

Football Forecast



Big Red Battling Backfield Troubles and Rugged Opening Schedule

"What we anticipate seldom occurs; what we least expected generally happens."—Disraeli.

THE anticipation of a new football season, with its bright promise of autumn afternoons, its crowds and its thrills, stalks the land. Speculation becomes the favorite sport and discussion provokes the mystic and intuitive genius of every fan.

In Oklahoma the question is: How big will the Big Red be in 1960?

Opening with a suicide schedule of Northwestern, Pittsburgh, Texas and Kansas, the Sooners meet their most formidable opposition back-to-back. In the years that Coach Bud Wilkinson has been at Oklahoma, his teams have never encountered so many talented teams in so brief a period.



By David A. Burr
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photo by Frank Garner

Wilkinson will counter with a rebuilt backfield and a fine crop of experienced linemen. His analysis of his team has the ring of authority:

"We had an excellent spring practice from the standpoint of interest, morale and a desire to improve. Our line has adequate potential but our backfield situation is the weakest I can recall since coming to Oklahoma."

Lettermen will man every line position, with the possible exception of left guard. Sophomore Duane Cook impressed the coaches in spring training and may earn a starting assignment. The rest of the line may include ends Ronny Payne and Jerry Tillery, tackles Billy White and Tom Cox, guard Karl Milstead and center Phil Lohmann.

If Lohmann, who can play a variety

of line positions, is used elsewhere, center will still be strong with Jim Byerly and sophomore Wayne Lee available.

The alternate team line will have a core of experienced linemen, also.

When Wilkinson speaks of a weak backfield situation, he refers to a lack of talent, depth and experience. Five members of the '59 starting and alternate teams were lost by graduation. Only two positions in the 1960 starting backfield appear to be settled: Ronnie Hartline at fullback and Mike McClellan at halfback. The rest of the backfield positions are question marks. Examples:

1. Can Jimmy Carpenter make the switch from halfback to quarterback successfully or will he be left at halfback under any condition to strength that position?

2. Can Billy Meacham supply the pass option threat at halfback and will his leg, which was operated upon in the spring, hold up?

3. Can Bennett Watts, Bob Page and Bob Cornell, all 2-year lettermen, provide the necessary leadership at quarterback?

4. Can sophomores be developed rapidly enough to handle halfback and fullback duties on the alternate team, particularly on pass defense?

These are questions that must be answered in a hurry. There's no time to gain experience by playing. Wilkinson has suggested that he may find it necessary to let one backfield go all the way, at least early in the season.

Thus far, only the first four opponents have been mentioned. But there is danger

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throughout the schedule, also. Wilkinson puts it this way:

"Our Big Eight Conference race should be most interesting. Those teams that everybody is rating the strongest can lose any Saturday to any opponent."

At least four Big Eight opponents should be considered in the running to squeeze Oklahoma out of another conference championship—Kansas, Colorado, Missouri and Iowa State.

At the top of everyone's list of dangerous opponents is Kansas. Not since the days of Ray Evans has there been as much excitement about a Kansas football team. The Jayhawkers keep 14 of their top 22 men who held Oklahoma to a 7-6 score in '59. In addition, two talented transfer backs, halfback Bert Coan and quarterback Rodger McFarland, join the squad. Coan will be a starter.

Missouri, Colorado and Iowa State all are well-qualified contenders. Missouri could come into its own if young quarterbacks show early maturity. Colorado has the throwing arm of Gale Weidner and 21 of its top 22 hands back. Iowa State returns

20 of 24 lettermen and fullback Tom Watkins.

The rest of the Big Eight—Oklahoma State, Kansas State and Nebraska—will have great afternoons but are not expected to be of championship calibre. Oklahoma State lost seven starters, including its entire backfield. Kansas State is still suffering from a lack of adequate material. Nebraska continues to show improvement and will surprise any team that does not take the Cornhuskers seriously.

Without minimizing any team on the schedule, the Sooners' chances for a big year hinge on their success in the first four games.

As an indication of what to expect from Northwestern, Coach Ara Parseghian states: "We lack experience at several positions, particularly the interior line, but we were pleased with the showing of replacements at these positions in spring practice. A number of 'ifs' still remain, but it appears that our 1960 squad will possess good speed and quickness and will be a little bigger and stronger than last year."

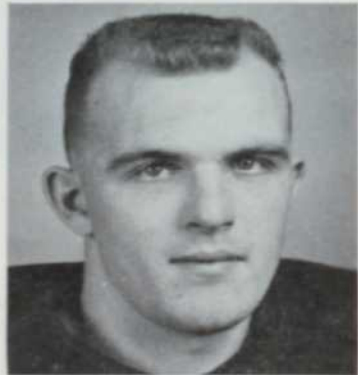
Pittsburgh's prospects were offered by

Newsweek magazine: "Don't be surprised if Pittsburgh threatens Syracuse for eastern and national football honors this fall. Experts back from spring workouts say Pitt is loaded, particularly in the backfield."

Texas does not appear to be quite as strong as last year. Ten members of the first two teams of '59 are gone but the Longhorns will draw heavily from one of the finest groups of sophomores in the country. From all advance indications the Oklahoma-Texas teams will be one of the best matched duels in the history of the series.

How successful will the Sooners be in '60? If Oklahoma loses four games, it should come as no shock to the football faithful. A good guess would be that Pittsburgh, Texas and Kansas would defeat the Sooners and that Northwestern and Colorado could pick up wins, also. That's the gloomy view.

But here's a guess that the final season record will be eight wins and two losses—to Texas and Kansas. If the team does that well, Mr. Wilkinson should be coach-of-the-year.



Hartline



Carpenter

1960 Schedule

- Sept. 24 . . . NORTHWESTERN
 . . . at Norman
- Oct. 1 . . . PITTSBURGH
 . . . at Norman
- Oct. 8 . . . TEXAS
 . . . at Dallas
- Oct. 15 . . . KANSAS
 . . . at Lawrence
- Oct. 22 . . . KANSAS STATE
 . . . Band Day at Norman
- Oct. 29 . . . COLORADO
 . . . at Boulder
- Nov. 5 . . . IOWA STATE
 . . . at Ames
- Nov. 12 . . . MISSOURI
 . . . Homecoming at Norman
- Nov. 19 . . . NEBRASKA
 . . . Dad's Day at Norman
- Nov. 26 . . . OKLAHOMA STATE
 . . . at Stillwater



Milstead



Cox