

IT IS A VERY GOOD YEAR

The best wrestling team in Tommy Evans' splendid coaching career, and probably OU's best team ever, is pinning its way to an NCAA title

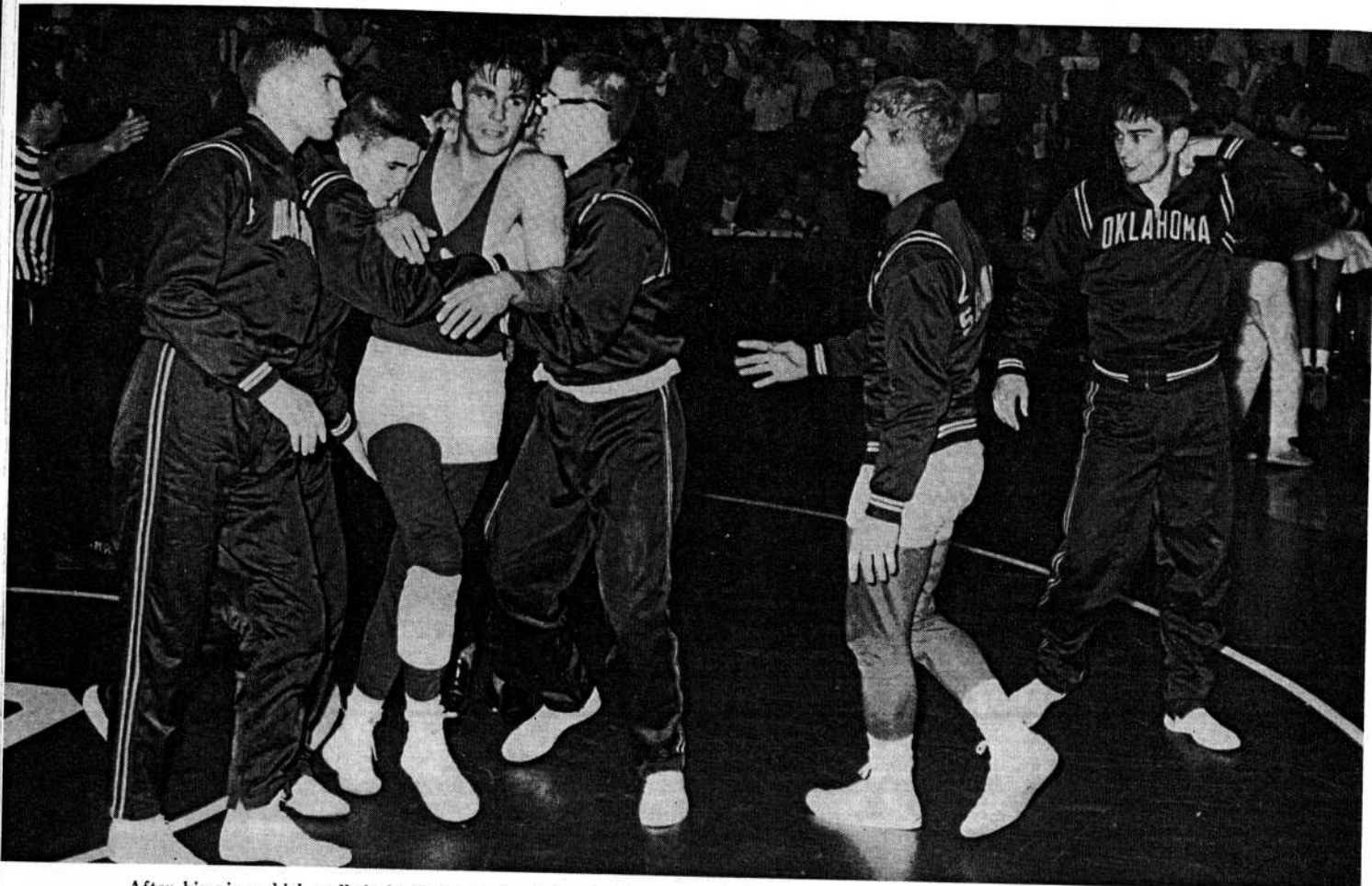
You don't have to twist Coach Tommy Evans' arm to get him to talk about his wrestlers. His total readiness to discourse on the 1965-66 outfit is understandable, for it's the best team the University has had on a mat in years, probably its best team ever. "It's certainly the best team I've coached," says Evans, who has had two national championship teams and two runner-ups in his five years here. "I thought the 1952 team on which I wrestled was a very good one and the 1957 and 1960 teams were outstanding, but this is the best balanced, best conditioned, most aggressive team

Continued on the next page

Happiness is snapping Oklahoma State's 84-match string, 17-12.

The intensity of an OU-OSU match taxes the emotions of even the most impassive, disinterested spectator—for example, Coach Tommy Evans.





After his pin, which pulled the Sooners ahead for the first time, 11-9, Lam is mobbed by teammates Stanley, Wells, Sager, Clery and Rice.

I've seen at the University."

This blend of balance, conditioning and aggressiveness along with a generous quantity of ability has led the Sooners to a 16-1 dual season and a co-favorite's role in the national championship at Ames, Iowa, Mar. 24-26. The title will be won by OU or its perennial rival OSU, which has an equally fine squad. Iowa State, the host team, has an outside chance at surprising its two powerful conference companions in the NCAA tournament, but it's probable that the 1966 trophy will end up in Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma-Oklahoma State squads are as equally balanced as they have been in years, and the two duals this year must be ranked with the athletic classics between the two schools. The annual home-and-home meetings have been appropriately, though tiresomely, dubbed the "bedlam series," and they do share common ground with political convention demonstrations, Latin American revolutions and cell block riots.

The 1965-66 series was tense, even, and beautifully wrestled, the ultimate

in the collegiate sport. In the first dual at Stillwater, OSU continued their five-year dominance with a life-shortening 15-14 win, rallying to take the final two bouts after Ruth and Lam had switched weights and put OU ahead with a pin and a decision. OSU's Harlow gave away 70 pounds in his stirring 4-1 upset of the Sooners' Sharpe in the heavyweight clincher. OSU won five bouts (130, 137, 152, 177 and heavy). OU prevailed at 123, 145, 160 and 167.

At the second meeting in Norman on Feb. 12, OU went with Sager and Stanley at 137 and 145, replacing Al-Karaghoulis and Haxel. For the first time in state history, the sell-out was televised, by WKY-TV in Oklahoma City.

The archaic OU Field House was packed an hour before the first bout; other thousands nervously watched "Get Smart," awaiting the television coverage at 8. Finally the voice of Ross Porter informed the TV audience that the Sooners would momentarily attempt to end OSU's record string of 84 duals without a loss (two ties).

In the first bout, Rice, who had shut out OSU's Hatta in Stillwater, was decisively, 9-3, by Grady Sells. Upset number one. Uetake handled Clery handily at 130, 10-4. No upset. At 137, however, Sager put hope in Sooner hearts by beating Gene Davis, 8-6. Sager had never beaten Davis before. Upset number two. (Sooners trail 3-6.) Confidence bloomed as Stanley set out for Cowboy Jim Rogers, who dominated the former NCAA champ, 9-4, beating him at his own takedown game. Upset number three. (Score: 9-3, OSU.) Now came the pivotal 152 bout between Reding and Wells. Reding had barely beat Wells at Stillwater, and an OSU victory would decide the match. Wrestling beautifully, Wells nailed Reding with a double leg takedown with 29 seconds remaining and hung on for a 4-2 win. (9-6, Cowboys). The customarily vocal, peripatetic Cowboy coach, Myron Rodrick, became hushed and still, and one could sense the coming victory. Lam was next at 160, and he drove the crowd mad by pinning his opponent with 19 seconds left in the bout. The

five points for the pin made it 11-9, Sooners. Ruth followed with a masterful exhibition, 6-0, although the Cowboy was able to avoid a fall. (Sooners 14-9). Harlow beat Mickish, 11-4, setting the stage for the heavyweight clincher. Sharpe dominated Ron Gabbett, 7-1, to avenge his Stillwater loss and give OU its sweetest victory of the year, 17-12. However, the national rankings, released two weeks later, still placed OSU in the number one position, with OU second, Iowa State third. (OU beat Iowa State, 23-5; OSU won, 22-12).

One of the season's two major rule changes aided the Sooners. The addition of a ninth weight, altering the former 137-147-157-167 weight progression to 137-145-152-160-167, allowed another wrestler in the middle weights where OU is strongest. The effect of the other rule change, making all takedowns worth two points (last year the first was two, the succeeding one point), was negligible.

Another factor in the team's success has been the splendid performances of two sophomores and a senior transfer. In sniffing the air for the sweet smell of success before the season began, Evans pointed out that the difference between a fair year and a fragrant one was directly related to the ability shown by Bryan Rice and Wayne Wells, two baby-faced sophs from Oklahoma City's John Marshall High School, and Duke transfer Luke

Sharpe, Checotah heavyweight. These three, all potential national champs, have given cohesion and balance to an already solid squad of veterans.

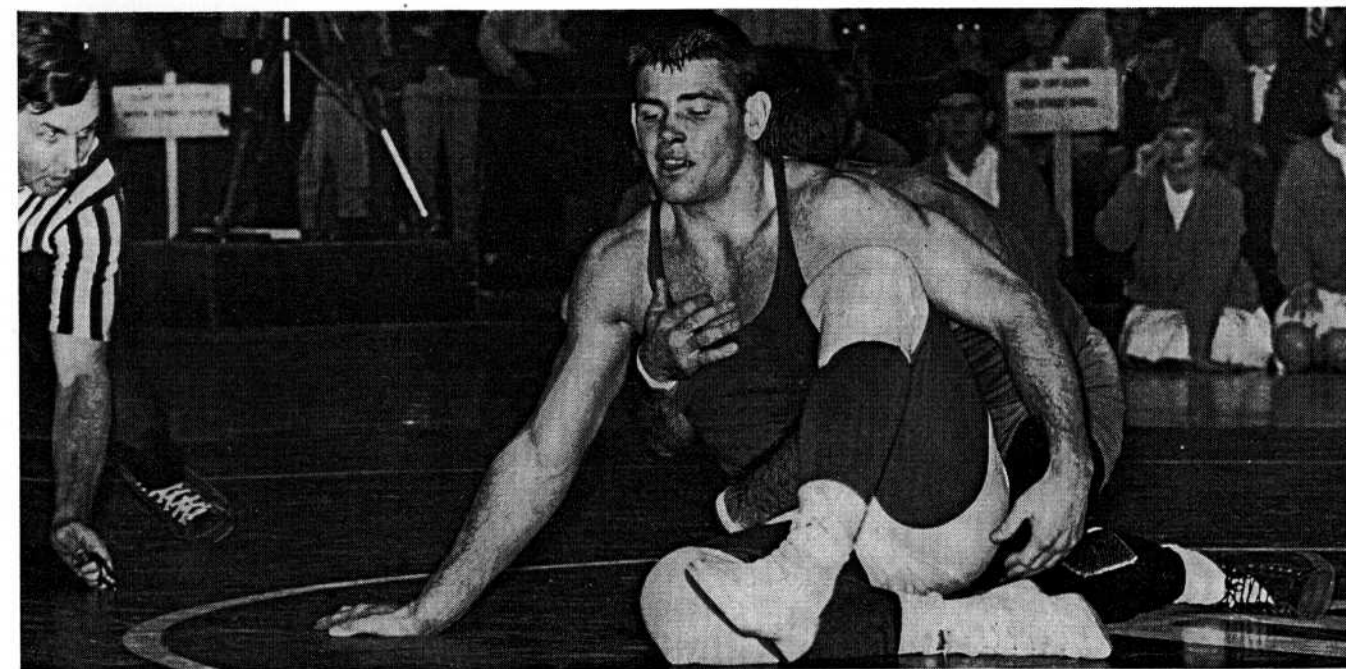
This year's team tied the school record of 43 pins by the close of the dual season and will undoubtedly become the best pinners in history after the conference and national championships. OU is the pin capital of wrestling, contrasting with rival OSU, the Hertz of wrestling, which champions defensive, counter-wrestling tactics. Usually lagging in depth and balance, OU has always had to try harder, and the penchant for the pin has enabled the Sooners to win the national tournaments they have. The proponent of aggressive wrestling, Evans must again have the extra points from falls if the Sooners are to win at Ames, for they will be giving away considerable advantage to the Pokes at the two weights, 115 and 191, that are added to year-end tournaments. Unless Rice decides to go at 115, which is unlikely, OU will not compete at that class, while OSU has national champ Hatta returning. At 191 OU will go with junior Tony Bennett, who wrestled heavyweight last year, and OSU can enter Bill Harlow, second at 177 last year. OU has to overcome this edge with falls to win the title. They can, if no injury to a key performer like Ruth, Wells, or Lam occurs.

The team:

123—Rice (14-3, 6 pins) has enjoyed a

noteworthy debut and is among the top three in his weight in the nation. Could go all the way. 130—Dave Clery (4-3, 3 pins), a transfer from Pittsburgh, has been hampered by injuries and has not wrestled at his potential. Two of his losses were to undefeated OSU great, Uetake of Japan, which Myron Roderick has annexed as the 51st state. Curtis Bradford (5-2-1) backs up Clery capably in what is perhaps OU's weakest weight. 137—Mike Sager (6-0, 2 pins), a 1964 NCAA champ who suffered a lackluster season last year, has shown flashes of his sophomore glitter and is a contender for a national crown. Ismail Al-Karaghoulis (5-3-3, 1 pin) of Iraq wrestled the first half of the season before Sager returned to form. 145—Jerry Stanley (4-1), another NCAA champ, became eligible second semester and beat out a fine junior, Dickie Haxel (8-0-2, 2 falls). Stanley is a great takedown wrestler, has yet to get a collegiate pin, and with OSU's Rogers is the title favorite, although the Cowboy beat him in the OU-OSU dual. 152—Wells (16-1, 7 falls) promises to be one of Sooner greats, is a favorite at the NCAA, avenged his only defeat against OSU's Reding with a key victory in the second dual. 160—Lam (17-0, 5 pins) is winningest Sooner ever, was third in NCAA as a sophomore, second last year, barring injury will win this year. 167—Greg Ruth (16-0-1, 8 falls), a silky smooth 1965 NCAA champ, and mechanically best in the nation, is as close to a cinch as there is at NCAA. 177—Roger Mickish (13-4, 6 falls) is a superb wrestler who has had to compete a weight higher than he should for the past two years because of Ruth. He was fourth in NCAA last year, will do well to finish that high again in particularly strong field. *Heavy*—Sharpe (15-1, 3 pins) is 6-6, 250 pounds; Evans calls him the best conditioned heavyweight he has seen. Not pudgy despite size, strong contender for national title.

As the television camera watches, Wells struggles to escape from Reding in the key match of the victory over OSU. He did and won, 4-2.



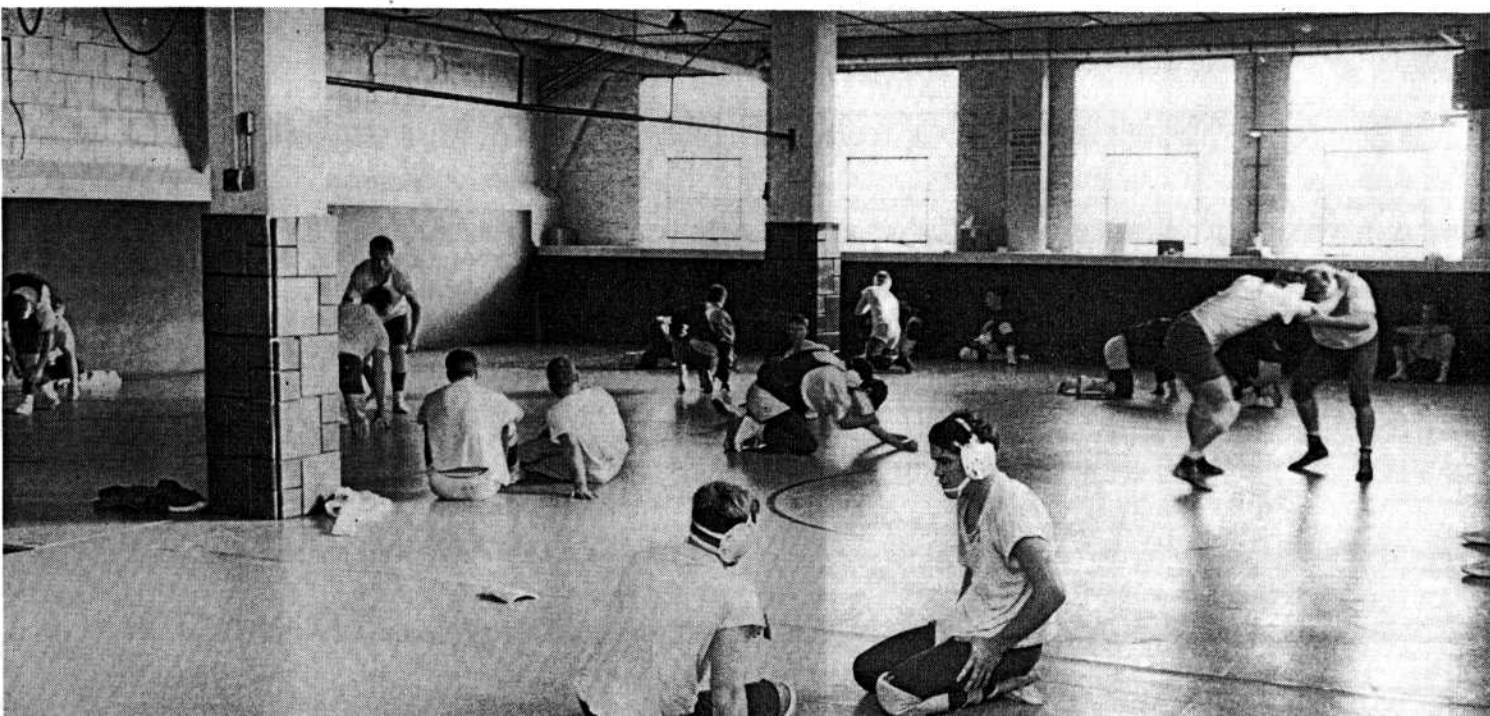
Behind the glitter of victory are gruelling hours of preparation

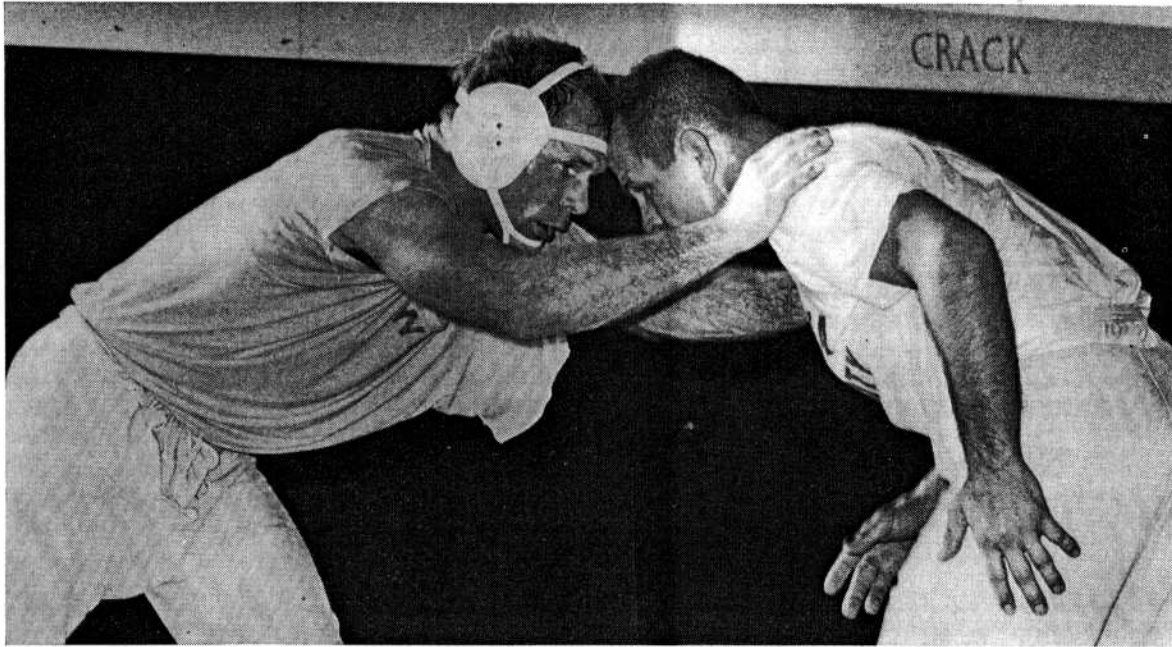
The season begins in September for the wrestler. From the first week of classes, sizeable chunks of his afternoons and weekends are spent honing his body into the condition the sport demands. There are cross-country runs sprinkled with lung-searing sprints, a strenuous spectrum of calisthenics—pullups, pushups, situps—and dozens of punishing runs up the steps of the stadium. But in a large, stark room above the football dressing area in the southwest corner of the stadium is where the action is. Here the wrestler sharpens his technique, refines his art. Its floor almost entirely covered by drab grey, spongy mats and smelling of stale sweat, the barny chamber has been the scene of legendary ranking matches witnessed only by a privileged few, a sanctum of private toil. On its walls are larger-than-life photos of OU's national champions and neatly painted, uninspired aphorisms: "Respect the Other Fellow." "Quitters Never Win, Winners Never Quit." In a sport unsurpassed, perhaps unequalled, in stamina, strength, personal discipline, and skill required in its execution, the University of Oklahoma wrestler is the foremost practitioner of the aggressive, go-for-the-fall philosophy, but he pays for his fleeting moments of public recognition with hours of gruelling practice.

OU's wrestling teams are developed in this barnlike chamber tucked away in a corner of the stadium above the football dressing room. Some of the nation's fiercest wrestling matches have occurred here before only a few spectators.



Ruth pulls on his sweat clothes after two hours of calisthenics and prolonged wrestling. Fellow wrestler is "Sam" Al-Karaghoul, a 137-pounder from Iraq.

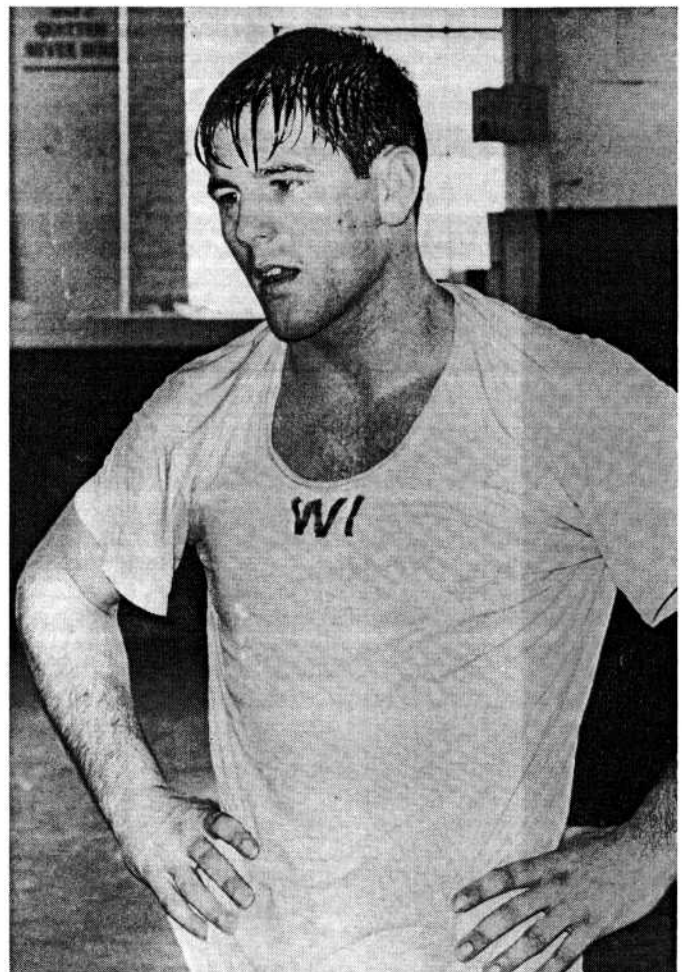




Evans, still in excellent shape, wrestles Ruth. Two years ago the OU coach could outwrestle everyone on the squad. "Except Ruth," he admitted, "but he doesn't know it." One of the best pairings in practice these days is a Ruth-Lam donnybrook.

Ruth & Lam—the dynamic duo of a star-studded squad

Bill Lam and Greg Ruth are the most consistently brilliant members of a superbly balanced team studded throughout with outstanding wrestlers, bona fide stars of the first order. (There are three former national champs in the nine-man lineup; seven could win an NCAA title this year.) Their styles, though contrasting in extreme, are equally devastating. If they were quarterbacks, Lam, the 160-pounder, could be compared with the scrambling, Fran Tarkenton type with Ruth operating in the classic drop-back, Johnny Unitas mode. Lam, unbeaten and hardly pressed in 17 matches (and five pins), uses his magnificent condition as a weapon, wearing his opponent down with crowd-stirring hustle and desire. Going into the conference tourney with 52 career wins, he is a cinch to break Wayne Baughman's school record of 53 victories and is a favorite for a national title. An Olympian, Ruth has pinned his man in half of his 16 wins, marred only by a draw early in the season. Watching Ruth, a wrestler of consummate skill, grapple with his opponent is like watching a spider entertain a fly. He should repeat as an NCAA champion at 167 pounds.



Bone-tired and soaked with perspiration, Lam ends a day of workouts. In the morning he and the rest of the team will run three miles before breakfast.