



The Perpetual Motion Man

*basketball fans are in for a shock
when the Sooners take the court*

By PAUL GALLOWAY

Photos by John Yack

Confronted with the task of predicting Oklahoma's performance in the forthcoming basketball season, even the most clairvoyant of prophets would do best to hock his ouija board, convert his crystal ball to a paperweight and look for an easier line of work. Conceivably the Sooner club could be classified as anything from a darkhorse to a dead duck.

The one thing that is certain about the 1962-63 season—other than its uncertainty—is that it will be exciting.

The reason for the excitement as well as the uncertainty is new coach Bob Stevens and the perpetual motion system he is installing. Stevens comes to O.U. after three years as head coach of the South Carolina Gamecocks, replacing Doyle Parrack, who resigned after last season.

The Sooners will play in the same Field House this winter, run up and down the same floor and shoot for the same baskets, but everything else will be different.

Stevens stresses a quick-breaking, high-scoring, go-go-go attack, a radical change from the system of the past seven years with its emphasis on defense and slow-breaking, low-scoring offense. Stevens' approach to the game has as much similarity to Parrack's as the twist has to the tango.

The 38-year-old Stevens is an amiable and engaging person, enthusiastic about basketball and steadfastly confident in the



method he will introduce to Oklahoma fans. Hanging appropriately on the wall in his Field House office is a framed copy of The Optimist's Creed.

On his desk is a large planning book, big as a backboard. In it each day of practice is carefully planned, down to the minute. Stevens believes in organization, and the seven and a half weeks before the opening game with S.M.U. have been organized meticulously and purposefully.

The 23 varsity candidates who reported for the first practice October 15 under Stevens and his two lieutenants (Gordon Stauffer, who came with Stevens from South Carolina as varsity assistant, and Bud Conin, the freshman coach) may have thought they were out for the track team. Each day before beginning practice the team leaves the Field House to run four miles around the track under the stadium.

"I'm a firm believer that a basketball player is no better than his legs and lungs," Stevens has said. "This running program will build both and also will develop basic fundamentals at the same time. We'll win ball games in January and February because of what we do in October and November."

When the team returns to the Field House, the staff begins drills in which the emphasis once again is on the "basic fundamentals" — dribbling, passing, pivoting,

driving, shooting, rebounding, breaking, cutting and defense. There are 77 drills with such intriguing names as quick-break hustle, short shot race, 3-man pivot, flash-light dribble, outlet pass drill, leap frog, shuffle races, press-pinch, half-shell offense, rebound outlet and follow-the-leader.

Each day's workout is recorded by the coaches in a typed report, enabling Stevens to keep track of individual progress. Daily workouts consisted entirely of conditioning and drills for the first three weeks. Finally on Saturday of the third week, the varsity and the freshmen scrimmaged. The varsity won, 82-78, and Stevens was pleased with the performance of both teams. "We didn't have good execution, but it was the first time we had run full court. The results were encouraging since the varsity played in its specially-weighted practice shoes which are two pounds heavier than normal and had run four miles before the game."

Stevens realizes that the rebuilding job he faces at O.U. will not be accomplished quickly or easily. "Establishing our offense is a matter of breaking old habits and teaching new ones. An offense can't be taught in a year, or even two. I hope the people will be patient. I am no miracle worker. I know the boys won't make the switch without much time and effort. In trying to change their whole way of thinking and responding, there will be times when the boys will

over-hold the ball and revert to their old way of play. When they do, they'll come over and sit next to me."

The situation that Stevens is encountering at O.U. is much like the one he found at South Carolina in 1959. The Gamecocks had been a slow-breaking team which had staggered to a disastrous 4-20 season the year before Stevens took over. He had to begin, as he must with the Sooners, by slowly cultivating his techniques in boys accustomed to an entirely different system. South Carolina had 10-16 and 9-17 records in Stevens' first two years. Last year his team fought to a 15-13 mark, finishing 7-7 in the rugged Atlantic Coast Conference. For revitalizing the once-docile Gamecocks into birds of prey, Stevens was voted the conference's coach-of-the year, feted and fed by state civic organizations and cited by the state legislature.

The Gamecocks averaged 79 points a game last year (the 1961-62 Sooners scored 58 a game) although their tallest starter was only 6 feet 3 inches. Displaying more heart than height, they won the devotion of the South Carolina fans with their speed, hustle and fight.

It may take three years to lift the Sooners over the .500 hump and into the contender class, but Stevens has the zeal and determination to succeed. He also has what he

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calls the "best offense in the country." He developed it from the teachings of two of the great coaches in America, Pete Newell and Forrdy Anderson.

Stevens was born in Indiana, the mother lode of basketball talent. He played high school ball and enrolled at Michigan State where he played one season before being interrupted by World War II. He served as a Marine officer and platoon leader in the South Pacific. During his training before going overseas, he was assigned to the University of Michigan where he played football and basketball for a season.

After the war he returned to Michigan State and played basketball three years for Ben Van Alstein, graduating in 1949 with an A.B. in education.

Stevens accepted a job coaching basketball for the Milford, Indiana, high school where he stayed two years, finishing both with 14-8 records. Once more war interfered. Stevens returned to the Marines to fight in Korea. Upon discharge (he is a major in the Marine Reserves) he coached the 1952-53 season at Great Lakes Training Base near Chicago.

He returned to Michigan State in 1953 to get his master's degree and while there, he coached the freshman team for Newell, who later transferred to California and led that school to an NCAA championship. In 1956 Stevens became the varsity assistant to Anderson who came to Michigan State from Bradley. Stevens helped Anderson win two Big Ten championships before leaving for South Carolina.

After regenerating basketball at South Carolina, Stevens decided to accept the challenge O.U. offers. To begin with, Oklahoma's schedule is awesome. Besides the formidable Big Eight foes, the Sooners will play U.C.L.A., Southern California, Purdue, Texas Tech, Illinois, Southern Illinois, S.M.U. and St. John's.

Stevens is undaunted, however. He places his faith in the eventual, inevitable superiority of his system. "There can't help but be more plays with my offense," he says. "On the quick break we figure that any time someone is standing still, he is doing something wrong. The object is to keep the ball moving at all times and break at every opportunity. We eliminate the dribble whenever possible. We teach this by using a no-bounce ball. The boys have

to pass and make a motion toward the basket. We like to get our shot away before the defense can get organized against us. We like to go-go-go. This type of offense will provide more scoring opportunities than a slow break possibly can."

Speed and stamina are necessary if the quick break works. Since the players must be fresh as possible, Stevens substitutes freely. "More boys get to play with the quick break, and it's an unselfish offense. The guards score as much as forwards, forwards as much as centers. We never build around one individual. We give a boy a lot of freedom."

On the subject of the stall, a Stevens statement is sure to cause slow-break disciples to wince and stare in disbelief. He says, "I have never played a stall, and I can say I never will. I don't have any faith in and don't know enough about it to present it to a ball club."

He encourages fan support. Spectators are welcome at practices as well as games. Stevens has invited people to watch the weekly scrimmage sessions on Saturday mornings until the season starts. "I think

if fans attend the scrimmages, know the players and the offense, they'll enjoy the games more once the season begins."

Fans can win ball games, Stevens believes, and he is eager to see the students and alumni support the Sooners. "I think they'll see an exciting brand of basketball," he says. "We like to have fun. Because of the freedom we give them, our boys enjoy playing. I am devoted to the game and hope the enthusiasm I feel for it rubs off on the boys and in turn on the fans. I have a feeling that the fans should be entertained from the time they come to the Field House until the time they leave. I have tried to insure this through music, the preliminary freshman game, in a good halftime show, and in the best basketball we can play."

Four lettermen from last year's squad have been graduated, and six remain. They are seniors Harvey Chaffin, Eddie Evans, Jerry Haddock and Stan Morrison, and juniors Farrell Johnson and James Kaiser. Several sophomores promise to help. They are James Gatewood, Jack Young, Butch Roberts, Joe Lewis and Willie Wilson.

The Sooners will be trying to better last season's 7-17 mark, and a .500 finish would be amazing considering the schedule and the difficult assignment of learning the new attack in one season. But whatever the season holds, the Sooners, decked out in flashy new uniforms and rehearsed by flashy new coaches, are ready to start that long climb back into the winner's circle.



New Sooner basketball coach Bob Stevens gives some pointers to Eddie Evans. Stevens cuts down on the dribble by using a no-bounce practice ball and gains speed by the use of weighted shoes.