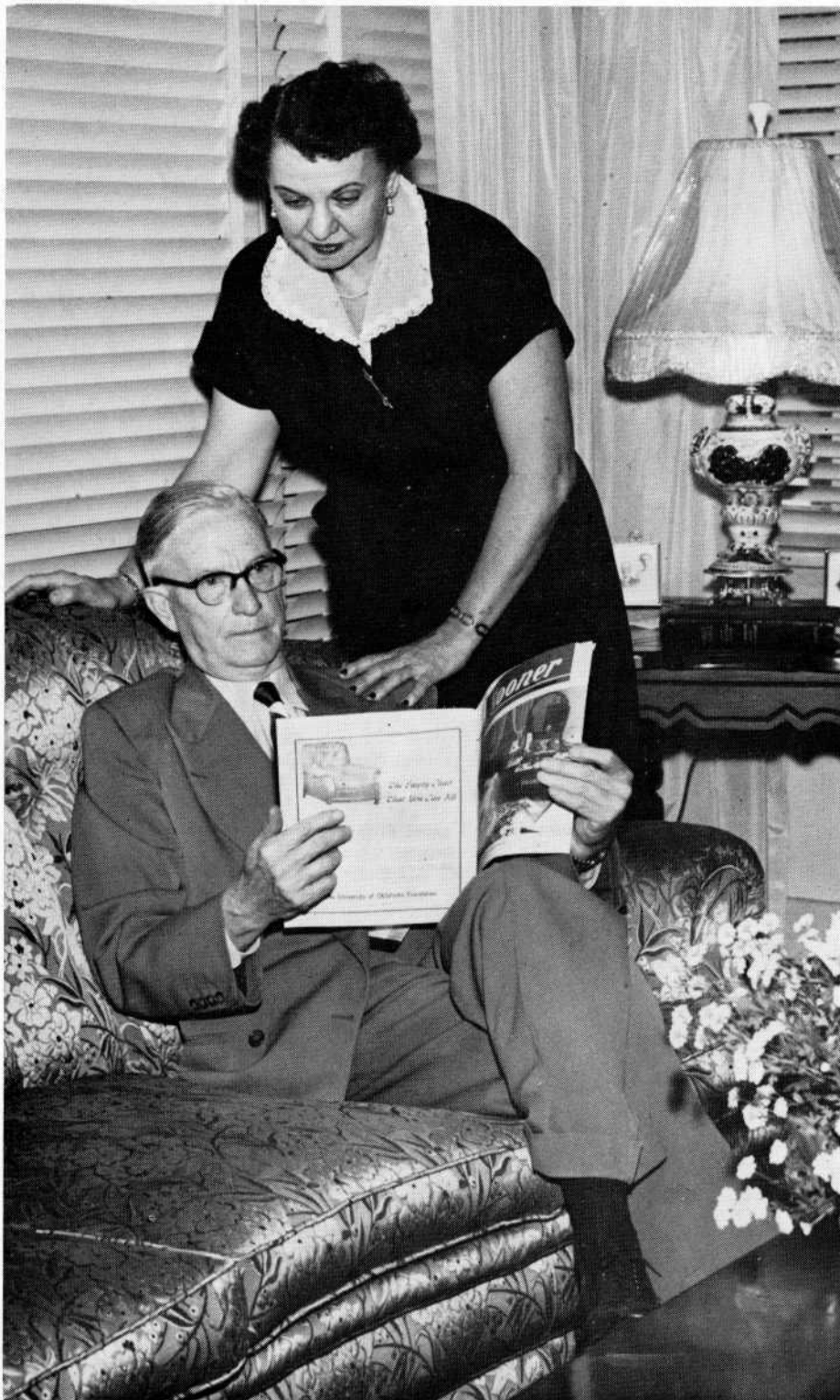


The Invincible Earle

Shortly after the turn to the century, a young man from Enid enrolled in the University and the sports history of the institution has not been the same since. The Sooner Magazine's special assignments reporter visited him in Hollywood during the summer and . . .

By ROBERT TALLEY, '55



EARLE RADCLIFFE AND MRS. RADCLIFFE
. . . The Senator Gave a Good Account of Himself

YOU MAY BE an ardent Sooner who has followed University sports with a keen evaluative eye, and yet you may have missed one of the greatest athletic stories this school has ever seen. You may not have heard . . .

In the hectic hell-for-leather days after the turn of the century a lanky undersized boy from Enid achieved a record that has no parallel. Earle Radcliffe, '09ba, '12ma, better known to sports writers of those years as the Invincible Earle, in one day competed in three different winning varsity events. He holds eleven "O" letters in five sports and may well be the only man in the annals of Oklahoma ever to play varsity football while teaching on the faculty!

When old-timers settle back to recall past days and the men who made them great they naturally talk first of Earle. In the long view of O. U.'s history when all-around prowess, determination, spirit come to mind, Radcliffe sticks out like an oak in a cotton field—a modest, unassuming, devoted wildcat.

To discuss Earle Radcliffe on paper like this seems rather strange since I have known him for some years. I was a glassy-eyed copyboy on the *Hollywood California Citizen-News* in 1947 when a gruff news editor hauled me by the shoulder over to the copy desk, a horseshoe-shaped affair where headlines of happiness and heart-break pour out for the readers six days a week.

"Want you to meet Earle Radcliffe," he grumbled.

Earle looked up, a grey-haired man, brown yet clinging to his temples, tall, slim, sixty, in good shape. He rose and smiled.

To a young copyboy shoved into a den of gnarled news hawks, Radcliffe was a friendly oasis in a desert of frenzy. What he thought of me when I rather shyly and formally said "How do you do" I don't know. But I knew there was a man I would like.

Time passed and Radcliffe in his quiet way became better known to me, a ready smile, a pleasant wit. He was helpful to a copyboy hoping for reporter and later was glad to help a sometimes fumbling cub to be recognized as a full-fledged reporter.

As one comes to notice differences in others, I began to see them in Radcliffe. I noticed in his mail there was always a *Daily Oklahoman* and that he spoke often of Oklahoma and was ribbed good-naturedly about his Okie ancestry. The Senator, as he was called (he was the paper's unofficial elder statesman), rooted quickly for the Sooners when football talk came around during less frantic hours after deadline.

I knew little more about him besides these facts and some private information one learns of co-workers. Oh, I'd heard he had played some football but he talked little of it. So when we discussed his life last summer in the paper's employee lounge, I was amazed. For you see, even though I had known him for seven years I, too, had not heard . . .

His is the success story of a boy—agile, quick—growing to become a mature athlete, cheered as a hero, but unaffected in the face of too many crowds and too much publicity; later to be an adventurous reporter and editor in a fiery era now calmed as foaming water in a rapids quiets upon offering itself to a lake.

Earle was born in December, 1888, of school-teacher parents, James Vincent and Florence Radcliffe, in the small town of Rosalie, Kansas. After a childhood spent in various little communities, where his father alternately taught and worked as a wheat buyer, Earle at nine moved with his parents to Enid, in new Oklahoma. There he spent his years before college. And there in his first year of high school he drew a deep breath, closed his eyes, and vaulted headlong into athletics. He showed promise then of skills that would red-letter the name of Earle Radcliffe into the sports history of the University.

His beginning track meet marked one of the few failures in his life. Earle was to run the 100-yard dash in his first meet. The track was smooth and the lines were well laid out. Fine for everybody but the young boy from Enid.

The starting gun boomed and the runners were off. Seeing a chance to gain position Radcliffe crossed lanes—he hadn't been told not to and he had never run with anything as fancy as lanes before. When he veered unexpectedly he ran smack into another boy and dived for the cinders, tumbling out of an almost sure win. Later in the day, however, he made up for the mistake by winning the pole vault event, a skill he'd picked up by yanking himself over a five-foot fence with an old hoe handle. By graduation time he had captained both the baseball and track teams (he later would add three other sports to his conquests) and had been THE out-

standing athlete. Even a better testimonial to the boy shows in his being elected president of both his junior and senior classes. He was ready for college now.

Upon arriving at O. U., he made up his mind there was one sport he wouldn't try—football. For an athlete who had done as well as Radcliffe had in high school to adopt



THE INVINCIBLE EARLE
... Eleven Letters in Five Sports

such an attitude toward the game was almost unheard of. Says Radcliffe today—pointing out that with a bucket of water in each hand he wouldn't have weighed much over 138 pounds—"I had always thought football too rough for me. I wasn't the slightest bit interested."

His mind was to change, however, because within three years sports writers were calling him "one of the greatest football players and the most versatile athlete who ever entered a contest under Oklahoma colors."

As Radcliffe talked over coffee I suddenly noticed him losing his easy, relaxed attitude. He pushed his cup away, pulled up closer to the table and was relating his story at an unfamiliar machine-gun clip with an intenseness I had never seen in him. I realized then that on the paper, working as he had with years and years of headlines, Earle had been only mildly interested in what went on ("News," another man had said one morning, "comes and goes . . .") but remembering the glory days with the game fast and the opponents rough, Rad-

cliffe's heart would quicken as ghosts came alive again.

Let's follow him through that startling college career.

In his freshman spring of 1906 after sitting out football as a bad bet, Radcliffe turned to his real love—baseball, winning first base immediately on the varsity team. (He had started playing the game in the second grade with a paddle and a rubber ball.) When track time came he quickly broke the southwestern pole vault record in an intercollegiate meet including Texas, Rice, Baylor, the Aggies and O. U. That semester he entered the track meet that would determine the best athlete at O. U. and he romped off with 19 points—three firsts, one second and one third—to win the coveted Winan's Medal.

At this point Radcliffe pushed back in his chair, stretched and commented on the medal in his characteristic simplicity. "I wasn't paying any attention—I didn't even know I had won it. Th next year I knew I was in the competition, so I went out for it. Then I got 25 points."

As a sophomore, Earle felt the boiling blood that runs through football players. One group called the Sooners and another naming themselves the Boomers—scrubs—decided to stage a rip-roaring football game. Radcliffe explained his participation:

"They were short-handed, needed every man they could get—and they picked me up (all 138 pounds). After the game got going I decided I liked it and surprisingly I didn't get killed."

Not only did he live through it, but when the game was over records show that one Earle Radcliffe—playing for the Boomers—had made a wild and brilliant 45-yard dash around the Sooners' end to score one of the only two touchdowns the scrubs made. That they were beaten (22-12) matters little; it is important because it was the first game ever played between Boomers and Sooners and Radcliffe was a hero of the game—the undersized skinny boy who had never cared for football.

Spring, 1907, was a big time for the young athlete. To his previous triumphs he added basketball, playing guard, and tennis, which he'd tried during the summers. (He was to go on to win the Oklahoma City Municipal Singles Championship twice in later years.) His skill at baseball brought him an offer to play professionally with an Oklahoma City team, but he turned it down for fear of losing his amateur standing.

This year also saw the unusual circumstances that found a fired-up Radcliffe compete in one day in three varsity sports. By noon he had won the singles in a tennis

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the Photo-Radar Intelligence course at Lowry A. F. B., Denver, Colorado, and has been transferred to Travis A. F. B., Fairfield, California.

HARDIN-SILBERG: Miss Beryl Hardin, Oklahoma City, and Lieut. Richard Silberg, '53pharm, Kansas City, were married May 21 in the chapel of Emanuel Synagogue, Oklahoma City. Lieutenant Silberg has been serving with the 511th Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

EASTMAN-SIMMS: Miss Elinor Eastman, '53bus, Oklahoma City, and Henry Fry Simms, '40-'42, Honolulu, were married May 22 in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Oklahoma City. Following a wedding trip, Mr. and Mrs. Simms are residing in Honolulu.

ELSEA-GREEN: Miss Yvonne Elsea, '53ed, Oklahoma City, and Phillip Edward Green, '52ba, Seminole, were married June 4 in St. Luke's Methodist church, Oklahoma City.

RANDALL-HIXON: Miss Margaret Ann Randall, '53h.ec, Oklahoma City, and Charles D. Hixon, '54eng, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, were married June 5 in the First Presbyterian church, Oklahoma City. Mr. and Mrs. Hixon have established a home in Boise, Idaho.

TRAUB-WARE: Miss Carlene Traub, Oklahoma City, and Herbert Earl Ware, Jr., '53bus, Inglewood, California, were married June 5 in the First Baptist church, Oklahoma City. Mr. and Mrs. Ware have established a home in Shreveport, Louisiana.

Cadet George E. Pratt, '51-'53, was recently graduated from the U. S. Naval Pre-Flight School, and is now assigned to the U. S. Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Whiting Field, Milton, Florida, where he is engaged in primary flight training.

Cadet William L. Wardell, Jr., '51-'53, was recently graduated from the U. S. Naval Pre-Flight School in Pensacola, Florida, and is now assigned to the U. S. Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Whiting Field, Milton, Florida, where he is engaged in primary flight training.

'54 DELANEY-SNIDER: Miss Patricia Carol Delaney, '54journ, Ada, and William Stephen Snider, '51journ, Mangum, were married May 22 in the First Methodist church, Ada. Following a wedding trip to Tanimul, Mexico, the couple has established a home in New York.

LAKE-MATHIAS: Miss Jacqueline Clyde Lake, '54bs, and Harold L. Mathias Jr., '51bus, both of Oklahoma City, were married May 22 in the home of Mr. and Mrs. L. Karlton Mosteller, Hidden Lakes Farm. Following a wedding trip to Sarasota, Florida, Mr. and Mrs. Mathias have established a home in Tulsa.

GRISSE-JEFFRIES: Miss Kelly Grisso, '54journ, Norman, and Robert Alan Jeffries, '54eng, Dallas, Texas, were married June 5 in McFarlin Memorial Methodist church, Norman. Mr. and Mrs. Jeffries have established a home in Pontiac, Michigan.

RIEGER-STAFFORD: Miss Marilyn Jean Stafford, Oklahoma City, and Henry A. Rieger, '54eng, Norman, were married May 15 in Corpus Christi Church, Oklahoma City.

The Invincible Earle . . .

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tournament. After grabbing a sandwich and changing clothes he joined the baseball team to help beat Chilocco Indian School, and when they were off the field he won first in the 220 low hurdles in a track meet, final event in the Winan's competition.

In taking his second Winan's Medal, Earle racked up the awesome record of five firsts in five events for 25 points: 100- and 200-yard dashes, 220 low hurdles, broad jump and pole vault. As versatile as a shop-lifter with a gunny sack. But every event was not to be so easy.

The Sooners had traveled to Pawhuska to play an Indian team and the Indian rooters were taking it to heart—betting everything they owned, could borrow or filch on their red brothers' ability. Concerned for their investments—to state it mildly—they paraded up and down in front of the hotel where the team was staying. They shouted threats and tried, it appeared, to put a heavy dose of evil eye on the boys.

As Radcliffe describes it now, "The next day we beat them and we hurried back to the hotel, and, boy, we stayed inside." An uneasy night passed and at four in the morning the team got out of town. Those Indians were scalping mad.

Another time after a game some kids stoned the Sooner players as they rode back from the field, but no one was hurt. "There was a lot of rivalry in those days," Radcliffe commented modestly.

At the close of that semester he had won four varsity letters, a full season for a boy who was also elected editor-in-chief of the *Mistletoe* yearbook and who was serving on the Athletic Council as well as studying rigorously for an economics-sociology degree.

The year 1907-08 stacks up well, too. Football had flooded, if not his life, at least the Fall, and he played in every game. Mainly quarterbacking. He picked up a letter in basketball, but to his disappointment baseball that spring was disallowed because several players had dropped in classwork. He recouped the lost satisfaction by breaking his own Southwestern Conference pole vault record in an intercollegiate meet in Austin, Texas: 10 feet, 10 inches, touching the clouds in those days.

The next year presented him with letters in football, baseball and track, and he captained the track team. Graduation came up with his degree completed. He stuffed the sheepskin in his pocket and accepted a year's scholarship for advanced study at the University of Chicago. When the year passed and September again carried the smell of football in the air he was ready to go back to O. U. And here begins one of the most unusual situations ever to take place in University athletics.

Since conference regulations and the men who enforced them were neither so hard-shelled or so hawkeyed as they now are, Radcliffe felt he could let the word of his yearnings get around. He had worked during the summer as editor of the *Enid*

Daily Eagle but football most of the time is more active than newspapering.

It was not long until the word passed around enough that President Grant Evans wired him a welcome-home telegram, offering Radcliffe a fellowship that would let him resume playing for the Sooners that year. He was to teach two economics classes and one sociology course—still plenty of time for the game—a faculty member on the varsity squad!

The year was 1910 and Sooners were overjoyed at the prospect of the star's return. A headline read: "The Return of the Invincible Earle Radcliffe to the State University." A later newspaper story told of the O.U.-Aggie game that Fall:

"With two minutes to play, Rad grabbed an onside kick and made the sensational run of the day, going 80 yards through the field of pursuing Aggies only to be brought back by Umpire Davis to Stillwater because of an alleged offside . . ." O. U. still won, 12-0.

The season ended Radcliffe's stay at O.U. In addition to his spectacular sporting success, Earle did nearly as well in school life off the playing fields. As a freshman he became the first pledge and first initiate to Gamma Phi, local fraternity, and was its secretary-treasurer. When the group merged with national Beta Theta Pi, he was initiated as a charter member and became its first president, serving from October 1907 to June 1908.

He sang in the University Glee Club, was a member of the YMCA and the Forum Society. He was elected editor of the *Umpire*, bi-weekly school newspaper, in 1908, in addition to his work on the *Mistletoe* and the Athletic Council.

After leaving O. U. he was to be named an honorary member of Sigma Delta Chi, journalism fraternity, and in 1912 he was elected vice-president of the Oklahoma Alumni Association. When the original lifetime "O" Cards were issued in 1917, Earle received the first one, listing football, baseball, track, tennis and basketball letters.

Earle had left O. U., said his goodbyes and had gone. But immediately in that winter of 1912, the same curtains that would mark the finale of football would at the same time throw open the stage for another exciting career.

Radcliffe returned to the *Enid Eagle*, where he stayed until 1917, leaving after five years to become news and sports editor at the *Oklahoma City Times*, and still later to become news editor of an expanding *Daily Oklahoman*. It was from 1912 on that he experienced the adventures that newspapermen build dreams on.

Radcliffe described one of his most dan-