



Bob Seymour relaxes in his comfortable suburban Denver home. Between dog races and a successful insurance business, Bob's life is a busy one.

Here Is a Lucky Guy

One of O. U.'s greatest football stars is fashioning a fine life for himself in Colorado's Mile High City. The author visited him this summer and . . .

By ROBERT TALLEY, '55

THERE are, apparently, some people in this world who have it, as surely as star attracts star, that nebulous quality that draws to them fame and fortune and even harder to get—happiness.

Bob Seymour, '36-'41, seems to have it in good measure. Some might question this, pointing out that during his 38 years he has had three concussions, a mangled knee, three cracked ribs, a separated breastbone, all the muscles pulled loose at the base of his neck—so badly that he couldn't use a pillow for two years, and his nose broken six times. Chalk those up alongside the usual pains and aches and they are impressive.

But watch the big man come toward you in his firm yet pleasant athletic amble, and you know, here is a lucky guy. Bob Seymour lives in Denver with a grand wife,

the former Melba Villines, and four equally grand children. Bob Seymour has two jobs, both interesting and both profitable. He and his family have a nice home, a good car and a house-filling number of friends—friends of his football past, friends of his dog racing and insurance present and friends who are friends for no more reason than they like the Seymours and the Seymours like them.

If a weekend should go by without at least one houseguest, or seven days pass without someone dropping in from out of town, that week goes down on the calendar in red letters to be remembered as the Week Nobody Came to Visit, much as old timers calculated from the Year of the Great Snow. An exaggeration perhaps. But not by much.

What is this quality that some possess

that makes their hard work pay off, while some plug and plug and find fame only in their fancies? Perhaps a look at Seymour can give an answer.

Bob was born in 1916, the son of a pharmacist, Ramsey Allen Seymour, and a Wyandotte Indian princess, Mary Elizabeth Brown, whose father, Eldridge Brown, was then chief. They moved to Commerce, in the heart of the lead and zinc fields, and in time presented the town with 10 sons, enough that the high school there had one to three Seymours on its football team every season for eighteen years. Citizens even named the new bleachers at Commerce High School, Seymour Stadium.

Teams there were handicapped but excellent. In basketball one year Commerce fell out of the state semi-finals by a push from bigger Tulsa when the hometown

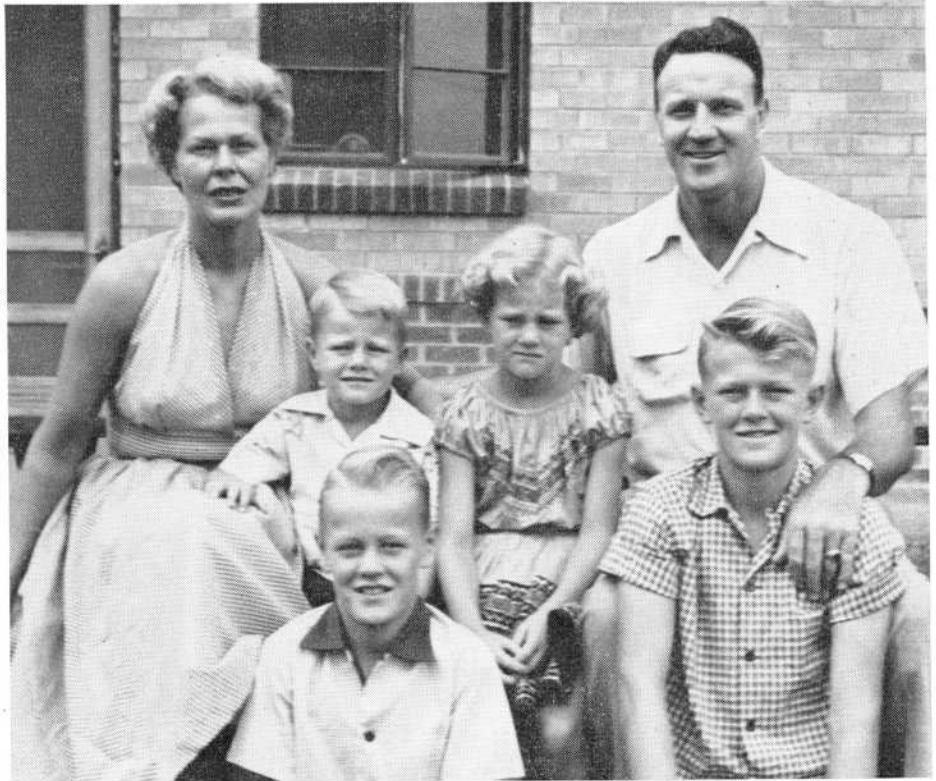
boys didn't even have a gym to practice in. And in football, from 1932 to 1935, the school, with Seymours Bob, Barney and Jim playing, romped away with 37 straight victories.

Bob lived the life of the boy in the small town. He hunted occasionally and fished sometimes and summers he worked in the lead and zinc mines that pitted the countryside. Mainly he "bumped," was the boy who pushed the ore on carts, upwards of about 1,600 pounds at a trip, from where the miners cracked it loose from the walls to the elevator at the bottom of the shaft. "It was," Bob says now, slapping his knees, "good for the old legs."

After eight or more hours of work, Seymour would wipe some of the grime off and play baseball on a mine team. (Incidentally, while playing with the mine nine he met and played with Mut Mantle, father of baseball's great Mickey Mantle. The two men remained friends over the years and Bob sat beside his hospital bed the night before he died recently in Denver.)

This was life in Commerce High School. Afterwards, coaches of both football and baseball at O.U., who had been watching Commerce in general and Seymour in particular, aimed scholarships his way. And it was at Oklahoma that he was first to gain national fame as an athlete, and, in sort of a mutually agreed chase, won his attractive blonde wife.

Seymour proved an all-around athlete, able to handle almost any sport. He played football as a driving, pounding fullback; made a fine attempt at basketball until he forgot and threw a block on an opposing player and knocked him off the court; he lettered in track for two years and won fourth place in the decathlon nationals,



The Seymour family poses for the camera on the back lawn of their home. With Bob and Mrs. Seymour, the former Melba Villines, are their children: Mark, 4, Lonnie, 9, Sandy, 6, and Bob Jr., 13. Little Bob, following in his father's path, has had his nose broken twice playing football.

and played baseball at short stop and in the outfield well enough that Coach Jap Haskell, who is to enter the Seymour story again, wanted him to consider turning pro. Football however was to win out.

With the crowds roaring, Seymour was a powerhouse. Freed of the physical shackles that had held him back in basketball, he plunged and drove and bulled his way through the opposition. He took a beating, but the men who had to line up against him reaped their knots as well. Despite all his injuries, Seymour missed no games, but it was the result of one of his several brain concussions, or so his wife Melba claims, that "I got him, when he didn't know what he was doing."

Let's go back a little more than a year and watch this.

Seymour, according to his wife, who then was a freshman, "was the best looking guy on campus that was tall enough for me." (She's conservatively five-eight.) "So I got my cap set for that big old boy named Seymour."

As Bob picks up the story, he was walking to a one o'clock class, when he noticed a tall gal walking down the street with what turned out to be her roommate. "I followed her," Bob says, "and she went into a shop. I waited but I didn't see her come out. I had missed a class and didn't see her for six or seven weeks."

Melba had told girls in her dormitory that she was out shooting for Seymour.

Being a freshman and a small town kid from Seminole, her friends guffawed and promptly threw her into a swimming pool.

Her big chance came, however, when she asked a mutual friend to fix up a date for her with Bob. This, he says, surprised him, because "I wasn't a campus hero, just a muscle-headed football player."

The date was arranged, and Seymour showed up promptly three hours late. He had been asked to attend a banquet and found he couldn't get away until 11. "I was mad," Melba said, "but not so mad he couldn't come again." On the third date, Bob asked the young blonde to marry him. The wedding took place a year later during his senior year, while he was recuperating from a concussion.

Of Bob's college days, Melba had a few choice words. "He even had to hire a tutor to keep him eligible for football—That Seymour was a great student." Nothing like wifely admiration.

With football season over and a physical education degree to be finished in June, an offer came to play for the Washington Redskins of the National Professional Football League. "Naturally we accepted," Bob said. "I wanted to play pro ball—I would have played for room and board." And from Melba, "I was just as tickled as he was. I'd never been out of Oklahoma and I wanted to see the country."

That year, Bob made first team as a full-

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This photo from Bob Seymour's file shows him as he looked to opponents in O.U. playing days.

back. This was 1940. And at the end of five years with the Redskins, the team had racked up four Eastern Division championships, in 1942 a world's championship, and Bob had been placed on all-star teams for two years. Seymour then signed with the newborn Los Angeles Dons, now defunct, and was elected captain of the team.

Inevitably, coaching was to be in the cards. Bob's offer, after seven years as a

pro, came from Denver University. They needed a backfield coach and Bob was their boy. They also need a swimming coach and Bob took that on even though the school didn't have a pool and despite the fact that he couldn't swim.

During his five years as backfield coach, his boys did well, beating such elevens as College of the Pacific, and, even more important, Oklahoma A&M. Four out of his

five coaching years in swimming, Bob's teams won the Rocky Mountain Regional championships.

Bob and Melba loved coaching, the boys, the university people, the campus life, but they had to give it up, because, as Melba put it rather succinctly, "We got hungry."

Fortunately, Bob's old baseball coach, Jap Haskell, now an insurance man, mentioned that selling might be a good field for him. Some talk went back and forth, and Seymour signed with the Aetna company as an underwriter.

About this time another interest was forming in Seymour's mind, the fabulous sport of dog racing. Bob got a job in the pari-mutual office at Denver's Mile High Kennel Club, and after a time, was appointed State Track Judge, a job about half the men in Denver would have given their best set of false teeth to get.

Bob got the spot over about 85 other men who applied, and is in his third summer there (the season is only two months). He makes sure everything about the races is kosher, that none of the dogs have been tampered with, or substitutions made, and so on. Every night of racing, which is nearly every season night, Bob is out at the track, supervising the weighing in and checking the dogs and watching the races.

I sat in the judge's booth at the finish line with Seymour for four races one night this past summer. The track is smaller than a horse track, but along the same lines, with covered grandstands and a band that plays between events. There is the same air of tenseness before a race that one finds

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with horse-racing or roulette, people scurrying about to place last-minute hunch bets. Others casually smoking as they make their selections. Some not betting at all, only there to watch. It's the feel of a county fair when everyone's entered the pie contest.

The pitch of sound increases when the dogs parade with their grooms up and back in front of the grandstand so the crowds can establish their favorites. The greyhounds are tall, nervous and skinny. They wear heavy muzzles and their tails look like bent fencing foils. Bob and the club's judge look them over. Grooms lead them to the starting boxes and the hush—emotional thunder, the tenseness—static electricity about to strike.

From around the far side of the track comes a low whine of metal sliding on metal. It builds up to a scream, increasing in speed, and the announcer shouts, "Heere comes Rrrrusty!" The white rabbit whistles by the starting gate, trips the doors and the dogs bolt, lean legs carrying them better than forty miles an hour.

Dogs leap around the track on to the finish line. In the stands winner and loser alike realize they have been holding their breaths.

In the judge's booth, Bob waits for the official photo to be sent down from the camera high above the track. The winners checked, the results are relayed to the pari-mutual stand. Results are flashed on the board. Winners rush to collect; losers begin figuring the next race.

As one might imagine, Bob Seymour loves racing, not as a bettor, but as an admirer of the fast dogs and the competition. "My job is easy," he says, "because everything is on the up and up." He paused for a moment and then added, "The only thing about it is that I'm never home."

After a day at his insurance office, Bob goes to the track at 5 every racing afternoon, and works until about midnight.

When Melba was asked about his long hours away from home, she answered, "It keeps us sweethearts. We're so glad to see each other that when he does get home we sit up and kill a pot of coffee and visit for a while."

Certainly this Seymour enjoys his racing, but not to the point of letting it get in the way of his insurance business. In fact, during his first year as an underwriter, he was one of the top six new men in the country with his company.

That nebulous quality is paying off. And what is the quality. A composite perhaps. One of his associates at the track may have summed it up while Bob was away for a moment.

"There," he said, "is a great guy."

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