



When cameras are aimed at Sooner athletics, Harold Keith is on hand to keep everything in focus.

the Hand behind the Headlines

WHEN the phone rings in Room 35 of the Field House, the caller may be *Look* magazine wanting information on Sooner fullback Prentice Gautt, or a writer from *Sports Illustrated* trying to set up an interview with Bud Wilkinson, or a sportscaster in need of a television filmette of Quarterback Bobby Boyd.

Whoever it is and whatever he wants, the man in the green eyeshade at the Norman end of the line handles the request in the same quiet voice and with the same quick, professional efficiency. To Harold Keith, '29ba, '38ma, it's all in the day's duties of the University of Oklahoma's sports publicity director.

There was a time—in pre-powerhouse days—when Sooner sports news was a drag on the national market. But even without Wilkinsonian football, by 1930 the athletic publicity had become too much for O.U. public relations under Fayette Copeland, '19ba (now director of the School of Journalism).

Harold Keith's new department was a one-man operation at first. The young pub-

licist not only gathered the material, wrote stories in his cubby-hole office off the basketball court, duplicated them, addressed and stuffed the envelopes, but also sold advertising for the athletic programs and managed many of the activities now carried on by a separate business office.

Then in 1935 O.U. got a coach who knew the value of national publicity, and the Keith machine really began to roll. A former Army and L.S.U. coach, Capt. Lawrence (Biff) Jones divided his time between the R.O.T.C. program and football, but he was always available to Keith 30 minutes a day. Harry Grayson of the NEA service, and the dean of sports writers, Grantland Rice, began to pick up Sooner sports.

The national spotlight had turned on Oklahoma by 1947, and Keith soon learned that a winning team demands more promotion than a loser. Sports publicity was a year 'round office and Harold Keith, one of the busiest men on campus.

Not until December of 1954 did the department get the growing room it needed in the present first floor quarters. Keith and

his enlarged staff had been in an upstairs Field House anteroom since 1935.

Keith had acquired his first full-time assistant in 1946 in the person of Pat Davidson Simpson, succeeded in 1951 by his present right-hand, Mrs. Addie Lee Barker, '39journ. Mrs. Barker, who lives in Norman with her three children, Gail, 15, Forrest, 13, and Alan, 10, had been a proof-reader for University Press, with Phillips Petroleum at Phillips, Tex., and secretary to the dean of the College of Engineering.

To bang out the hometown stories, Keith now has three students on a part-time basis, Jim Jones, Ross Porter and John Brooks. The track men work out their scholarships four hours a week in the sports publicity office.

His student assistants are a favorite topic with Keith. The closest-at-hand and one of the best Keith ever had is O.U.'s athletic business manager, Ken Farris, '43bus, a broad jumper from the track crew. But Keith can point with pride to many others who have stuck with journalism, most of them in sports.

Among them are Volney Mece, '50 journal, *Oklahoman-Times* sports writer; Bob Hentzen, '54journal, *Topeka* (Kans.) *Capital* sports writer, and Gene Thrasher, '57journal, of the *Lawton Constitution*. Jim Weeks, '56journal, is with the Odessa, Tex., paper, while Dick Wentworth, '56journal, is sales promotion manager of the University of Louisiana Press, and Lewis Ferguson, '56journal, is sports writing for the *Ponca City News*. Rick Jay, '48journal, is professor of journalism at the University of New Mexico, Max Nichols, '56journal, with the *Des Moines Register-Tribune*, and Doug Feaver is writing sports for the *Norman Transcript* while still an undergraduate.

Brochures on 10 sports—football, basketball, baseball, cross-country, indoor and outdoor track, wrestling, tennis, golf and swimming—pass over Keith's desk. He writes material for programs to be sold at the games, organizes souvenir and promotional booklets (*Football at Oklahoma*, etc.), and arranges photo sessions for cameramen from all media.

This season he tried to eliminate his weekly newsletter to sports writers in the belief that it was no longer needed—but a quick check revealed that only 3 of the 435

receiving the letter could afford to do without it.

The unexpected news break is almost too commonplace to create a crisis in the Keith office. Whether the first string quarterback suddenly leaves school before the Orange Bowl or the team comes down with Chicago "food poisoning," it is Keith who must be ready with the answers.

Sports publicity makes it a practice to break the big stories first, if possible, to give all the news outlets equal opportunity. Keith is a firm believer in maintaining the confidence among the sports writers in the department's information.

During the football season, Keith works seven days a week, and life really gets hectic when O.U. plays a post-season bowl game, as it has four out of the last seven years. Christmas holidays in Florida may sound like a lark, but for Keith, it's a rough Yuletide. With bowl games overlapping basketball and wrestling, the load is pretty heavy on the home office, too.

Between football seasons, there are a few nights and Sundays when Keith finds time heavy on his hands—but not for long. An author from the age of 14 when he began

selling sports fiction to *Lone Scout* magazine and later to *The American Boy*, Keith has also written sports articles for *Esquire*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and a baseball novelette for *Bluebook*, as well as six books for young people.

Boys Life of Will Rogers in 1936 was followed by *Sports and Games*, a Junior Literary Guild selection in 1940. *Oklahoma Kickoff* (1948), *Shotgun Shaw* (1949) and *A Pair of Captains* (1951) preceded his most acclaimed book, *Rifles for Watie*, chosen for the Newbery Medal as 1957's best juvenile book.

Rifles for Watie took five years to complete, and Keith has spent the past 2½ years just doing research for a new book on the Comanche Indians.

But the Comanches take a back seat in the world of sports where Harold Keith has spent the bulk of his life. During college days, he was sports editor of *The Oklahoma Daily* and a long distance runner on the track team. In 1928, as an added starter, he won the 3,000 meter steeplechase in the mud at the Penn Relays.

Today he is sports correspondent for the *Oklahoman-Times*, writing *Times* feature stories as he has since college.

The sports publicity office keeps a record of every imaginable sports statistic—play-by-plays, summaries, scores, yearly won-lost standings, team and individual averages—but the staff claims that Keith's encyclopedic memory is as good as any written record.

The University often has several sports events going at one time, and Keith tries to make them all, freshman as well as varsity. Football may be the most demanding of O.U.'s sports, publicity-wise, but Coach Doyle Parrack's rebuilt basketball team (runner-up in the conference last year) and a three-time national champion wrestling team are big news, too.

In 1953 sports publicity started one of its more popular services with the help of the University motion picture unit. Television filmettes, from 30 to 60 seconds long, featuring individual players, close-up and in action, are in great demand by TV sportscasters all over the country.

The filmettes are typical of the type publicity that makes All-Americans. Keith operates on the theory that when the sportsmen sit down to choose the favored few, they should be familiar with the outstanding players from the outstanding teams. And so long as Harold Keith is around, there will be no shortage of information on



Quarterback Bob Cornell gets last minute instructions from Keith during football "photo day."

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HAND BEHIND HEADLINES

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the Sooners, 33 of whom have been All-Americans during Keith's time at O.U.

A respected member of his profession's national organization, the College Sports Information Directors of America, Keith is considered one of the best in the nation. Besides having served on the board of directors and the public relations committee, Keith is currently charged with gathering contributions from NCAA member schools and compiling a public relations manual scheduled for publication next spring.

The biggest and most demanding phase of Keith's job at O.U. is in personal relations with the press, radio and television, national as well as local, state and regional. Press dinners in Oklahoma City are arranged yearly to enable writers to meet the entire coaching staff with press parties on Friday nights before home football games attended by both Sooner and opponent staffs.

Photo days for each sport before the seasons begin give dozens of photographers the chance to get their own custom-posed shots for immediate and future use.

If a single "biggest problem" exists, it is probably in furnishing the necessary convenient and comfortable working accommodations for press, radio, television, national magazines, syndicates and cartoonists while they are covering campus sports events.

The O.U. press box was the most improved in the nation after its 1951 enlargement—but is far from ideal. With a little careful stacking, Keith can house from 200 to 225 at an average game with the demand higher at the Big Red's "big" games. Every type of temporary quarters have been built on the roof, from platforms to lean-tos.

Since no darkroom facilities are available at the stadium, photographers must journey across campus to the Journalism Building to develop their pictures, then send them to Oklahoma City by car for transmission. Keith is looking forward to the day when all these operations can be accomplished within the stadium box.

In surveying his crowded sports and literary careers, Keith's only regret is the inroads they have made on his home life. He and his wife, Virginia, have two children, Kitty, '59ed, an elementary school teacher in Denver, and Johnny, a popular campus entertainer during his O.U. days, now with Clyde McCoy's Dixieland Band.

To the average 8-to-5'er, Harold Keith's job looms as a back-breaker, but Harold Keith has a strong back and wouldn't trade places with anyone.

COLLEGIANS AND CASTRO

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"The Cubans do not understand the agitation by Americans for an election," Johnson said. "They believe that he has been elected—through their blood, sweat and tears. I think he should have an election soon. It is necessary if his government is to be understood here, but I think he is popularly chosen now and would be the overwhelming choice in a free election."

The war trials, which broke in big, black headlines across America, were expected and demanded by the Cubans. Castro in 1958 had announced his intention of hunting down and punishing war criminals if he came to power.

The Cubans compare the trials to the Nuremburg trials, but point out that the machinery for their trials was established by Castro before the end of the war and not after the war as was the machinery for the Nuremburg trials.

"They cannot understand how we can criticize them for shooting down war criminals after they had been tried," Johnson said. "The trials prevented an extended period of rioting after Castro's victory. Always before, a revolution was followed by the slaughter, without benefit of trial, of those on the losing side. The war trials prevented this type of pandemonium. To the Cubans the trials were understandable.

"We could never condone such trials here," Witt said, "but to the Cubans they were justified and necessary and done with public approval. They did not start a reign of terror in Cuba. The people are not frightened of torture and death as they were under Batista."

Convinced that the Cubans themselves are happy with their new government, Johnson and Witt see economic policy as the biggest obstacle facing Castro.

Castro has abruptly put into force several wrenching economic changes, which are favored by most Cubans but hated by foreign landholding and business interests. He has cut the telephone rates and apartment rents drastically without consulting the companies or owners. His most far-reaching change is the land reform.

Castro plans to give the land to those who till it, breaking the stranglehold of wealthy landowners. Forty per cent of Cuba's land is in the hands of foreign interests, and 50 per cent is owned by 17 per cent of the Cubans.

"The landowners call it confiscation, but the people are definitely behind the land reform," Johnson said.

"The goals of the reform are satisfactory to the people," Witt said, "and if it can be done, it will be great. Economically it is probably an unsound proposition. They are going too fast, but the people are so nationalistic they believe they can do anything."

"I do not see the revolution as either all good or all bad," Witt said. "I believe the revolution was needed, but I think Castro is making several serious mistakes in his economic reforms. The Cuban people believe that his is an honest and noble attempt to improve the country, but I think the attempt may not be based on sound judgment."

The Cuban people, although basically not anti-America, are riled by slurs that have been heaped upon Castro, their leader and hero, in the American press. They cannot understand or forgive America's support of Batista with military training missions or her support of other autocratic dictators in Latin-America.

Johnson and Witt both believe that America will harvest nothing but hatred in Latin-America until her foreign policy is changed, and Americans take an interest in the welfare of those south of the border.

"The Cubans cannot understand our policies and so many of them are opposed to our government," Johnson said, and then added wistfully, "Castro has said he wishes all Americans could come to Cuba to see for themselves. I wish every Cuban could come to America."

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