

Catlin, Vessels, McPhail and Crowder are all in the running for football's highest award. They have qualified for selection as

## O.U.'s All-Americans

By DAVID BURR, '52ba

In South Bend, the day was brisk. Notre Dame's stadium was filled to capacity. To the southwest, Norman was enjoying fall's early blessings.

All over this university town an air of expectancy hovered, breaking forth occasionally when groups met for coffee with the flat statement of facts, "O.U. will slaughter them."

By 1 p.m., November 8, the streets were unusually deserted and by 1:15, a parade could have been held down Asp Avenue without disturbing the normal flow of traffic. In hundreds of houses, wherever wires atop a chimney or gable identified essential furnishings, small groups gathered to witness the football thrill of a lifetime. O.U. had finally matched its dream game. On this day, Notre Dame was the opponent.

TV viewers watched the first half of play follow what most fans thought was the usual Oklahoma formula. The Sooners made a few fumbles, yes, but managed to keep the pressure on the opposition and to test the enemy's defenses point by point. And the score was a good omen. At the half, O.U. lead, 14-7.

As the two teams trotted onto the field to open the second half, Big Red partisans were a little worried but mainly confident. No one guessed the peak the Irish were about to reach . . . and then they reached it and went out in front 27 to 21. Still a chance for the Sooners to eke out a 28-27 win. Down the field they came. Storming along with their running game at full throttle. And then came the fumble that was to cost them their chance. Billy Vessels fumbled on the 20-yard line of Notre Dame and for all practical purposes the game was over, although the ball changed hands once again.

The realization that Notre Dame had

downed one of O.U.'s finest offensive elevens, and one that was in contention for the national title, was slow in making its way through many numb Oklahoma minds. The specter of Army's win in 1946 was supposed to be forever laid to rest with a victory over the Irish.

This was not the day. It took a little while for O.U. fans to look at the game with any degree of objectivity. The sportscasters and writers were quicker on the trigger. This was one of the finest games ever played, they chorused. Two titans of the gridiron collided and the Notre Dame spirit prevailed, said some. That Oklahoma's luster had lost little of its sheen was indicated by the football pollsters' opinion on the following Tuesday. Oklahoma had fallen from 4th to 8th in the AP poll and from 5th to 7th in the UP poll.

And for some members of the Oklahoma team, new appreciation of their talents was voiced from every quarter. Senior Halfback Billy Vessels had the greatest day of his career. (It's true he gained more ground in other games, but never against the quality of opposition.) He gained 195 yards on 17 carries (11.4 yards per carry), received one pass good for 28 yards and scored all three O.U. touchdowns.

Eddie Crowder, the gifted quarterback, set TV cameras careening with his fakery. And the great fullback, Buck McPhail, blocked, faked and ran for 81 yards on 13 carries.

Tom Catlin, All-American center, was a standout performer on defense and Doc Hearon, guard, seemed to be in on every defensive maneuver. Yet it wasn't enough and Notre Dame enjoyed one of its sweetest plums from a tree that seems to be of the everbearing variety.

Injuries and infractions cost Oklahoma



BILLY "The Kid" Vessels, halfback, looks like a cinch for All-America honors.

part of its effectiveness. J. D. Roberts was thumbed from the game just before the end of the first half, and Ed Rowland suffered a leg injury early in the second half. Buddy Leake, the fourth regular member of backfield, making his first start since being injured in the Kansas game, found his ankle unable to operate at full speed and played only a short while.

Yet there were few who tried to alibi the loss. Notre Dame won the game with as hard-hitting a performance as many football fans had ever seen.

The season is at hand to publish the various lists of All-Americans. Most publications make their selections known immediately after the season closes. By the time this magazine appears, many national periodicals will have announced their choices.

The *Sooner* features in pictures on these pages the two Sooner football players con-

sidered most likely, by the editor, to make the major All-American lists.

Tom Catlin will likely head any Oklahoma delegation to the All-American convention. Co-captain of the team and senior center from Ponca City, Catlin was named to some All-American lists as a junior. This year he appeared in many of the pre-season All-American lists. He is an All-Big Seven performer, as selected last year, and is a cinch to repeat. Catlin is a strong candidate for lineman-of-the-year-honors. He's a fine offensive center but has made his greatest reputation as a linebacker. His play in the Kansas game won him lineman-of-the-week honors. It wasn't a bit better than his Texas effort. He's a modest, football perfectionist.

Billy Vessels will be hard to keep off the "All" lists. His great performance against Notre Dame brought him to the attention of every member of the sports writing fraternity. Through Oklahoma's first seven games he had gained 812 yards rushing on 113 carries for an average of 7.2 yards per carry. He proved his versatility by playing a great deal of defense during the Irish struggle. He has scored 13 touchdowns for 78 points and leads the midlands in that category. He has passed for 192 yards and 1 touchdown on 6 completions in 16 attempts. He has received 3 passes for 92 yards and a touchdown. Figures released following the Notre Dame game showed he was second in the nation in rushing. (All statistics appearing in this feature are for the first 7 games of the season.)

For Billy the season must be considered an overwhelming success. For three years the writers have been trying to make up their minds which Big Seven halfback is the greatest—Hoag of Kansas, Reynolds of Nebraska or Vessels of Oklahoma. All three



LESTER LANE

... Two Letters and a Vault

backs have had their ups and downs physically. As a result of this year's play, the experts are in agreement: Vessels tops them both.

Eddie Crowder and Buck McPhail are placed together here because their individual success has depended in such large measure on their exceptional work together. Crowder's wizardry with the ball depends on McPhail's masterful faking. In turn, Crowder's aerial threat that has accounted for 5 touchdowns and 425 yards on 19 completions from 31 attempts provides the double bit ax that opens the middle for McPhail's plunges. McPhail's blocking has been deadly all season and his rushing record of 696 yards on 102 carries is high up in the national rushing lists.

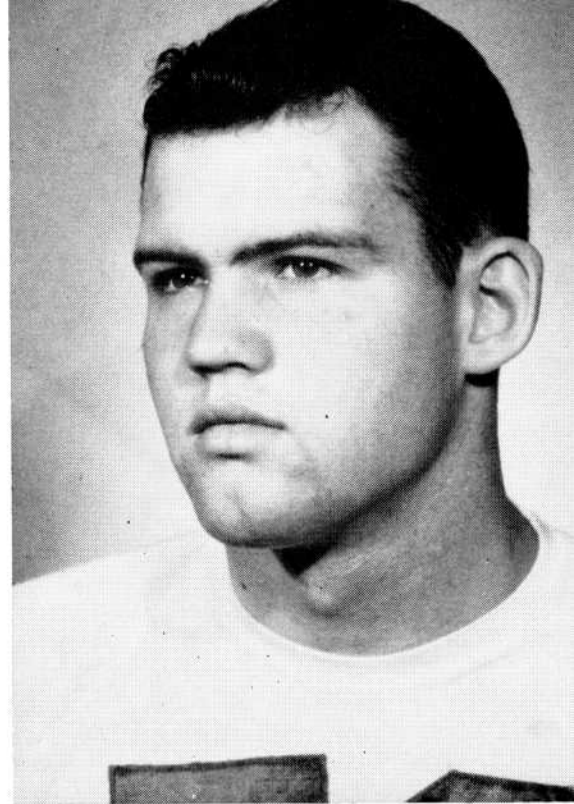
Crowder and McPhail are listed together for another reason besides their acting. Both will make a few first team All-American selections but both will come in mainly for second string selections. This is not because they do not deserve greater attention. The practical view is that both are competing for honors against better publicized performers in other areas of the nation and, in a sense, are competing against Catlin and Vessels, since it would be unheard of to get four nominations on one All-American team for a squad that has been beaten once and tied once. Both will make All-Big Seven as will most of the following; Rowland, Max Boydston, end, Jim Davis, tackle, J. D. Roberts, guard, and Larry Grigg, great defensive safety.

Not considered for any "All" honors this year, but a young man whose stock is beginning to soar is a Purcell sophomore, Lester Lane. Lane has performed well at defensive halfback this year. But the most remarkable thing about this young man is that he seems certain to be the first Sooner since Tom Rousey to letter in both basketball and football, and Rousey did it in 1940.

Lane's freshman performance in basketball was so outstanding that he started several games and played in most of the others. He did not go out for football as a freshman due to an operation to correct a knee injury picked up in highschool. This year he showed defensive skill against all of O.U.'s opponents, including Notre Dame.

In street clothes, Lane's looks do not set him apart as a fine, natural athlete. He's only 5'11" and weighs in at about 165. When I talked with him following the Notre Dame game his forehead and cheekbones showed some of the skinning he took at South Bend.

An intelligent young man, the type which makes a good ambassador for sports, Lane's athletic abilities may get another testing



TOM CATLIN

... A Sure All-America Choice

this spring. If it can be arranged between spring football and class work, Lane has ideas about trying his mettle as a pole vaulter. And it seems a cinch that he could make the track team.

Last spring at the state AAU track meet in Norman, Lane was sitting in the stands with Jack Angel, a basketball colleague. Angel suggested that perhaps Lane was not quite up to snuff as a pole vaulter. Lane, who was a triple threat star in highschool at Purcell (he was All-State in basketball and football), took him up on the suggestion and cleared 11 feet 6 inches for second place in the meet.

So there is a possibility that he might earn three letters in one year—a good trick for anyone and especially noteworthy at O.U. Lane may have to have a little time to get into full basketball shape. The last football game is November 29 at Oklahoma A&M and the basketball season opens December 6 with Iowa at Norman. The remainder of the schedule—December: (10) Texas at Austin, (13) Southern Methodist at Norman, (22) Texas at Norman, (26-30) Big Seven tournament at Kansas City. January: (5) Kansas at Norman, (10) Missouri at Norman, (12) Colorado at Norman, (17) Oklahoma A&M at Norman. February: (2) Iowa State at Norman, (10) Kansas at Lawrence, (14) Kansas State at Manhattan, (16) Nebraska at Norman, (21) Iowa State at Ames, (23) Colorado at Boulder, (28) Nebraska at Lincoln. March: (2) Missouri at Columbia, (7) Kansas State at Norman, (10) Oklahoma A&M at Stillwater.