



Kay Belknap, O. U. senior and head cheer leader, does her job at a recent game: "Fans are the 12th team member."

# The Year to Yell

Everyone has seen cheer leaders at work on football afternoons, but who really knows them? They're a professional, hard-working group, and they even have a constitution.

**F**ROWNED ON, laughed at, pointed down. Suppose you happened to find yourself in a business where it was the usual thing for one to take this type of treatment from the public. What would you do?

Probably you'd become discouraged and quit. Or you'd take steps to improve your status, thereby changing the public opinion about yourself.

Kay Belknap, University senior from Norman, has found herself frowned on and laughed at plenty of times. For years she underwent such experiences, even after she enrolled at O. U. Kay is a healthy, attractive blonde, bursting with energy and a love of life, and she never let the catcalls get her down.

Instead, she and her fellow workers took steps to change the situation. They took

a long look at themselves, at their predecessors, and at other persons holding the same sort of job. Then they plunged into a campaign of self-improvement.

Kay is a cheer leader.

For those who believe that cheer leading consists merely in excitable extroverts or show-offs kicking up their heels before a crowd of potential noise makers, Kay has a bit of news: Cheer leading is a professional, calculated job, and one practically must be cut out for the role.

"You have to be born with it," said Kay, "and then work at it."

Where does all that vitality come from? Vitamins by the handfuls?

No. Rather, it's a great love for sports and crowds, and the feeling that one serves a special sort of purpose. "I get so excited

at ball games that I can hardly bear it," said Kay.

Enthusiasm is a powerful thing. The girls in O. U.'s pep leader group claim they cannot feel intense cold in their short skirts—"We're our own heaters." And on sultry days the cheer leaders often refuse to remove the heavy knit blazers which they wear; they'd rather look neat than cool.

None of the group can remember a game at which they had to work in the rain. If one should come, however, they'll stay on the job. A big help will be the red raincoats given them by Norman and Oklahoma City stores.

Making up this season's cheer leading group are Kay, who is head leader; Wanda

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Krivanek, sophomore from Oklahoma City, and Darlene Owens, freshman from Tulsa. A fourth girl, Donna Drake Pinkerton, underwent surgery soon after the season opened and was forced to miss most games.

In addition, there are four men in the group. Two of them, Ron Firestone and Phillip Pfanschmidt, are engineering majors from Wichita, Kansas. The others, Tom Owens and Merle Tyler, both hail from Tulsa (Owens, too, is in engineering).

Less than two years ago, feeling they were old-fashioned and not being taken seriously, the cheer leaders drew up a new constitution. They wanted to constitute a more official group, to feel that they were actual ambassadors or representatives of the University, and to make the best possible appearance.

Previously try-outs were held each fall, after which eight persons were elected to form the group. Under this set-up, O. U. could come up with an entirely new corps of cheer leaders every season. The plan allowed for no profiting from past experience, and the constant turnover made for a shaky organization.

The new constitution provided for leaders to be elected on a permanent basis for the duration of their college work. Only by graduation, emergency leave-taking or expulsion can one now be replaced.

Expulsion can come for several reasons. One is grades. Cheer leaders, like other athletes, must maintain at least a "C" average in school work. Another reason concerns attendance at games and pep rallies. Only three absences are allowed, and then only with a legitimate excuse; a fourth means loss of the job.

The most obvious change came in the form of new uniforms. For too long a time O. U. cheer leaders were colorless and formless. The girls wore white sweaters and long white skirts; men wore white sweaters and white slacks.

Both color and Ivy League styling came with the addition of red-striped blazers. Skirts were shortened. Large red and white pom-poms became standard equipment.

O. U. cheer leaders also wanted—and procured—some changes in the schedule of their own appearances at games. They felt that it would be better for all of them to appear as official University "ambassadors" at one out-of-town game each season,

rather than for only one or two of them to attend every game. The new rules authorize the entire group to attend the annual game against the University of Texas at Dallas, at the game against Oklahoma State when it is played at Stillwater, and at all bowl games in which O. U. participates, and at all other games authorized by their advisory group.

Their advisory group is made up of four faculty members. One, Dr. David P. Bergin, works with the cheer leaders constantly, giving them quick, sometimes personal counsel when problems arise. Another, Ken Farris, athletic business manager, is referred to by the leaders as their "priceless travel agent." They consider Farris a "jewel" because he plans all their trips, arranges for transportation, room and board.

Other "jewels" are alumni, say the cheer leaders. An Oklahoma City alumnus recently composed a new yell for them: "Florida oranges, Texas cactus; we play Notre Dame just for practice."

Another alumnus passed a hat among passengers on the special train to Columbia, Missouri, this season, asking them to donate so that the cheer leaders might be assured expenses to the Orange Bowl game in Miami, Florida. Another said that, providing not enough money was raised for the Miami trip, he would fly the leaders to Miami in his own airplane.

"We're proud of the Oklahoma alums and students," said Kay. "They've become the All-America 12th man on the Big Red team. We got this straight from the horse's mouth, the opposition, who told us that they fear Oklahoma fans.

"Sooner spirit," she said, "is dandy. I should like to say that our fans never throw apple cores, cola bottles or snowballs at the teams or bands or cheer leaders. None of our fans try to steal the equipment of cheer leaders from visiting schools."

At one of the 1957 games O. U. cheer leaders had a great deal of trouble with opposition fans attempting to steal their pom-poms and pennants. Like professionals they took it as just one of those things which happens now and then.

And professionals they are. Most of the eight were cheer leaders for two or three years in high school, and most have been serving in the same capacity ever since they enrolled at the University. Their routines have been carefully worked out and practiced. They teach high school cheer leaders at the summer clinics held at the University's North Campus. This year, for the first time, they will try out for a part in Sooner Scandals, annual student variety show.

The motto adopted this year by the leaders is "This is the year to yell." Like all Oklahoma fans, the leaders have realized how tough it is for a team to stay on top once it gets there.

To coax the crowd to yell—students and non-students alike—cheer leaders "warm up" or "knit" spectators before the games begin. This is accomplished by splitting up in pairs and going to different sections of the stadium, where yells are led.

Criticism seems inevitable, no matter how high cheer leaders attempt to set standards. For example, the traditional yell for the annual Dallas game has been "Beat the h— out of Texas." And Texas fans respond with the same yell, substituting "Oklahoma" for "Texas."

This year a large number of Campfire Girls attended the Dallas game. Their sponsors, outraged by the yell, wrote complaints to the two universities' presidents.

Consequently, at one of the following games (Missouri) Oklahoma fans found their fangs had been pulled. They had to sit by quietly while the opposition yelled "Beat the h—out of Oklahoma," unable to respond.

It was frustrating, but the O. U. group took it as just another event in the life of a cheer leader.

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