

when you're safely in the cellar

It's a Long Way Up

By ROBERT D. CAREY



Forming the nucleus of Coach Doyle Parrack's 1961 basketball squad are (left to right) Eddie Evans, Jerry Haddock, Stan Morrison, Warren Fouts, Harvey Chaffin, Jack Lee and Tom McCurdy.

FACING perhaps the roughest schedule in Oklahoma's basketball history, Coach Doyle Parrack's quintet is starting the 1961-62 cage season with very little to lose and much to gain.

Last year's Big Eight cellar-dwellers opened December 2 at Norman against Southern California's Big Five champions (who returned the starting five intact), followed by such stalwarts as Southern Methodist University, a vastly improved Illinois, mighty St. John's (with the same starting lineup that ranked in the top ten last year), Texas Tech (last year's Southwest Conference champs) and Colorado State (co-champs with Wyoming in the Skyline Conference). That's quite a warm-up for the pre-season Big Eight milling in Kansas City December 27-30.

If the team makes it through December and can still smile around Christmas time in Kansas City, Parrack figures to have a "respectable season."

In general the pre-season outlook calls for a considerable improvement in spite of the man-killing schedule, another strongly balanced Big Eight lineup, and loss of center Brian Etheridge and playmaker guard George Kernek (via transfer and professional baseball).

As for what happened last year when Parrack's boys were tabbed as title contenders and wound up in the basement, let's take a look:

The 1960-61 Sooners broke from the barrier in early December like Olympic sprinters, winning 8 out of their first 9 games, having only a 67-61 loss to blot their record when they went to Kansas City. There the Redmen won one and dropped two, with the loss to Iowa State only a mild sur-

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Kansas State is still the team to beat

prise, while Kansas State romped and the Sooners clouted Colorado.

But Parrack's charges lost more than two games at the tournament; they lost their winning ways for good. In the remaining three months, the team won only twice—beating Colorado again at Boulder, and belting Nebraska at Norman.

The rest was shambles. The slumping Sooners dropped 14 out of their 16 remaining games and lost their last 8 straight.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and it's easy to speculate as to what might have been, but definite factors led to the swift downfall of a potentially good team.

One November afternoon Coach Parrack took time out in his Field House office to fit these factors together.

"Starting with an 8-1 record last season," the coach said, "we met three of the best teams in the conference in our next few games, playing nationally ranked Kansas State (the eventual champions) twice and Kansas and Missouri once each.

"We lost all four, but we were right in there until the last few minutes. We led Kansas State at the half, and it was 55-55 with less than 7 minutes to go. Then we played Kansas a very good game here only to lose in the last minute by three points."

Parrack paused and searched for the right words. "When we lost several close games like that, it did something to the boys. They began to think they didn't have that certain something. You can lose one or two close ones occasionally, and shake it off, but four . . . They sort of lost their spark and spirit."

But it takes more than psychological handicaps to produce a losing season, and a close study of last year's results points up five main factors that made a loser out of a possible contender:

(1) Loss of stellar guard George Kernek by injury in January. Thereafter, Parrack was unable to find the consistent guard combination which is vital to winning basketball.

(2) Inability to come up with a smooth working offense, and five boys who could play consistent basketball as a team. Parrack experimented with new offenses and combinations, trying to plug the gap made by the loss of Kernek, all unsuccessful.

(3) Tendency of the team to commit mechanical errors at crucial moments. Three

straight times after pulling even with Kansas State, O.U. lost the ball without getting off a shot.

(4) Lapses of five or six minutes without scoring or scoring very little, while the opposition poured in the points. In a game with Kansas, the club was outscored 18-5 within one 7-minute period. Against Kansas State, the team took 17 shots from the floor in one 20-minute span, and missed them all.

(5) A habit of being too late with too little, costing several close decisions. Little Eddie Evans hit three straight buckets in the last three minutes against Iowa State, but it wasn't enough. Iowa State won, 57-56.

These factors coupled with the inconsistency of the team, its inability to play 40 minutes of good basketball, and its apparent loss of spirit doomed them to the basement, and gave Doyle Parrack his first losing season as head coach.

Parrack sums up the 1961-62 outlook this way: "We've got experience working for us this year, and this ball club in practice has shown more enthusiasm than any other team I've coached here.

"What we need is a sparkplug in there. Someone like Denny Price (cage star of a few seasons back) who used to keep the team's spirit and morale high. It helps for the students and fans to be enthusiastic too; you can always play better ball when the crowd is pulling for you."

Take the club's experience—O.U. will return eight lettermen, four juniors and four seniors—add determination and find a sparkplug, and O.U. will be hard to beat this year—but that, of course, is a tall order.

Experience will be a plus element in the 1961-62 roundball edition. The only newcomer likely to crack the starting lineup will be Farrel Johnson, a 6' 3" sophomore from Shawnee, who averaged 16.5 points per game with the freshmen last year.

Going at the other guard will be pint-sized Eddie Evans, a 5'9" junior from Oklahoma City. Evans is the number two scorer of the returning lettermen and is the fastest man on the squad. Evans' specialty is the long jump-shot. He is also a good rebounder.

Probably getting the nod at center will be Stan Morrison, a 6'7" junior from Plainview, Texas, although he may have compe-

tion from Darrel Hohmann, 6'7" Lone Wolf senior, and James Kaiser, 6'9" sophomore from Byng.

A cinch starter at one forward will be two-year monogram winner, Warren Fouts, 6'7" senior from Garber. Fouts led the team in scoring last year and rebounds well.

The other forward position remains somewhat open. Running number one at present is Jerry Haddock, a 6'5" junior from Oklahoma City, who is deadly with the one-hander from medium range. Just a step or so behind Haddock is Harvey Chaffin, 6'6" Tahlequah junior.

Two other veteran cagers may break into the starting lineup before the season gets under way. Tom McCurdy, 6'3" Purcell senior, and Jack Lee, 6'2" two-time letter winner from McAlester, can go at either forward or guard.

The remaining spots on the traveling squad will be up for grabs with perhaps one exception, Eddie Jackson, 6'10" junior from Waco, who improved in the latter part of last season.

The team is deep and should have good balance. The point drought that plagued last year's five should be broken.

In the Big Eight, Kansas State will again be the team to whip. Coach Tex Winter lost high scorers Larry Comley and Cedric Price but still has the nucleus of last year's champions that wound up fourth in the national ratings.

Oklahoma State returns three starters from last year's third place squad and will be tougher this year. They may push Kansas State for the crown.

Kansas might slump after losing Wayne Hightower and Bill Bridges, a three-time All-American. Coach Dick Harp will have to try some unseasoned hands and come up with the combination to win the big ones.

Nebraska may give the first division contenders a fight; for the first time in years they are deep in good big men at center. In addition they have a swifty guard in junior college transfer, Buddy Deckard.

Missouri, Colorado and Iowa State will dog-fight to break even in league play.

The Big Eight will have excellent balance, and the winner will probably lose once, or maybe twice. There will be some fine basketball teams in Norman this winter, and O.U. just might have a say about who's going to capture the crown.