

# Under Cover

By DAVID BURR, '52ba

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WE ARE in the season of "Alumni Pressure." In this season, head football coaches quake in their sleep, reach for the sports page of their papers before eyes are fully open, drown an ulcer in black coffee as they scan the news for a chink in their security.

And there it is. Coach Whatshisname, who has done a brilliant job of molding men at State U., is being relieved. The same writer who wrote critical pieces about the coach yesterday, confesses today that he never met a better man or one who could coach football better than Whatshisname.

Why was the coach fired? Who was responsible?

A culprit must be found if the drama is to have any meaning. Certainly a sportswriter can't admit to holding a gun at the coach's head through critical sports page comments. At a time like this, you must not suggest that a coach might be relieved because he has little ability.

And so the villain is spotted through a process of elimination. Typewriter keys assume righteous proportions as they prepared the news item, "Coach Whatshisname, after eight excellent seasons, was asked to resign tonight by regretful officials at State U. It was determined that alumni pressure had forced the resignation."

This sordid drama is played out with pomp and fanfare. The whole world is made aware that alumni of State U. and, by inference, of every institution, are hatchetmen who await a chance to strike.

The public conception of alumni as hatchetmen has been as damaging as it has been unfair. The large majority of alumni of every institution, if the institution has done its educational job, understand their job to be that of a watchman: to observe their institution, to protect what it stands for and to aid its growth and development as an educational institution.

Alumni of the University of Oklahoma are taking part in this year's season of "Alumni Pressure." But the coaches don't mind, the administration welcomes the intrusion, and sports writers will completely ignore it. The pressure offers proof of the power of the alumni and of the prize they want for their institution.

Let's pick the story up in early summer, 1956.

More than 2,000 graduates received a letter which said:

"I am asking you to provide important leadership in the 1956 Alumni Development Fund Campaign by serving as a . . . Class Representative. This year, as a Class Representative, you will be requested to send one personal letter and one postcard to not more than 25 classmates . . . encouraging them to contribute to the Alumni Development Fund . . ."

The letters were signed by Class Agents of the respec-

tive graduating classes or by J. Phil Burns, '27ba, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Fund.

Suspense accompanied the letters. Perhaps no program of the Alumni Association had ever been conceived with greater purpose: to provide through an annual giving program an opportunity for alumni to share in the advancement of their University. And no program had ever been initiated that needed so much leadership from so many individual alumni.

Would busy alumni find the time to demonstrate their loyalty by accepting the letter writing assignment? The answer was prompt in arriving.

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More than 800 graduates answered yes. Many others asked to be excused for '56 but wanted to be considered for the '57 campaign. Most indicated pleasure at being invited to participate. Enthusiasm reached a peak when one alumnus wrote, "Give me the whole state of Florida" for alumni contact.

But this was summer and first letters were to be written in October. Would those who accepted the assignment put the plan in execution?

As Class Representatives forwarded copies of their letters to the Fund Office for information and file purposes, it became obvious that initial enthusiasm withstood the test of time and busy schedules. The high hopes of Fund officials were being surpassed with every mail.

Caught up in the spirit of the campaign, one Class Representative sent each of his 25 alumni a \$1.00 bill and asked them to send it along with their contribution to Fund headquarters. The pump priming worked.

At least two representatives sent a nickel to each of their 25 classmates to buy a coke or cup of coffee after they had submitted their contribution. The personal touch was apparent in every letter.

Two steps of the Fund program had been accomplished. But would alumni respond? They had been told that state funds would never match the opportunity for building a great university. Money for scholarships, research, and equipment was far short of a desirable goal. Would the alumni of the University of Oklahoma recognize their opportunity to offer positive proof of their loyalty to O.U., and their concern for its continued growth as a great institution of higher learning?

Once more the answer was emphatic and quick in coming. The campaign, which was touched off by Class Representatives and Class Agents in early October, had achieved the following results by the middle of November: More than 2,000 contributors gave more than \$17,000. With six weeks to go before the campaign ended, it seemed realistic to believe the total might go to more than 3,000 contributors and more than \$22,500. Such figures would more than double any previous year's returns.

While the figures are revealing as a yardstick of accomplishment, the most significant aspect of the 1956 Alumni Development Fund campaign was accomplished in the beginning. Never before had so many O.U. alumni been asked to contribute their time and money to an Alumni Association project, and never before had so many responded so well.