



In his 36 years at O. U., John Jacobs has received many honors, including '26



yearbook dedication (as pictured above), coached Olympians and to top it off . . .

## Jacobs Enters Hall of Fame

By DAVID BURR, '52ba

*"To Coach John Jacobs, one of the whitest gentlemen we have ever known, this book is dedicated.*

*"No formal or stilted praises are in order here. Unknown, in fact, to more than a few of us, his works are both visible and conspicuous.*

*"Young and an extremely hard worker, John Jacobs puts into his duties as coach of track some of the same character of work that once made him the best track man that Oklahoma University has produced.*

*"His influence is good."*

**N**O NATIONAL RECORDS are published on the number of college track coaches who have been the object of a yearbook dedication, but it is a unique distinction. John Jacobs, '16ba, O. U.'s track coach for 36 years, received such a tribute in the 1926 *Sooner Yearbook*.

In May, 1957, the man who defied formal or stilted praises, received an honor that drew praise of both types. He was selected, with eight other outstanding college coaches, for membership in the Helms Foundation Hall of Fame.

Employing a favorite conversational gambit, the understatement, Jacobs re-

ceived the honor with the announcement, "I backed in but they ain't backing out. Seriously, how can I convince myself that I deserve this fine honor?"

(On another occasion, when he was selected as the track coach of the year by the Rockne Club of Kansas City, he remarked, "I've been layin' low, afraid it was a mistake. I thought they must have meant Mike Jacobs or Jack Jacobs.")

Fortunately, his selection to the Hall of Fame was not determined by his own modest view of himself. It was based on solid evidence given over a 36-year career as an O. U. coach.

He has gained his reputation the hard way. He's best known around the nation for his brilliant development of obscure material, for his ability to learn and coach unusual events and for teaching his men to double in events they have never tried before.

He has converted broadjumpers into 600-yard stars; successfully coached hop step and jump performers and specialized in preparing men for the tough decathlon event. He has also developed steeplechasers, an event that appears rarely in American track meets.

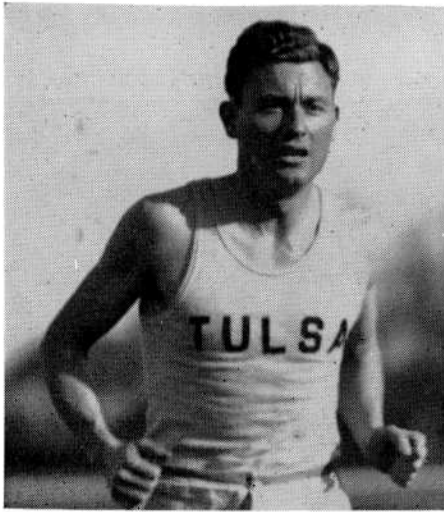
Jake has also earned a reputation for his dry wit that can make a coaching point or delight newspapermen with equal ease. His coaching talent and conversational humor have been essential at Oklahoma where track material has not always been abundant.

There's more than one reason for lack of material. In a lament familiar to coaches the country over, Jake says, "If they can run, they can't pass their grades. If they can pass, they can't run."

Employing an offhand manner, he once told a lackadaisical weightman, "Go home and beat your wife. You're not mean enough to be a shot-putter."

He tipped off a pole vaulter on how to improve. "Pole vaulting is all mental. If a guy can't vault 14 feet, he hasn't got good mentality." (He also commented on a freshman vaulter who was confident of clearing 14 feet that the vaulter got half that distance in his last meet and expects to get the remainder the next time out.)

A hurdler who was having trouble with his form got this advice: "You hurdle like the ancient Greeks. They used to hurdle for beauty. The idea was to go over the hurdle looking beautiful. The one that got the



GLENN DAWSON

... Represented U. S. in '32 and '36 Olympics

most cheers won. Hurdlin' for beauty. But up at Kansas City in the Big Seven indoor meet they'll be pepperin' those boards like hell." The hurdler got the idea and became a star performer.

His advice often has the effect of getting his men mentally prepared for a big meet. He once told them: "In a track meet you're on your own. You can't just put on a helmet and hide behind the other guys." He warned his runners for the '57 indoor meet in Kansas City, "It's going to be a thrill to get out in front of that sold-out stadium and show whether you got it or you ain't got it . . . Calm down. Remember your name at least. Sometimes they ask that to see if you are in the right lane . . ."

Jacobs' comments make good listening anytime. To a mother who had traveled a long distance to see her son perform in a Big Seven meet, only to see him eliminated in the preliminaries, Jacobs explained, "Madam, this ain't no county meet."

Of Pneumonia Downs, the Sooners' open air indoor layout beneath the east stadium, Jacobs once cracked, "Only kids who were raised on bean soup and corn bread can stand up under there. The bottle babies won't last."

He once told a photographer, "Don't take any pictures of me. I've got too many wrinkles in my face. There's the North Canadian," he said, tracking a long wrinkle in his cheek, "there's the South Canadian, there's the Cimarron."

Jacobs was born in Texas and moved to Oklahoma in his childhood. He attended high school at Mangum where he played baseball but never saw a track. At O. U. he was given the choice of taking a required gymnasium class or going out for track. He chose the latter as the lesser of two evils.

He developed into a great competitor

and became a Southwest Conference champion in several events. (O. U. belonged to the Southwest Conference in those days.) He tied the world record of 15 seconds flat for the high hurdles in an exhibition race and traveled by chair car from Norman to San Francisco by public subscription to compete in a decathlon event.

His senior yearbook dutifully recorded his feats with the summary, "John Jacobs, for two years captain of the Sooner track team, is O. U.'s greatest cinder path artist. His records in the hurdles and the jumps will probably stand for some time to come. Jake has been Oklahoma's greatest point winner and his loss this year will be very keenly felt."

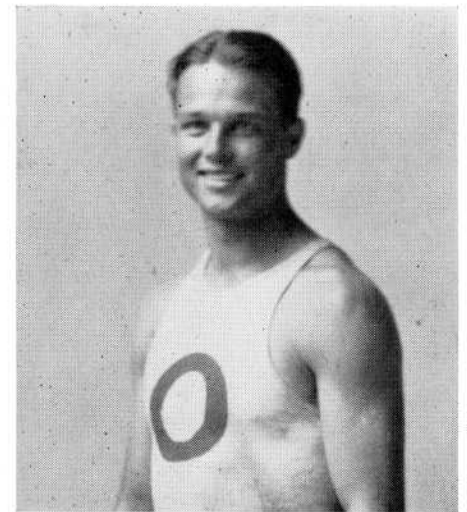
His loss was to be felt for only six years, however. After graduation, he maintained his permanent residence in Norman, but spent four years coaching track in Texas high schools. He returned to the state as a high school coach and was picked for the O. U. position in 1922.

From 1924 to 1929, Jacobs' teams won 19 dual meets in a row before Nebraska stopped them. He has coached four Olympic performers. In 1928 he developed Tom Churchill, a husky basketball player, into a decathlete who placed fifth at Amsterdam. He switched Glenn Dawson, Skia-took, to the steeplechase and Dawson made the Olympic team in that event in both '32 and '36. J. W. Mashburn was selected for the '52 Olympics while yet a freshman at O. U. and Neville Price, broadjumper from South Africa, competed for his country in both the '52 and '56 Olympics.

Another of Jacobs' track stars failed to make an Olympic team. He is, however, appearing on a different type of team. He is a member of the cast of the TV series, "Gunsmoke." Bill Weaver, known professionally as Dennis Weaver, is the entertaining Chester of the program.

### Homecoming Changed

Homecoming for 1957, originally scheduled for October 19, has been changed to November 16—the date Notre Dame plays in Norman. The switch in dates was necessitated by the late opening of school (September 23) and in order that organized houses would have an opportunity to decorate for the event. The change also makes Homecoming the last day of the state's Semicentennial celebration. Houses will be decorated on the "Arrows to Atoms" theme.



TOM CHURCHILL

... Placed Fifth in '28 Olympic Decathlon

Jake has earned a number of honors besides his recent Hall of Fame rating. He was honorary referee of the 1943 Texas Relays, the 1950 Kansas Relays and the 1951 Drake Relays. Honorary status as a referee is the track equivalent of an honorary degree.

When he completed his 25th year of coaching duty at O. U. in 1947, the event was noted by his track alumni who presented him with a shotgun and complete assortment of hunting equipment.

What is the secret of success for a track coach? With typical candor Jacobs will tell you, "The secret of track coaching is to find you a real, good man who can beat the hell out of anybody else. He'll make you look like the best track coach in the world. He'll take you around the world."

This may be the most expedient way, but Jacobs disproves his own theory. In recent years he has not been blessed with many super stars that could beat the hell out of anyone else. Yet he has kept on building his reputation as one of the outstanding track coaches of the nation.

His '57 squad was weaker than usual and no amount of coaching skill could overcome injuries and scholastic difficulties. His '57 team stood sixth in the indoor standing of the Big Seven and seventh in the outdoor listing.

If the '57 performance were off par for a Jacobs team, there is a sense of optimism about '58 prospects. He may have found at last that special combination: the runner who can pass his subjects and run, also.

But regardless of how his '58 team performs, he has earned a unique place for himself in the Hall of Fame and in Oklahoma track history. As the yearbook said, "His works are both visible and conspicuous."