

The Little Round Man Is Ready

Coach Gomer Jones faces his first season with a spirited, veteran squad

By PAUL GALLOWAY

WELL before the season's first kickoff, the Oklahoma Sooners had been picked by practically every football forecaster to be one of the nation's top three teams by the time the season's final gun sounds. The encouraging thing about such prognoses is that every once in awhile they turn out to be right.

The experts were not bothered a bit by the fact that OU would be playing under a rookie head coach. Of course, referring to Gomer Thomas Jones (*below*) as a rookie coach is like describing Sophia Loren as an Italian woman. It's technically correct, but it doesn't tell the whole story. Jones—the best known, most respected assistant coach in the country during his 17 years at the University—has a distinguished record and a well-earned reputation as a successful football strategist and innovator. He is the author of two books on football. Twenty All-American linemen have blossomed at Norman under his tutelage. The Oklahoma 5-4 defense has had a profound influence on modern football. His disciplined, aggressive lines have performed with chilling, consistent proficiency through the years. Jones is a pro, and Oklahoma players were delighted with his selection as head man early this year.

Jones inherits a powerful, experienced squad, but the *In September it's not easy to catch a head coach smiling.*

little round man has been reluctant to agree with predictions that the Sooners will finish first, second or even third in the final polls. He foresees Oklahoma as fourth—in the Big Eight, that is—behind Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska. It's possible, but so is Ringo Starr in a crew cut.

The Sooners have a lot going for them. First and foremost is their experience. Twenty-eight lettermen, 18 of whom are seniors, will give the team a large, poised nucleus. The seniors have played on two good teams—both were 8-2 in the regular season. Second, the spirit will be a factor in the Sooners' favor. The attitude and enthusiasm has never been better. The players are eager to play well for Jones. They want to give him a good beginning.

Then there's Jim Grisham, shown on the opposite page as he ran against OSU last year. The six-foot, two-inch senior is the best fullback in the nation and a key to the Big Red's fortunes. If he can stay well, he will set a school career rushing record. In his two previous seasons Number 45 has rushed for 1,572 yards in 300 carries. He is 548 yards away from Clendon Thomas' record of 2,120 yards. In the final game of last year he ran for 218 yards against our country cousins, the unselfish OSU Cowboys, and established a single game rushing record. A healthy Grisham is vital to a successful season. OU's offense relies heavily on the 205-pound fullback, who is five-yards-and-a-cloud-of-dust all by himself. Watching Grisham is a delight. He has magnificent balance and an uncanny ability to slide off a tackle and drive on with a tremendous second effort. 1964 should be his best year.

The Sooner line is another reason for optimism. The first two units play both offense and defense and are composed of 12 veterans and two sophomores, Jim Riley, third largest man on the squad at 238, who plays guard on the alternate unit, and Nehemiah Flowers, alternate left end.

After talking about the experience and spirit, Jim Grisham and the seven pillars of power who make up each of the two starting lines, one enters areas where answers do not come so quickly and so surely. The quarterback question is one such area. The defensive secondary is another. And then there are some weaknesses which plagued the team last year which could rear their heads again this year. First, what about quarterback? Mike Ringer was the choice last year and the choice seemed to be a good one. After leading OU over Clemson and Southern Cal, he injured his elbow in a freak accident and sat out the rest of the season. The team was run by Bobby Page for most of the remainder of the schedule. The leading candidates for quarterback are again—from left to right in the picture on page 12—Norman Smith, John Hammond, Bobby Page, Tommy Pannell and Mike Ringer. All are lettermen. After a week of practice before school began, Pannell was taken out of the picture by being shifted to right halfback. Ringer again seemed to be the most effective with Ham-

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Keeping pace with the Jones boys won't be easy

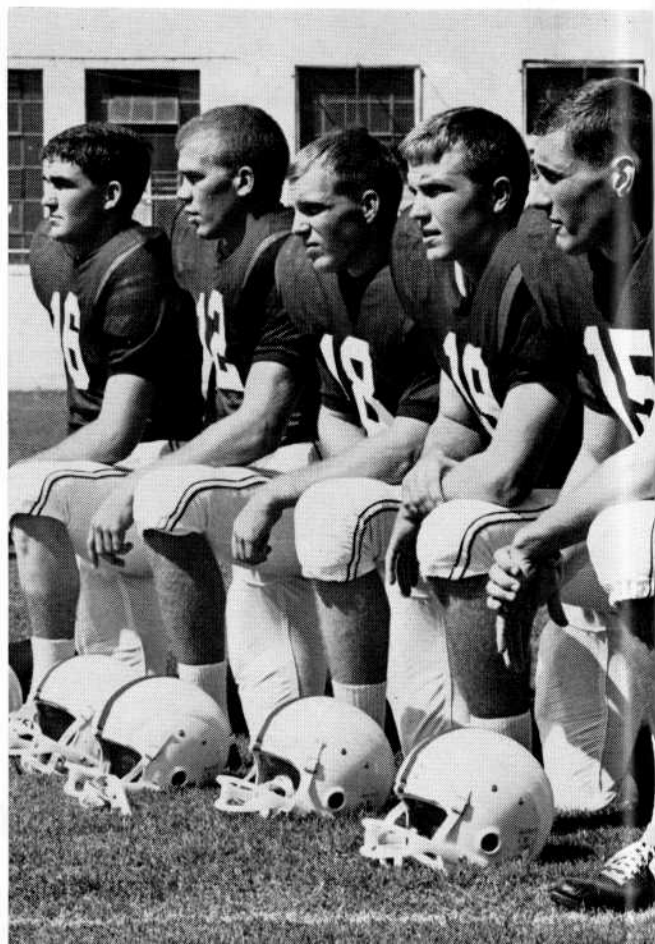
mond and Smith pushing each other for an alternate spot. Hammond throws better than Smith, is better on defense and held an edge going into the season opener. Page will probably play very little. None of the quarterbacks are Roger Staubachs with the ball, and the Sooner air game doesn't appear to be as strong as it must be to finish the year undefeated. Last year opposing teams stacked their defenses against the run and dared the Sooners to hurt them with passes. The Sooners didn't. It may take Ringer some time to overcome the long layoff; if he takes too long, it may be too late. The defensive secondary looks better than it did last year at this time. Charles Mayhue returns as a corner back. There is no more dedicated athlete on the team. He plays to win, and a competitor like the senior Mayhue will greatly help the two sophomores who team with him. Eugene Ross at the other corner back has come along fast, is sure to make mistakes but is being counted on to develop quickly. Safety is the lanky Bill Thomas who has shown an aptitude for defense. Senior David Voiles along with Garrett or McAdams, backs the line as he has done so capably the past two years. Offensive halfbacks are plentiful and leave little to be desired. Converted full-back Larry Brown is powerful and quick for short bursts from his left half slot but is not considered a breakaway threat. Lance Rentzel *can* hit the home run, and he's stronger this year, weighing 211 but still elusive. Larry Shields, Wes Skidgel, Jon Running and Pannell will furnish extra moxie to the halfback crew. And there are a batch of sophomores who could see action, among them Ben Hart, Stan Crowder, James Jackson, Boots Bagby and Bobby Robinson. Jones will use an offensive backfield, a defensive unit and a swing backfield which can play both ways. The running game is as strong as last year when the Big Red was fourth in the nation, but the passing game is still doubtful. If it can come through, it'll be rainbows and roses. This is predominantly the same team, however, which finished second in the nation last year, behind Clemson, in fumbles lost with 25. It's the same team which lay down and died in the Cotton Bowl. It's the same team which allowed 18 touchdowns and five field goals in 1963. It's the team which was woefully weak in the kicking game, allowing several long punt and kickoff returns. One Sooner field goal was blocked and returned 72 yards for a touchdown. If the Sooners live up to the great expectations the fans and the experts have for them, these Achilles heels must be healed.

The Sooners will find no solace in the schedule. There will be no time to experiment, no room for error. Pop Ivy, former player and coach for OU, now a scout in the National Football League, warned his friends to keep their money

in their pockets after seeing Texas practice in September. The Longhorns will be as tough as ever; don't let the graduation of Duke Carlisle's crowd raise your hopes too high. And Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska could stop any Oklahoma dreams of glory. Kansas returns 16 of its top 22 men, Missouri 14 plus Johnny Roland. Nebraska was hit more heavily by graduation but will be strong. They can field a veteran starting eleven, and quarterback Fred Duda is a worthy successor to Dennis Claridge. Thank goodness for Kansas State even though Coach Doug Weaver predicts the Wildcats will surprise people this fall. Maybe they'll play in sandals or something. Oklahoma State will likely peak at the pregame coin toss. Colorado is growing stronger but is still a season or two away. Iowa State will continue to give us fits—for a quarter or so.

Preseason predictions are risky. Too much can depend on good luck, a lack of injuries, the important ingredients of morale and desire which are themselves often unpredictable and variable. The Sooners are loaded, and the biggest worry all year may be whether to call heads or tails at the coin toss; but a key injury, a bad day, a resulting letdown, one play can cause a chain reaction which could lead to a less than successful season. The unpredictability of sport accounts largely for its appeal. That's why some forecasters could probably do better throwing darts blindfolded. Some predictions can be made without reservation: the Sooners will be well coached, the stadium will be well filled, the fans will be well pleased. And the Big Red may climb to heady heights in the top ten.

One of these young men will be the Sooner quarterback.



The Dallas OU Club is sponsoring the annual Beat Texas dance for alumni which begins at 9 p.m. Friday, Oct. 9 at the Sheraton Hotel ballroom. Table reservations for eight or more. Cost is \$8 per person which includes chasers, tips and midnight breakfast. Proceeds go to the club scholarship fund. Write Box 1321, Dallas. At the Colorado game alumni are invited to a dinner-dance Friday, Oct. 30 at 7:30 p.m. at the Denver Petroleum Club. Cost is \$6 per person. Send reservations to Pleas Stringer, 406 Johnson Bldg., Denver or Howard Frank, 1127 Willow St., Denver.