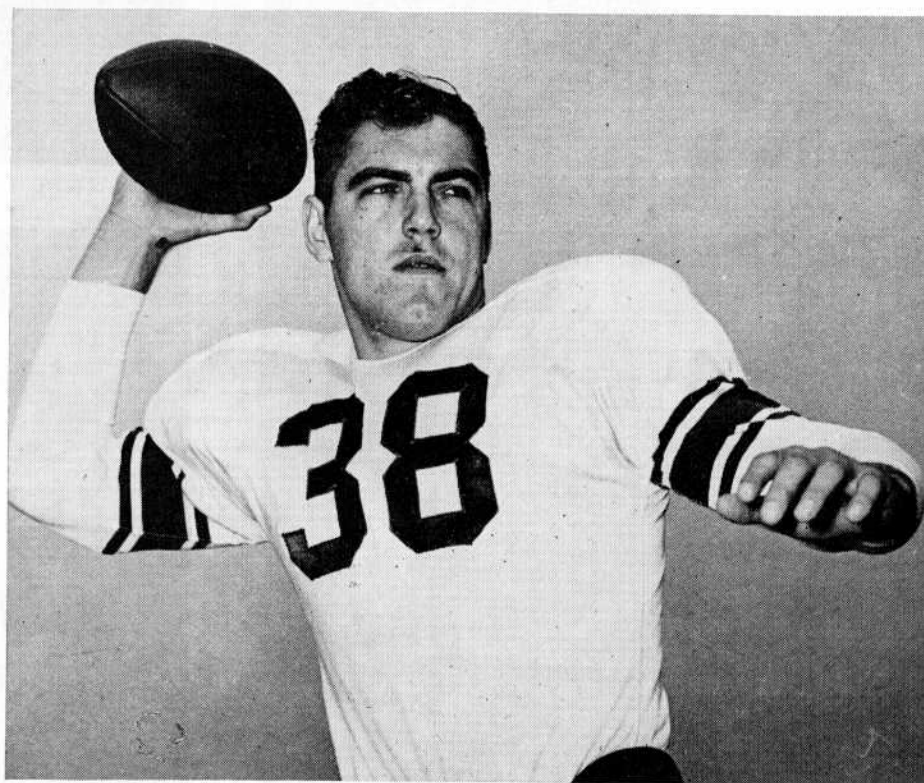
As might be expected, the loss of the big halfback has the Sooner coaching staff wearing worried looks these days. They claim they don't see any sure replacement for him yet.

"The left halfback slot is wide open," Coach Frank "Pop" Ivy said. "We haven't anybody with Lindell's experience and talent. I guess that gives Dick Heatty the inside track on the job, but we'll have to watch Billy Vessels, Gene Cook and Tom Carroll, all freshmen."

Heatty as a sophomore saw quite a bit of action last season in the role of Pearson's understudy. A fast, shifty runner, he also did most of the team's punting, averaging more than 40 yards per boot.

Another prospect for the post is Frank Silva, sophomore quarterback last season. Coach Ivy said his position depends on how the quarterback situation develops, but Silva has been running very well in the current spring practice sessions.

But who ever gets the coaches' nod will have quite a gap to fill, for Pearson was quite a ball player. He played in two Sugar Bowl games and figured in scoring plays in both. He averaged better than 7 yards per carry last season, and notched a 6.7 yard per try average in his first varsity season while scoring 48 points. His passing ability made him doubly dangerous on the wide pitch-out plays, for he had the option of either running or throwing. He was good enough at both to earn a permanent place among the all-around fine halfbacks to come out of O.U.



Lindell Pearson during the past season was a much more feared footballer than he will be next campaign. He'll have to sit it out because of a conference ruling.