

YESTERDAY

Something to tell the grandchildren about

A decade ago, our best eleven was king of football. Enjoy reminiscing about that team

By CHARLES LONG

In his recent speeches to alumni groups, Jim Mackenzie likes to tell how he imagines this year's schedule came about. "I can just see Bud and Gomer lounging around, giggling and laughing, after that great 1956 season. 'Sure, we'll play anybody. Let's take on the world. Why not play Notre Dame and Oregon in 1966?'"

Naturally, his predecessors were far too reserved to make such remarks, but Mackenzie, who doesn't exactly look upon the schedule he inherited as opportune, isn't exactly wrong either with this bit of hindsight.

Looking back through the fabulous Wilkinson-Jones era, we who were fortunate enough to be there still enjoy reminiscing about the 1956 season. Wilkinson had fielded great teams before, including national champions in 1950 and 1955, but the consensus holds firm today that the '56 team was the greatest.

And this isn't just loose talk coming from a bunch of die-hard alumni. From coast to coast, the word got around that one of the best football teams ever, had been assembled in Norman. "Big Red" became not an unfamiliar term, and new maps were printed that included the state of Oklahoma. There probably were some other good football teams that year, but we didn't notice. If anything reached perfection, it was right here—a precisioned, powerful unit in complete command at all times.

In the season opener, OU matched its own national record of 31 consecutive victories by beating a supposedly tough North Carolina team, 36-0, with 21 of those points coming in the last 6½ minutes of the first half. The feat stunned Tar Heel Coach Jim Tatum. "Did you ever see backs run any harder?" he asked. "Oklahoma is everything everybody says—and greater. If Oklahoma isn't No. 1 in the nation, I'd hate to see the team that's better. I've never seen a better college squad."

Kansas State saw more hard-running backs, 19 in all, who trampled the visiting Wildcats, 66-0. By the time the last quarter had begun, the first two units were practically in the dressing room. The third team did us share of the scoring and then turned matters over to the fourth-teamers, who also tallied by rambling 70 yards in 9 plays.

Big Red never had it so good against Texas. A couple of halfbacks named Clendon Thomas and Tommy McDonald (Misters Inside and Outside) reeled off 263 yards rushing that hot October afternoon to help clobber the Longhorns, 45-0. A well-remembered play was the Jimmy Harris-to-McDonald aerial, 27 seconds before halftime, that the slender quarterback unleashed from his own 47, and McDonald, jet-propelled, scooted under with magnetized fingertips to

score. No. 25 heaved the ball straight up and galloped back upfield to jump astride Harris, a la Yogi Berra and Don Larson, and 30 minutes later, OU fans never attacked goal posts with such enthusiasm.

The next week, Oct. 20, Sooner hearts fell. Kansas became the first foe to score on OU since January, all the while the latter was marking up 174 points. At Lawrence, the Jayhawks briefly made things interesting before being rocked, 34-12. When it was all over, the Big Red offense was averaging a mere 458 yards per game.

Who would have thought back East that OU could beat Notre Dame in South Bend? It was the only time the Sooners ever did—but by plenty, 40-0. After the game, Wilkinson said, "Nothing that has ever happened to me gave me more pleasure." Armchair quarterbacks easily recall when two-time All-America Jerry Tubbs rocked Golden Boy Paul "Locks" Hornung (Heisman Trophy winner that year) with a bone-crushing tackle that came close to duplicating today's stop-action shots on television.

After this peak performance, the Sooners proved that they too were near human when they traveled to Colorado the next Saturday. The Buffalos had some characters named Boyd Dowler, John Wooten, Bob Stransky, and John (the Beast) Bayuk, and anything short of a top game on the part of the visitors could have been disastrous. Keyed-up Colorado shocked OU with a 19-6 halftime lead, but, behind the great running of McDonald, Thomas, and Harris and timely assistance from David Baker and Carl Dodd, the Sooners served notice they were still around and finally prevailed 27-

19. On Wilkinson's halftime talk, Guard Doyle Jennings said, "Coach told us if we couldn't play any better than that, we'd better take off those Oklahoma jerseys."

The good guys in white helmets returned to top form by drubbing Iowa State, 44-0, and outdistancing the hapless Cyclones, 443-95 yards. Then they clinched the Big Seven championship by breezing past Missouri, 67-14, scoring six of their ten touchdowns following Tiger miscues. Against Nebraska, directed by former OU aide Pete Elliott, Oklahoma amassed 506 yards rushing and 150 passing to shuck the Cornhuskers, 54-6.

The icing went on the cake in the season's closer at Stillwater as OU flattened Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College by a 53-0 score for the second year in a row. The win clinched a second consecutive national championship and extended the Sooners' winning streak to 40. In the process of rushing 123 yards, junior halfback Clendon Thomas ran for two touchdowns to sew up the major college scoring crown (108 points on 18 touchdowns). Tommy McDonald was close behind with 17 TD's.

Highlights of the Aggie contest came late in the game when Wilkinson inserted an all-senior eleven which had tackle Ed Gray at right half. The outgoing gridgers, none of whom had ever played in a losing game for OU (including their freshman year), ground out 77 yards in 9 plays to score, letting Gray get the touchdown from the two. Substitute end Bill Harris was elected to try the placement, but a bad snap from Bill Pricer, the fullback who was playing center, foiled his lone chance to score.

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The Magnificent Eleven of 1956: LE-John Bell, LT-Tom Emerson, LG-Bill Krisher, C-Jerry Tubbs, RG-Ken Northcutt, RT-Ed Gray, RE-Don Stiller, RH-Clendon Thomas, QB-Jim Harris, FB-Bill Pricer, LH-Tommy McDonald. This team is judged to be Oklahoma's best.

Your ADF

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tions which can be pin-pointed where the most pressing needs are, and there is never enough for all the requests, almost all of which are seriously needed.

Dr. Haden's request explained that the grinder "would be used in 'cutting' or grinding semiconductor and other materials into other simple or complex geometrical forms . . . and is important because . . . of its usefulness in solid state research in electrical engineering, and second because of its interdisciplinary uses. Other schools and departments—physics, mechanical and chemical engineering, even biology—will be able to use the instrument. "Finally," said Dr. Haden, "the ultrasonic grinder would be very useful in cutting samples for undergraduate laboratories. An example of this is the Hall 'bars' used in obtaining mobility and resistivity data on semiconductors . . . The results which might be achieved through its use are limited only by the ingenuity and tenacity of the researchers using it. The machine's use in undergraduate instruction alone justifies its purchase."

Dr. Haden's case impressed the ADF board, and he received his money. (The alumni members always have the final say.) But the people who gave the money should feel most responsible for enhancing the engineering facilities and helping to improve the education of the state's future engineers. Take a bow, contributors. You may even want to ride the elevator up to the fourth floor of the Engineering Center and see your money at work. *END*

The '56 Team

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It was really something to watch that team. One pollster was so impressed, he named the first, second, and third Sooner units as the top three teams in the country and even put the freshman team somewhere in the top ten. Jerry Tubbs, Tommy McDonald, Bill Krisher, and Ed Gray made All-America, and most everyone who saw them think Jimmy Harris, Clendon Thomas, and Bill Pricer should have.

There were others who shone. Jay O'Neal spent three years as the alternate quarterback to Harris. He could have started for any other team. Tom Emerson was terrific at opening up holes over right tackle, and Tubbs had a pretty fair corner backing him up named Bob Harrison.

Team and individual records almost completely rewrote Harold Keith's statistic columns. The '56ers still have the highest rushing average per game of 391 yards; the most yards accumulated on intercepted passes in one season, 423 (78 came on a return by Tubbs against Iowa State); most points scored in a regular season, 466, the highest scoring average per game, 46.6, and the highest scoring average per Big Seven Conference game, 48.6. The Sooners scored 70 touchdowns, also a school record, as is 4,817 the most yards rushing and passing in one season, and 6,049 total yards (rushing, passing, interceptions, punt and kickoff runbacks).

Of course, the team, in the meantime, was

helping establish a number of national records, including consecutive victories and consecutive games scored in. Amazingly enough, McDonald, Thomas, et al, scored 50 percent of the time they controlled the ball.

Individually, McDonald, the Albuquerque, N.M. flash, became OU's most versatile football player for one season, gaining 1,515 total yards—853 rushing, 149 running back punts, 95 on kickoff runbacks, 282 on pass receiving, and 136 intercepting passes. He caught 12 passes for 4 touchdowns and threw for 11 straight completions, another OU record. McDonald was a unanimous All-America

and received the Maxwell Memorial Award and *Sporting News Award* as the nation's best player. He is still bouncing up from hard tackles as an all-pro flanker with the Los Angeles Rams and currently is among the leading pass receivers in the NFL.

Thomas, on his way that year to setting new career rushing and scoring records, also is still playing professional football as a defensive back with the Pittsburgh Steelers. Tubbs, 1956 Lineman of the Year and recipient of the Walter Camp Trophy as Player of the Year, is currently a linebacker with the Dallas Cowboys (and chairman of the OU ADF campaign in Dallas).

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The Sooners were best noted for their great ground attack under Wilkinson, but Jimmy Harris, a terrific runner in his own right, could throw as well as anybody. And he proved it. In 1956, he completed 23 of 37 attempts for 482 yards and 8 touchdowns and an amazing percentage of 62.1. Only one of those 37 was intercepted. Unsung Harris played professional ball for awhile and now is working in Shreveport, La., for oilman Roy Guffey, a Sooner football star of 1926.

The ends of OU a decade ago were John Bell, currently head coach at Oklahoma City Southeast High School, and Don Stiller, who returned to his home town of Shawnee to enter the real estate and insurance business. Emerson today is Dr. Tom Emerson, a recent OU PhD recipient, with the physiology department at Michigan State University's Medical Center, while his counterpart, Ed Gray, owns an oil field welding firm in Odessa, Tex. Former guard Ken Northcutt owns a private club in Oklahoma City and Bill Krisher runs a boys' camp in Vermont. Billy Pricer, the great blocking fullback and linebacker, now owns and manages a service station in Oklahoma City.

Bill Brown played some good fullback for the Sooners in 1956, as did Dennis Morris and David Rolle. David Baker and Carl Dodd were the alternate team halfbacks who teamed up with headknockers like Delbert Long and Bob Timberlake at end; Byron Searcy and Benton Ladd at tackle; the Jennings boys, Doyle and Steve, and Buddy Oujesky at guard. Bob Harrison was a sophomore center who alumni thought would become a cinch All-American. Supporting roles came from men like Dale "King of the Cowboys" Sherrod, Jakie Sandefer, Dick Corbett, Joe Rector, Ross Coyle, among others.

This is a squad which combined its efforts to lead the nation in rushing with a 391-yard per game average, set a national record for first downs in a season (222) and outscore all opponents by an average of 46.6 to 5.1. By winning its second consecutive national crown, OU retired the coveted O'Donnell Trophy.

Touchdowns and victories and titles were habit forming. If a fan had any complaint, it was because things came too easy. No team ever dominated its sport any more than the Sooners did in 1956. For those of us who were not around to see Jack Dempsey fight or Babe Ruth hit a baseball, this is one of the stories we'll tell our grandchildren. **END**

Frisky Darkhorse

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more Eddie Hinton, a cinch for stardom as the wingback breakaway threat, and Ron Shotts (*page 9*), the junior tailback. Shotts will share the tailback position with James Jackson, (*Page 7, center photo*) a senior who has seen scarcely two minutes of action in two previous years, languishing on the bench. Jackson, it seems, was a victim of one of those myths built to explain why someone isn't playing. Jackson's story was that he "couldn't turn the corner" and was "afraid to hit." If he couldn't and he was, well, he can and he isn't now. His play at tailback has been one of the bright spots of the spring and fall practices. He can have a very good year.

Also ready for a final go is the new

Monster man, Eugene Ross (*page 7, top photo*) who plays the free-lance secondary position that is a key part to Mackenzie's defense. He appears to have found a home there. Ed Hall (*page 8, top photo*) another senior and one of the best blocking linemen last year, is set at offensive tackle.

The defensive secondary will be small but quick, and sure tacklers. How well they have learned the new pass defense remains to be seen.

In his visits to alumni meetings over the state and region, Mackenzie listed three areas which could prevent Oklahoma from having an outstanding team. They are (1) inexperience at quarterback and the inability of any player to dominate that position; (2) the lack of quickness in the line which can mean defeat, and (3) a lack of depth. Mackenzie is not just throwing out the usual alibis. These are obvious and critical weaknesses. This knowledge, of course, fails to diminish the great expectations that dwell in the chests of all Sooner fans, who can never forget those two winning streaks and keep asking, "Why can't we do it again?"

To offset these conspicuous shortcomings, Mackenzie has a well drilled, proud bunch who have shown willingness to sacrifice. And sometimes this is just enough.

One thing he didn't list that he would now is the inordinate amount of injuries. Knee hurts have sidelined a number who could have been helpful, most prominent being Thurman Pitchlynn who came out of nowhere in the spring to become an outstanding linebacker. Two prime sophomore backs who face careers of mispronunciation have been knocked out with knee injuries. Chebon Dacon (pronounced Shh BONE DAY cun), a fine quarterback, and San Toi DeBose (rhymes with Man Boy the Rose), tailback (*page 7, bottom photo*), may be red-shirted this year.

The defensive ends and linebackers were at one time almost extinct because of injuries, and if such unforeseen catastrophes persist, the record will suffer.

Predicting the national collegiate football season is intrinsically futile, and attempting to do the same with one team is almost equally foolish. The bones of last year's prognosticators are strewn everywhere. But one can make observations and from them

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