



# Gee Cly, Youse Guys

Oklahoma's great coach, Bennie Owen,  
is honored at a reunion by his '23 team

By CHARLES LONG

It had been an extremely rough practice session that day. Any minute now, they would hear the coach's whistle that would end it all. The five o'clock train had just gone by, indicating that it was time to quit for the day. It would be nice to hit the showers once again and get rid of the dirt, grime and sweat that had been accumulated. And, there were visions of crawling in bed in order to soothe away the fatigue that had come through hours of sprints, drills and body contact.

But the whistle never blew; instead came

the order to hop aboard a bus that, for some odd reason, suddenly popped up out of nowhere. Quickly, the squad of 44 exhausted and astonished men was carted out of the city limits. Now a joy ride in this heap surely seemed like a waste of time . . . but, on the other hand, it was rather relaxing for the moment.

As the disgruntled squadmen leaned back and collapsed in their seats, one of them managed to push himself up, take a deep breath and inquire, "Where are we going, Bennie?"

"You'll find out," was the calm, deliberate reply.

When the bus finally pulled to a stop, the question arose, "What are we going to do, Bennie?" And as the motion was made for the squad to get up and out of the bus, another question, "What are *you* going to do, Bennie?"

Calmly and deliberately as before, the instigator of the little journey suggested, "It's just nine miles back to Norman. I want you boys to run back all the way."

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The bus left a cloud of dust as it moved away into the sunset with only one-forty-fifth of its original cargo aboard.

This partly was the means of preparing a football team at the University of Oklahoma for its opening home game encounter with Washington University of St. Louis on October 20, 1923. The previous week, an untried Sooner eleven dropped a road game at Nebraska to the sad tune of 0-24. The time had come for a change.

The account of the game that appeared in *The Norman Transcript* on October 21 reported that O.U. defeated Washington University, 62-7, "displaying a more brilliant brand of football than has been seen here for several years. The Sooners presented a smashing, versatile attack which seldom faltered, and despite substitution of second string men, showed themselves the master of their opponents at all times except for one brief period."

Since football games are won or lost through preparedness for same, the '23 squad's cross-country jaunt before the Washington tilt may have been just the dose of salt needed to defeat the visitors by such an overwhelming margin.

Even more important than the victory that day was the inauguration of Owen Field, a modern football arena settled on a sprawling prairie in south Norman which would soon become the most exciting meeting place Oklahoma sports enthusiasts have ever known.

Forty years and some 240 Sooner football victories later, 29 members of the 1923 team returned to the O.U. campus to commemorate that inaugural occasion and honor the man who sent them running in the wake of a bus ride—Benjamin Gilbert Owen.

The story of Bennie Owen is largely synonymous with that of the University of Oklahoma itself. The two, through a 58-year partnership, have garnered enough history to fill reams of *Sooner Magazine* copy. Owen, who is now 88, came to the University in the fall of 1905, the first of 22 consecutive years as Oklahoma football coach. His record during that tenure speaks for itself: 122 wins against 54 losses and 16 ties.

Owen has never left the University. He and his wife, Nina, still live in their original home at 530 Elm, across the street from the campus. Due to an astronomical career as an athlete, coach and sportsman,

## 1923 VARSITY FOOTBALL SQUAD



Top	MEACHAM	TOLBERT	WILCOX	BROCKMAN	WHITE	MATHIAS	WOODALL	PERICK	GUFFEY	NORRIS	DURKEE	PATTERSON	WHISTLER
Middle		JOHNSON	PRICE	WOLFE	STEINBERGER	HEIDRICK'S	BRISTON	MURKIN	MORGAN		LAMB	FLEMING, C.	BOWLES
Bottom		HUNTER	SLOUGH	HARTFORD	ARBUCKLE	HAMMIST	JACKSON	MAYES	STRUEVELLE	STEINBERGER	MARIS	MURPHY	

This is the way O.U.'s football aggregation appeared when it inaugurated Owen Field in 1923. The Big Red's opener with Clemson this year was the scene of a reunion for the three coaches and all but four of the squadmen who are still living. All team members are native Sooners.

### GEE CLY, YOUSE GUYS

## Coach Owen not only developed a great also an inspiration to the many athletes

he was voted into the original National Hall of Fame in 1951.

As the 1923 team dined with Bennie on September 21, the 40th anniversary of Owen Field, Dr. G. L. Cross, O.U. president, best described what role the little, one-armed gentleman has played in the development of the University.

"He was not a classroom teacher in the usual sense of the word," Dr. Cross said, "but he did make a national reputation, teaching the value of scholarship, good sportsmanship, decency and clean living. He was the planner and developer of athletic facilities and men.

"In the face of almost overwhelming financial obstacles, he visualized, promoted and constructed practically every athletic facility that serves the University's intercollegiate and intramural sports program today. He was the motivating force which produced Owen Field with its original 30,000-seat stadium, now expanded to accommodate more than 60,000. He is responsible also for the Field House (his football players cleared the area of an orchard which

grew there so that construction could get under way), the men's swimming pool, the baseball field and bleachers, the concrete tennis courts and many other playing fields.

"He found a way of financing the purchase of the 57 acres upon which for many years the University operated a nine-hole golf course. He was the architect and builder of the course. The University's new track and field facilities now occupy a part of this and the remainder is used for intramurals and for parking during football games. In the future, buildings will be constructed there.

"Of course, it is well-known that Bennie gave us our first big-time athletic program. His teams were winners.

"More important than the development of athletes is the development of men. The members of Bennie's teams were good students. His first all-victorious team at the University was the team of 1911. Every man of that squad except one, who later got a law degree from a Texas school, earned a degree from the University of Oklahoma. Five of the players completed



Here is how they looked when reunited 40 years later. Team members are (top row, from left) Richards, Brockman, Mathias, Hunter, Carroll, Durkee, Patterson and Whistler; (middle row) McBride, Tolbert, Johnson, Bristow, Clint Steinberger, Morgan, Wolfe, Norris, Bowles and Lamb, and (bottom row) Walden, Fleming, McFadden, Hickman, Boatright, Arbuckle, Hardwick, Jackson, Clark Steinberger, McDermott and Bennie Owen.

## athletic program at the University, but he was and students who knew him during his coaching career

two degrees each, and two others completed three degrees each. Five became members of Phi Beta Kappa. It was the same story with the other great teams that he coached."

Dr. Cross, in concluding his speech, turned to look at Owen and said, "Bennie . . . I will tell you now what I told you back in 1947: namely, that if one-half of the University employees one-half your age had had through the years one-half of your imagination, ability and drive, the University would be twice as far along as it is. It has been a privilege to have your friendship through the years."

Bennie Owen loved to win, but he stressed fair play and clean sportsmanship above anything else. In 1923, when O.U. was preparing to meet Nebraska, Owen gave his charges a report on the great Cornhusker back, Roland Locke, who at that time was playing with an injured knee.

"This man is a great athlete," Owen said. "If he's up and running, knock him down the best way you can. But, if he's down on the ground, arch your body over that knee." And Owen demonstrated such. "If I catch

you trying to hurt that knee while he is down on the ground, you'll never play another down of football at Oklahoma." This typifies the kind of coach—and man—he was.

Actually, Owen, the coach of action, was a man of few words; but his patented game cries of "Murder! Murder!" (his most profane epithet), "Don't let that man get behind you" and "Gee Cly, youse guys" will never be forgotten by those who played under him. The '23 team remembers them well.

There were other memories, of course—such as running sprints along Lindsey Street after dark and getting back to the dressing room in time to hear the train whistle at 6:30 p.m., earning anywhere from \$10 to \$20 a month for sweeping out the old gym or washing dishes at a dormitory or firing a furnace at one of the school buildings (athletic scholarships were practically unheard of in those days) and being able to pace yourself during each game so you could play 60 minutes of rugged football.

The 1923 team members also remember gathering and carrying their own equipment on road trips. The helmet, shoulder pads and uniform of an individual were all thrown in a neat little pile and strapped together by a belt. A visiting player could be seen lugging it over his shoulder almost everywhere he went. After a game, these bundles, which would then be mixed with mud or clay, might easily weigh up to 100 pounds, resulting in many a broken strap. The belt business really boomed!

Also remembered were individuals, such as Bon Tolbert, who, while stationed at Fort Sill with the Army, received weekend passes to play in the football games. Tolbert was the only man in O.U. history who earned an athletic letter without being enrolled in school or living in Norman. There was the unforgettable fullback, Obie Bristow, who at the start of each game would toss his helmet to the sidelines so as to better buck through opposing lines with head bowed.

Dale Arbuckle, Sooner athletic director

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## anecdotes like the one about Obie Bristow and the bathtub enlivened proceedings at the Saturday banquet

during World War II, recalled the day when Bristow, only a few hours before a road game, was thrown in jail for changing price tags on unmentionables in a ladies' apparel store. "How'd you like to see your wife in that for a \$1.98?" the mischievous

Bristow laughed, pointing out a bathtub to a perplexed customer.

Quarterback Eddie Johnson was reminded of the time when he intercepted a pass and returned it 95 yards to set a new O.U. record. Johnson, thoroughly exhausted by this unexpected feat, dragged himself to the sidelines and fell at the feet of Coach Owen.

"Eddie, I believe you're a little anemic," Owen remarked, calmly looking downward. Johnson, the Indian blood beginning to boil within him, replied, "No! I'm a Chickasaw!"

The idea of holding a team reunion at O.U. blossomed about four years ago, and under the leadership of Johnson and former guard Cliff Bowles, it was met with great enthusiasm by all of the living squad members.

The names of the 32 squadmen still living follow with their home towns. Their present addresses are listed in parentheses:

Captain Pete Hammert, Anadarko (Anadarko); Dale Arbuckle, Enid (Oklahoma City); Lloyd C. Boatright, Frederick (Oklahoma City); Cliff Bowles, Norman (Houston, Texas); Ed Brockman, Tulsa

(Colorado Springs, Colorado); John Carroll, Muskogee (Tulsa); Robert Durkee, Norman (Houston, Texas);

Lloyd Fleming, Hugo (Tulsa); Roy Guffey, Shawnee (Dallas); Josie Hickman, Altus (Altus); Bernard Hunter, Oklahoma City (Oklahoma City); Eddie Johnson, Norman (Amarillo, Texas); Dr. Alvin Jackson, Mangum (Oklahoma City); Roy "Goat" Lamb, Ardmore (Big Spring, Texas); Charles Mathias, Norman (Tulare, California); D. B. Morgan, Tulsa (Cheyenne, Wyoming);

Dr. C. Alfred McFadden, Weleetka (Abilene, Texas); Floyd McBride, Oklahoma City (Ada); Granville Norris, Laverne (Muskogee); William Patterson, Eufaula (Seminole); Charles D. Pokorney, Lawton (Oklahoma City); A. H. Richards, Enid (Oklahoma City); Herbert Schaeffer, Tulsa (Denver, Colorado); Clark Steinberger, Chickasha (Houston, Texas); Clint Steinberger, Chickasha (Houston, Texas);

Charles Thompson, Waurika (Byers, Colorado); James B. Thompson, Pauls Valley (Pauls Valley); Dewey H. Walden, Marietta (Tulsa); Rex Whistler, Norman (Norman); William G. Wolfe, Oklahoma City (Oklahoma City), and Loyal Woodall, Helena (Helena).

The 12 deceased members of the squad are Glen Hartford, Oklahoma City; Earl "Yienie" Hendricks, Oklahoma City; Clyde Fleming, Norman; Harold Maris, Ponca City; Joe "Skunk" Mayes, Pryor; P. E. Murchison, Muskogee; Jim Pennick, Altus; King Price, Fairview; Elmer "Peanuts" Slough, Ardmore; Edward Struevelle, Tulsa; John "Firpo" Wilcox, and Lazelle White, Drumright.

The starting backfield during the Owen Field inaugural game was Eddie Johnson at quarterback, Hendricks and Hammert at halfbacks and Bristow at fullback. They were capably backed up by Slough at quarterback, Arbuckle and Hunter at halves and Lamb at full.

Charley Mathias probably came as far as anybody for the 1963 reunion, traveling all the way from California. He is the fa-



Roy "Goat" Lamb of Big Spring, Texas, admires the gold spittoon presented to him by Granville Norris as a door-prize at the recent reunion.



Coach Bennie Owen receives a hearty round of applause from his former pupils and their wives.

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## Conversation Piece

How were Homecoming ceremonies observed when you were at O.U.?

MRS. JOHN ALDEN LOVE  
(Nadine Norton, '52ba)  
Shawnee



MRS. LOVE—When I first went to O.U., Homecoming was a colorful affair with all of the floats, house decorations and parades. I remember quite well stuffing crepe paper into chicken wire as we worked for days preparing for the Homecoming weekend. At our sorority house, part of us would work on the house decorations, and the rest of us would work on a float. This all took a lot of time and hard work, but it was fun. Later, the parades and floats were eliminated, and now there are no more house decorations. When I went back to Homecoming three or four years later, there was nothing to see. I miss it, actually. The big house decorations were beautiful. It just doesn't seem as exciting as it used to be. Dad's Day, Band Day and Homecoming just seem to be days with names now. But, it is still fun to go back and visit the school and sorority house during those weekends.

**MARRIAGES:** Caralee Hemphill, '63bs, Norman, became the bride of Harold M. Gay Jr. in August at a ceremony in the Hemphill home. Mr. and Mrs. Gay have established a home in Oklahoma City.

Ellen C. Hughes, '63ed, became the bride of David Kent Williams, '61bus, '63Law, in a ceremony in the First Presbyterian Church, Ardmore, on July 20.

Paula Gene LeFan, '63ba, was married to Carl Nelson Stover, '63bs, July 14 in St. John's Episcopal Church, Norman. They will make their home at Holloman Air Force Base, Alamogordo, New Mexico, where Stover is stationed.

Anne Elizabeth Gruenig, '63ed, was married to Charles Goodwin White Jr., '63bus, on July 27 in All Souls Episcopal Church, Oklahoma City. Mr. and Mrs. White are living in Camden, Arkansas.

Genalea Bryson became the bride of Paul D. Black, '63bus, on July 20 in the First Baptist Church of Noble. Mr. and Mrs. Black will establish their home in Oklahoma City.

Sherry Lee Owen, '63bs, Tulsa, became the bride of James Calvin Atkins Jr., '62bus, Shreveport, Louisiana, July 13. The couple will reside in California where the bridegroom is a first lieutenant in the Marines.

Elaine Averett Word, '63bs, and Granville C. Knight Jr. were married October 5 in the First Baptist Church, Bartlesville. The couple lives in Houston, Texas.

Mary Jane Pemberton, '63ba, and John Gooch Campbell were married August 10 in the sanctuary of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Oklahoma City. Campbell is attending the O.U. School of Medicine.

Rosemary Frances Riddle, '63ba, was married to Robert Lee Simpson III, '61bus, in the McFarlin Memorial Methodist Church, Norman, July 20. Mr. and Mrs. Simpson are now living in Oklahoma City.

Linda Jean Childs, '63ba, became the bride of James Frederick Fellingham August 17 in Rose Chapel of Boston Avenue Methodist Church, Tulsa. They are living in Oklahoma City. Fellingham is a law student at the University.

Kathryn Fay Chapman, '63ed, became the bride of William Kenneth Hawkins, '63bus, August 10 in the Trinity Baptist Church, Norman. Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins live in Dallas, Texas.

## Gee Cly

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ther of Bob Mathias, former Olympic champion. He and four other members of the '23 squad now are physicians. Two team members made Phi Beta Kappa.

Despite the historic triumph over Washington, the 1923 team finished the season with a 3-5 record. One of those losses came at the hands of Kansas, 7-3, in the new stadium's muddy dedication game. The losers' three points were registered on a 45-yard field goal by Bowles.

"We didn't have too good a record," remarked Bowles, "but how could we? We didn't have anybody from Texas! We sure were good students though."

Naturally, O.U. football did not steal all of the headlines in 1923. For example, Dempsey knocked out Firpo at the Polo Grounds that year. In Oklahoma, Governor Walton was impeached despite the fact he called out the national guard to

prevent the vote on it, and the *Oklahoma Daily* reported that enrolment at O.U. was "3,192 and still climbing."

But the manner in which former players and coaches spoke at their reunion, it was Bennie Owen's ability to produce winning teams and good athletes that always stood in the forefront of their hearts and minds.

Hugh McDermott, captain of the 1918 team and coach under Owen in 1923, said that he can easily recall the days when "ballplayers shaved at home instead of on television." About Owen, he said:

"I have been happily associated with Bennie for 48 years. I know of no man who made the football Hall of Fame with fewer men or as inferior equipment. Our hats are off to you Bennie. You taught us to play better than we were, and you will always be in our hearts like the master that you are."

Bristow said although he never played on a championship team, his memories are of a team of champions.

"We were champions led by a kind and gentle coach," he said. "This was a coach who taught us, not by words, but by precept and example. It is with little wonder we will always remember Bennie Owen."

"Bennie, when you selected us to play on your team, it was an honor," said Ed Bockman. "On or off the field, you were always known as a perfect gentleman."

The remembrances of days past and the tributes to the little giant were climaxed when Ed Johnson, Owen's next-door neighbor from 1912 to 1924, presented his coach with a handsome plaque which will hold a prominent spot in the "O" Club.

When it came time for the honored man himself to say a few words, Owen, trying to hold back nostalgic tears, appeared speechless. Finally, he was able to utter:

"Gee Cly, youse guys!"

And with that, the entire aggregation adjourned to watch O.U. defeat Clemson in the house that Bennie built.

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