

With the Season half over
and two tough Texas teams behind them, the Sooners are
proving themselves

The Champs

By David Burr, '50

Does the University of Oklahoma have the nation's No. 1 football team?

That question will be haunting coaches and football writers until the season ends, but for Oklahomans it was decided beyond question October 7 and 14. On those weekends, O.U. defeated Texas A.&M. 34-28 and Texas U. 14-13.

Behind, and seemingly on the thoroughfare to destruction, the Sooners fought both Texas teams to a standstill and then managed to come up with an uppercut that floored the south of the border opponents. In both instances they did it the hard way

with only seconds standing between national prominence and Landonism.

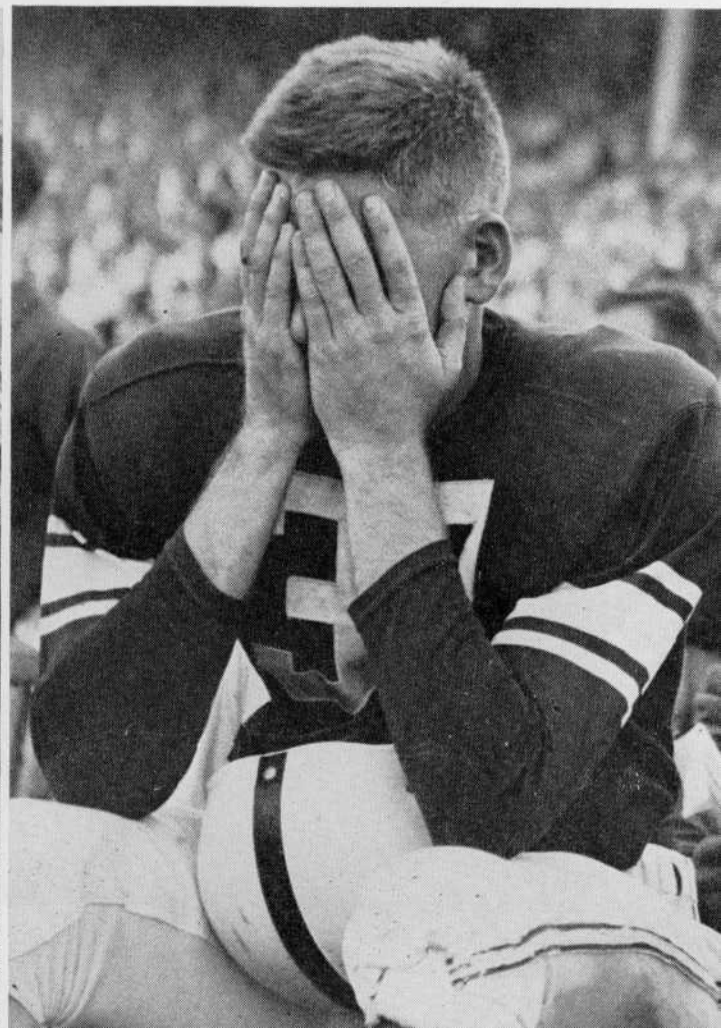
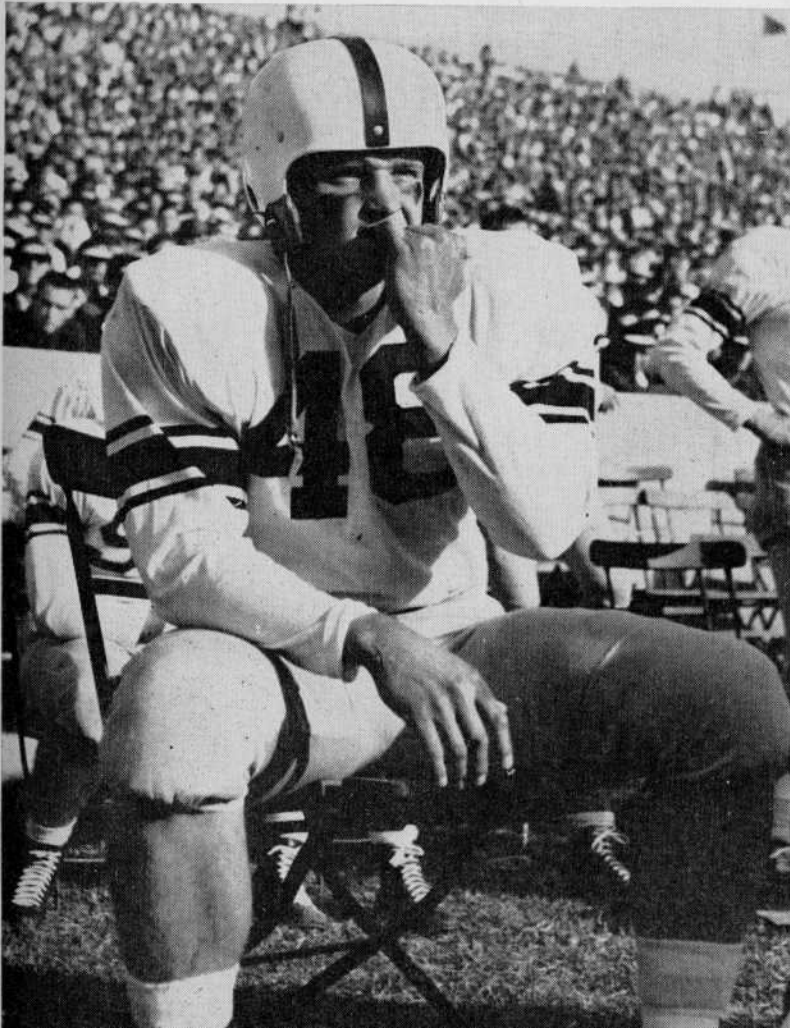
John Cronley, *Daily Oklahoman* sports editor, accredited the wins over the two tremendous teams to poise. Whitney Martin, Associated Press sports writer, mentioned heart. Heart or poise or both . . . that's what champions are made of.

A few plays in the two games will be remembered again and again when Sooner alumni gather. One of these was a conversion attempt by All-American tackle Jim Weatherall in the Texas A.&M. game that would have tied the score 28-28. He

missed, and Big Red came charging down the field with less than two minutes remaining in the game to clip the Aggies. Most observers agree that the missed point was the fuel that fired the team to the king-sized effort.

At the Texas gab-fest, the goal line stand of the Sooners near the end of the first half proved the local lads' class. Again the clock was running out—this time on the Texans. When the last series of plays began, Texas was on the 1-yard line. The Sooners were penalized for being offside halfway to the goal line. For three consecutive

Nail-biting Texas Aggie Jim Dobbyn (left) and "see no evil" Al Needs, Big Red back, strike uninhibited poses that reflect the gloom which hovers over the bench-warming area when the scoreboard lights up on the wrong side. Dobbyn's worry didn't help.





Leon Heath charges through the Texas line on the Cotton Bowl field, graphically illustrating his nickname, Mule Train. His razzle dazzle play led the nation's backs in 1949 averaging 9.12 net yards per carry, won him title of outstanding 1950 Sugar Bowl Player.

plays the Texans tried to move the ball 18 inches but failed. Not bad work for a line that was playing without benefit of even one first stringer from last year's team.

If the two Texas encounters were hard on the nerves of the fans, they were most assuredly chillers for Bud Wilkinson. In his first football letter appraising the 1950 chance for survival of the Sooners, he said, "I think we will have a hustling, interesting aggregation that should get better as we go along. We could lose all of our early games—one or two of them by big scores—but we are hoping that our improvement each week will enable us to play a close game with all our late season opponents."

Bud has been chastised in print as a poor prophet for those remarks, but a diagnosis of the statement would seem to indicate that King Charles knew what he was talking about. True, Boston College didn't measure up in a 28-0 rout, but both Texas A.&M. and Texas should run many a team off the field before the season ends. That O.U. didn't get such a treatment can be attributed to the aforementioned hustle, poise and heart, with a good deal of coaching generously sprinkled in.

The classic portion of the quote would seem to be "a hustling, interesting aggregation." You can't get much more interesting and survive in the gridiron wars.

As to the "close game with all our late

Billy Vessels, Big Red left halfback, struggles against a two-front attack by Texas Aggies before being brought to the ground. With both feet in the air Aggie Jack Little cuts in on what appears to be a rug-cutting session with another Texas Cadet.



season opponents" Wilkinson had his work cut out for him to provide an explanation that would not be chucklesome. He also had words that should strike a certain amount of fear into Big Seven opponents.

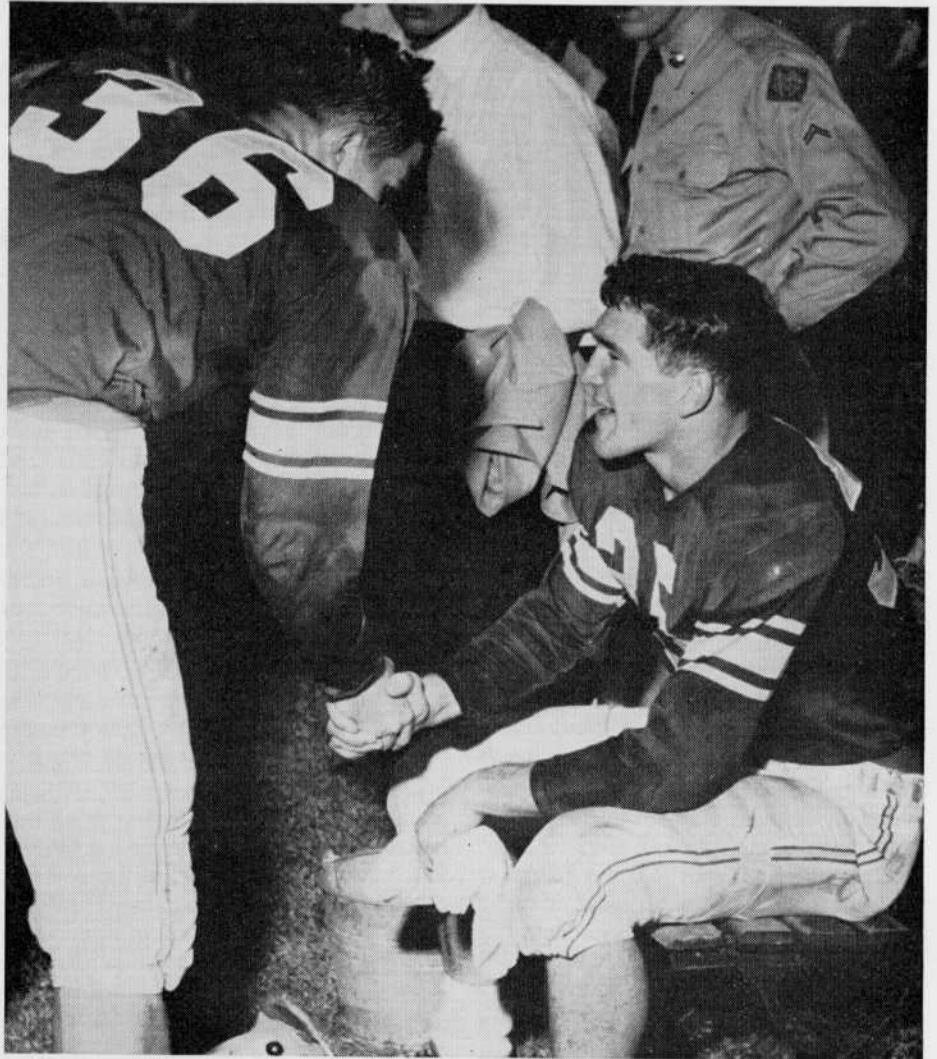
"We are improving each week," he told 400 guests at the Oklahoma City Sportswriters and Sportscasters weekly luncheon in Oklahoma City. (The 400 are not to be confused with THE 700 mentioned by a national magazine in a tongue-in-check story.) "We will be all right if we continue to show improvement as we go along," Bud continued. Referring to the Kansas State Homecoming game, he said, "We can't afford a letdown this week; the morale factor in football can't be underestimated—I wish the season were over, right now."

Nobody was much worried by the word of warning. For most fans the season was over the rough spots. Of course, it was exactly this attitude that Wilkinson was warning against. And there are definitely several threats remaining from in-conference foes. By the time this magazine is off the press, the Colorado Buffs, playing their first full conference slate, will have tried to make their season complete by kicking the Sooners out of the throne room.

The conditions for an upset will be pregnant with possibilities as O.U. goes to Boulder to play. The game is November 4. On the following Saturday dangerous Kansas will tackle the Oklahomans at Lawrence (November 11). Then comes Missouri, November 18 at Norman, followed by a rebuilt Nebraska team November 25 at Owen Field. The season will be over officially December 2 in Stillwater with the traditional Aggie-O.U. game.

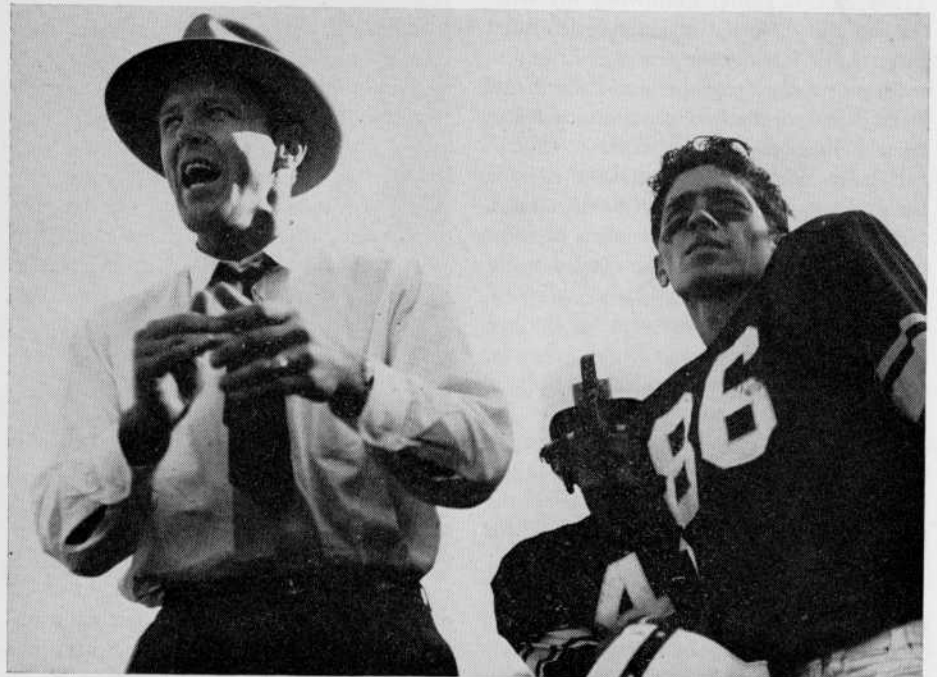
Some achievements in addition to the Texas and Texas A.&M. victories have been made. With the Texas win the Sooners stretched their win streak to 24 (count 'em) games—the highest such victory skein going in the nation. It is also the longest ever built up at O.U. The Sooner victories over Texas the past three years tied another O.U. record. Only once before in 1910-11-12 were the Sooners able to beat Texas three consecutive tries. And that's not all. There's a new record in the making. It should be written into the books when and if Colorado is defeated. With that game the Sooners should own a 27-game consecutive win record. If they do they will have beaten the record set by Cornell in the '20s of 26 consecutive wins without ties. (Notre Dame's recently snapped winning streak was longer than the Sooners but contained two ties. The present Army team is working on a streak that is one short of Oklahoma but that also includes ties.)

In all of the pre-season guessing, only one Oklahoman was seriously mentioned for



Dick Heatly No. 36 congratulates Billy Vessels after Vessels carried the ball over the goal line for the second Big Red touchdown in the O.U.-Texas Cotton Bowl game.

Bud Wilkinson, wearing the same tie he has worn since the Sooner winning streak began, cuts loose with a whoop on the Cotton Bowl sideline. Reddell, 86, was calm.



All-American honors—Leon Heath. There was much lamenting concerning the loss of backfield stars George Thomas, Darrell Royal and Lindell Pearson. Graduation managed to make a shambles of the 1949 line—something no opponent was able to do. So what happens. A new group of pig-skin personalities make their pitch. And what a pitch it is. Names on the tongue of fans after three games would probably read something like this: Heath, Weatherall, Vessels, Arnold, Jones and Anderson. If the fans can handle tongue-twisters, other names like Clark, Catlin, Keller, Mayes, Janes, et al., would be bandied about.

The first two names on the list will undoubtedly be on one or more All-American rosters. Leon Heath, the mule train from Hollis, is proving himself every bit as good as the dopesters figured. His running game has been nothing short of spectacular and his precision blocking is a marvel to behold as well. He catches passes like an end. In short, in a season where good fullbacks are throwing their weight around—two of the best seen hereabouts in a long time were Smith of Texas A.&M. and Townsend of Texas—Heath will do to take along.

Then there's a boy by the name of Weatherall. He's played as many dramatic roles as John Barrymore. To begin with Jim boots the conversions. And he's been right successful in his first three encounters. He's kicked 10 extra points and missed one. But the one he missed was a lulu as mentioned earlier in the story. Again in the Texas game a win depended upon his toe in circumstances quite like the A.&M. brush. This time he didn't miss. He was named lineman-of-the-week by the Associated Press following his brutal line play in the Texas A.&M. game. Following his selection he said, "Gosh, am I surprised. But I don't think I really deserve it." The Texans have reason to rue the loss of the White Deer, Texas, highschool graduate. (See October 1950, *Sooner*).

If Billy Vessels doesn't make the grade from an unknown freshman to All-American sophomore halfback this year, he must certainly be considered a top candidate for Sophomore-of-the-Year. "Curly" is from Cleveland, Oklahoma. He came of age as a member of the Big Red in Dallas when he scored two touchdowns and ripped off 76 yards rushing against a fine Texas line. He caught two passes for 22 additional yards. He looked good against Texas A.&M. and Boston College and must be one of the players Bud meant when he spoke of his team improving each week.

The hero of the Texas A.&M. get-together may have been Weatherall but he certainly shared honors with Claude Arnold, senior quarterback from Okmulgee.

Arnold appeared as fit a replacement as anyone could hope for to fill the Mitchell and Royal title roles. With less than two minutes to go and trailing 27-28, Arnold moved his team down the field with as pretty a flurry of passing as you would care to see. With the clock running out he took his time and generated the team to a spot four yards away from a touchdown. That was all Heath needed.

The line offers more greats in the image of Burris, Walker, West, Dowell, etc. Dean Smith, senior tackle from Tulsa, was a standout defensive performer against Texas. Clair Mayes, senior guard from Muskogee; Frankie Anderson, senior end from Oklahoma City, and Bert Clark, junior guard from Wichita Falls, Texas, add something extra to their work. Yes, the Wilkinsons sport many individual standouts but it is the team play that has played such large and beautiful dividends.

As this is being written, the Sooners are riding in the exact spot in national rankings as they completed the 1949 season—No. 2. Whether they can bypass Army or Southern Methodist for the top rung remains to be seen. This reporter has already had ample demonstration of what the Big Red can do. In the September issue of *Sooner Magazine* he wrote that if O.U. defeated Texas he would believe in miracles. Well he does. And just to show that one error in guessing has not dimmed the editor's ardor for sooth saying, check the following:

1. Leon Heath and Jim Weatherall will make more than one All-American selections. Heath should be on the AP first string and Weatherall on the second.

2. Heath, Weatherall, Vessels, Anderson and Mayes will make All-Big Seven. Bert Clark is a good candidate also. Arnold will probably miss because of a quarterback at Iowa State named Bill Weeks.

3. Wilkinson will not be coach-of-the-year. He'll be at the top of the balloting and might repeat except for the notable reluctance of the experts to let a coach keep the honor two years hand running. For the *Sooner's* money, Bud deserves the title even more this year than last.

4. A bowl game is certainly in the offing if the team wants it. What bowl they'll play in probably depends on who the opposition will be. If SMU should make it to the Cotton Bowl, sentiment would undoubtedly favor a match to see which is the best in the Southwest.

But enough speculation. In a sports season already spiced by the Whiz Kids of Philadelphia, the Sooners are writing their own ticket. And they're doing it in much the same way as the youthful baseball team. With poise and heart—the stuff that champs are made of.

Dallas . . .

forty-five resulted in the only casualty of the trip—the loss of Elizabeth's tartan weskit. But a kewpie doll on a stick made a good substitute and after twenty minutes or so we made it inside.

Jack Nossaman, another lawyer of the class of 1930 from Sherman, Texas, hailed Paul. Ned Hockman, '49ed, University motion picture producer, and Mrs. Hockman were eating lunch and Mrs. J. J. Truscott, Shawnee, O.U. booster and garden club enthusiast was entering the gate. Reuel Little, '27Law, Oklahoma City, was also there.

Charles Young, '40Law, Oklahoma City, supreme court marshal, expressed surprise at seeing Paul. He thought the University would cut off his ticket supply because of the suits Paul had been involved in.

In my opinion, someone had done pretty well by us. We caught a breath of air on the way up to section 102, row 32, one row removed from the top of the double-decker, and most of the spectators were former Oklahomans. At least you don't have to apologize when your team makes a good play.

Seated nearby were the Belknaps—Harold, '25ba, Lucille, '43ba, '50ms, Hal and Kay—of Norman. Lawrence Wilson, '34, Tulsa, and Max Cook, '39ba, '41Law, Clinton, were within shouting distance. Crystal Risinger, '27ba, and sister Golda Risinger Unkerfer, '30ed, from Muskogee were down the row. Lloyd Swearingen, '20bs, '21ms, and wife and Ansel Challenner, '25eng, '33m.eng, and wife were over to the right. Joe Fred Gibson, '34ba, '36Law, Oklahoma City and Mrs. Gibson, (Marion Hauck, '35ba) were seated near the Joe McBrides who, like the Oklahoma Aggies and the law class of 1930, seemed to be everywhere.

Working my way through the crowd at the half to the student side, I found out how the five million dollars was being spent. Ice at twenty-five cents a cup available only through a retail dealer amounts up.

The closing whistle of the game, fans milling, bands marching, gave me a chance to catch my breath and realize that Bud Wilkinson's Big Red had done it again. I would not have to use my philosophy developed through twenty years of seeing the Sooners win six and tie one. I could let go and enjoy the game, the ride back home, and finally home which looked better than anything I had ever seen—dirt and carpenter's shavings notwithstanding.