

# Tribute for Bennie

*Bennie Owen came to O.U. 50 years ago as head coach. He will be honored November 25 for his many contributions.*

ON NOVEMBER 25, in what promises to be a crowded room, a spare, smiling man, whose 80 years fit comfortably, will receive the tribute of grateful pupils and friends.

Bennie Owen, who guided O.U.'s football teams from 1905-1926, will sit in the seat of honor at the dinner commemorating his 50th year of association with the University of Oklahoma. About him will be those who learned as much about being men as they did football—and were spared neither—through his teaching.

The Bennie Owen Story could easily make a fine script for a sports movie. It's filled with success, conflicts, honors and human interest. It also encompasses much football history.

The movie could begin with his first coaching job. As a football player he had quarterbacked Fielding H. "Hurry Up" Yost's all-victorious 1899 Kansas team, and had gone to Michigan as Yost's assistant for the famous Wolverine point-a-minute team.

In 1902 he conferred with the president of Bethany College of Lindsborg, Kansas, about a position as head coach and chemistry instructor. He quickly fell in love with the school, the town and the people. Nestling on the bank of the Smoky Hill River, Lindsborg was the center of a Swedish colony that had settled in central Kansas in 1868.

It was the cleanest city in the state and also the most cultured. Its 2,000 people, most of them earnest commutants in the Swedish-Lutheran faith, were honest, industrious and law-abiding. Nearly all of them spoke the Swedish language on the streets. Bethany College, founded there in 1881 and supported by the Swedish-Lutheran Church, was famous all over the



Bennie Owen is pictured with one of his fine ends of the early twenties, Howard "Tarz" Marsh, '23ba, Tulsa. Owen's Sooners recorded four undefeated seasons—1911, 1915, 1918, and 1920.

prairie for its emphasis upon the arts and particularly for its Messiah concerts.

With the boyish Owen at the reins, it quickly became famous for its football, too. His teams became famous as the "Terrible Swedes." His won and lost record during his three years at the college was very good. During that period, his Swedes won 22, lost 2 and tied 2. His 1902 team, regarded by old-timers as his strongest at Bethany, beat the Kansas Aggies 40-0 that year. His 1903 team lost only to Washburn. His 1904 team was all-victorious.

Best of all, Owen's Bethany teams are remembered by their opponents for their scrupulously clean tactics. There was no fouling, no roughing, no kneeing, no slugging by a Bethany team. Noted for their surging speed, the "Terrible Swedes" played hard but with a courtesy, chastity and punctilio that was natural to their religion and their way of life.

On train trips, Owen's team didn't spend their time rough-housing or playing cards. One boy could be found knitting socks or mittens and his quarterback did intricate crocheting.

When Owen's Bethany team of 1904 drubbed Oklahoma 36-9, O.U. athletic authorities were so impressed that they hired Owen. Thus began his illustrious career at Oklahoma.

Starting in 1905, Owen lifted his ragged little Oklahoma teams from obscurity to football's forefront in the prairie area. Speed was his shibboleth and as far back as 1914 he was the first coach in America to prove the modern "pro" principle that numerical profusion of forward passes in every game on the schedule is both practical and sound, provided it was carefully organized and the passing team had a crisp rushing offense to complement the aerial play.

This was the theory that decades later would be spectacularly exploited by many of the famous coaches of the Southwest, but Owen was the pioneer.

Owen's first Oklahoma team beat Texas 2-0 and the formidable Haskell Indians 18-12. His powerful 1908 team crushed Texas 50-0 at Norman, still the record score of the series, and lost but one game.

His 1911 team was all-victorious, as were his 1915, 1918 and 1920 teams. The 1920 team won the Missouri Valley Conference championship on the maiden attempt as a member of the league.

Some of his other records include: Against Texas he compiled an 8 win, 8 loss record; against Oklahoma A&M he showed 16 victories, 2 losses and 2 ties. The only times his teams were beaten by A&M were by 9-0 and 6-0 scores. His overall coaching



BENNIE OWEN

... After 50 Years, a Dinner

record: 128 wins, 52 losses, 13 ties. His record, excellent though it is, would have been much better if Kansas had not been on the schedule. Against Kansas, the Sooners scored only 7 victories while losing 12 times and tying 3.

In 1926 Owen ended a 22-season coaching career at O.U. to become athletic director. Owen Field, where Bud Wilkinson's powerhouses have run rampant in recent years, was named for him.

In recognition of his contribution to football, Owen was among the first 21 American football coaches to be elected to Football's Hall of Fame. Recently, he was elected to the Helms Athletic Foundation Hall of Fame, also.

That is a skeletal summary of Owen's successful tenure as coach at Oklahoma. It does not include the fact that the first Oklahoma player to be picked for All-America played for him, as did the next three Sooner selections. They were Forest "Spot" Geyer (1915), Roy "Soupy" Smoot (1920), Phil White (1920), and Granville

#### ALUMNI INVITED

All alumni of the University are invited to attend the Bennie Owen dinner. It will be held at 6:30 p.m., November 25 in the Ballroom of the Union Building. Tickets are priced at \$2.50 and may be ordered by writing the Alumni Office, University of Oklahoma. It is expected that all available tickets will be sold prior to November 25. Early reservations are suggested.

Norris (1927), who had received his early coaching from Owen.

In 1949, Benjamin Gilbert Owen was selected as one of five recipients of the Distinguished Service Award presented by the University and its Alumni Association.

In making the presentation speech, President Cross said:

"The next citation goes to one who perhaps has contributed more to our fine sports tradition than has any other Oklahoman . . . In 1905 he became Oklahoma's coach, an act that really took courage. Football material was scarce in the Territory because there were so few four-year high schools. And the athletic association of the young university had scanty funds. But this man was a builder and a dreamer—he knew that Oklahoma eventually would be granted statehood and he knew that the university would grow.

"His hardest year was 1907. During that year he lost his right arm in a hunting accident, the Administration Building burned, and Charles N. Haskell, first governor of the new state of Oklahoma, discharged President Boyd, Professor Parrington, and nearly a score of the old faculty. He shrugged off those setbacks and began to build great football teams at O.U.

"He made three important tactical contributions to football. In 1910 he began using the direct pass for every play in his repertoire and he started the use of long punt formation for running plays. In 1914 he became the first coach in America to go in for mass production of aerial play, and his teams used the forward pass as a major unit of offense. He stressed speed and sportsmanship.

"He dreamed of a complete physical plant for athletes at O.U. and his dream became a reality . . .

"Most important of all, he has been a builder of men. Thousands of boys who played football under him today are still living by his philosophy that clean speech and clean living are essential to winning, that it is important not only to take victory modestly but to accept defeat gracefully."

To this tribute, Owen responded with his philosophy of life and achievement.

"... It seems to me that achievement is almost synonymous with character. Neither is static. Both are made up of almost every little thing we do.

"I have a list of the qualities that seem to cover my philosophy. They are right thinking, hard work, ambition, opportunity and luck. There is another quality everybody who succeeds has to have. Courage. Or, as we politely call it in athletics, intestinal fortitude. . . . And right along with

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October 7. The couple is living in Oklahoma City where Dooley attends Oklahoma City University.

Miss Ruth Welch and J. M. Ivy, '51Law, were married June 29. The couple has established a home in Waurika.

Miss Mary Ann Hahn, Oklahoma City, and William Douglas Brewer, '55ba, Tulsa, were married August 20 in Oklahoma City. Mrs. Brewer was a member of Chi Omega sorority at Oklahoma A&M and Brewer is a member of Kappa Alpha fraternity. The couple is living in Tulsa.

Miss Sybil Marie Shilling, Wright, Arkansas, and Leonard Clay Sisk, '55pharm, Walters, were married August 5 in Norman. The couple is living in

Midwest City, where Sisk is assistant manager of Conrad-Marr Drugstore Number 1.

Miss Joyce Elizabeth Clemons, Oklahoma City, and Stanley Robbins Livesay, '55ms, Houston, were married September 4 in Oklahoma City. Livesay served two years with the Air Force in Korea. The couple is living in Fort Worth.

Miss Lavona Bernice Price, '55ba, Oklahoma City, and William James Rushton, III, Birmingham, Alabama, were married August 19 in Oklahoma City. Mrs. Rushton was affiliated with Kappa Alpha Theta sorority at O.U. Rushton graduated from Princeton University and served in Korea after graduation. The couple has established residence in Birmingham.

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courage comes perseverance, which is the ability to stick with a discouraging proposition when you are sorely tempted to pull up stakes and leave it.

"Applying this to my own life, I think it must have started with my mother who taught me to think right, and to work hard. Then my wife gave me the incentive to teach fair play and team work to the boys whom I coached in football.

"Opportunity comes next and for that I'm deeply indebted to the new state of Oklahoma and the opportunity it offered. I lived in southern Kansas, just a few miles

from the border of the territory of Oklahoma, so I could see for myself what a magnificent opportunity it afforded. It was my good fortune to come here at exactly the right time, when Oklahoma was just 'a-borning.'

". . . speaking of my own period here at Oklahoma, I can only say that while it was lots of work, it was also lots of fun."

### A University's Concern . . .

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ident and the professors in the Philosophy Department. Some of the complaints were discounted but many were lodged by students who could not be ignored. Most of the complaints dealt with the same issue—the irrelevance of material discussed by Dr. Eaton to the subject material of the courses he taught.

After much soul-searching, the faculty of the Department of Philosophy recommended unanimously last year that he be dismissed from the faculty. No immediate action was taken except to let Dr. Eaton know he was standing on thin ice—that he was undergoing a critical evaluation period.

At the end of the year, a committee of



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