



Oklahoma's Landry Jones (12) and Oklahoma's Ryan Broyles (85) celebrate after a touchdown during the Bedlam college football game between OU and Oklahoma State.

2011 OKLAHOMA FOOTBALL PREVIEW

DYNAMIC DUOS

PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY

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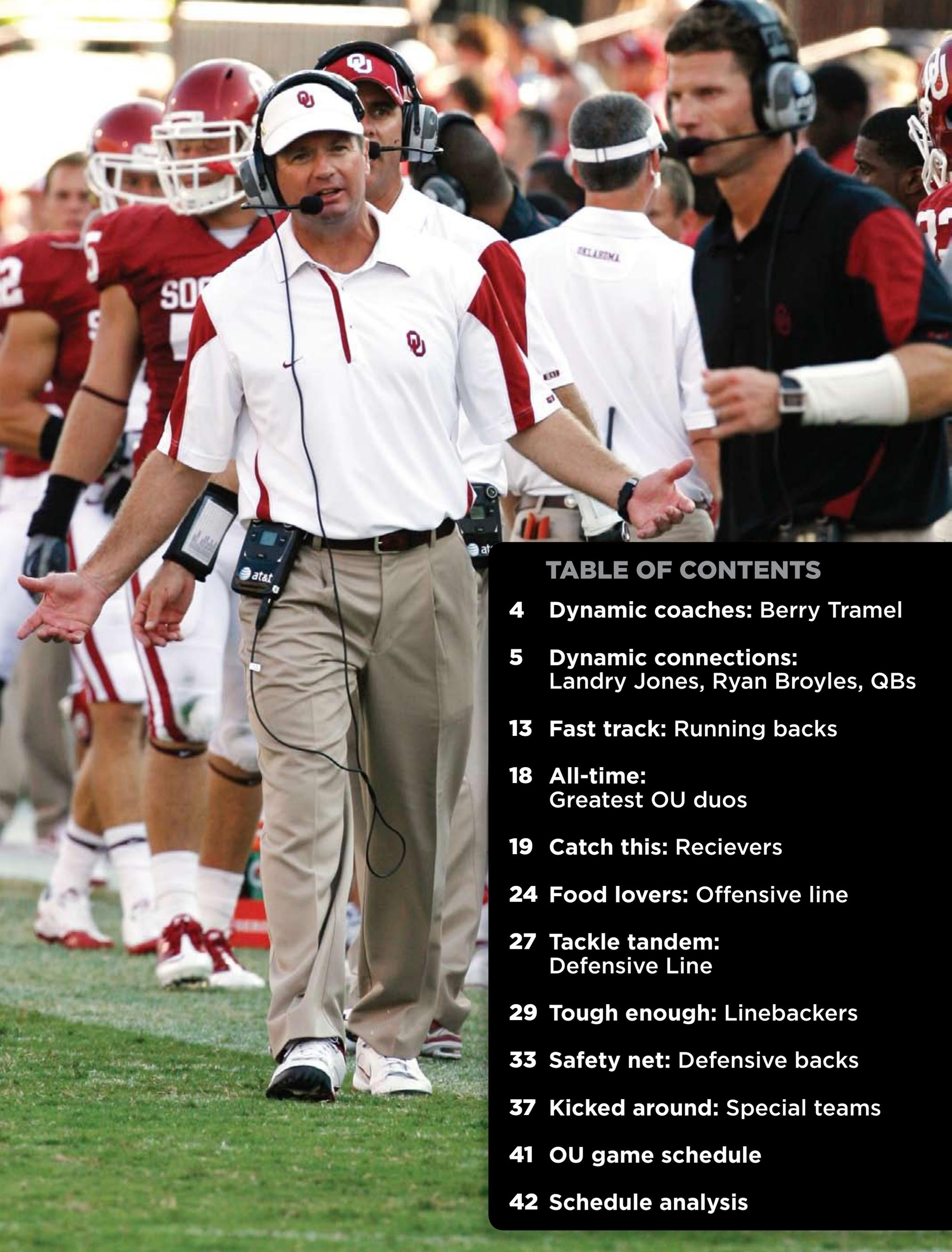


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Sooners' longest running Dynamic Duo of Bob Stoops, Brent Venables still going strong

The original Dynamic Duo clearly had a pecking order. Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson were mentor/protégé.

And so are OU football's longest running Dynamic Duo. Bob Stoops' relationship with Brent Venables has changed mightily over the years, if for no other reason than the 40-year-old Venables no longer is the Boy Wonder.

But Stoops clearly is the mentor. He recruited Venables the linebacker to Kansas State 20 years ago. Stoops recruited Venables to become a K-State graduate assistant in 1993. Then Stoops hired Venables for the Sooner staff in December 1998.



BERRY TRAMEL

"We've won a lot of games together," Venables said. "Lot of championships together. Our families have grown up together."

Stoops and Venables have been together 18 of the last 21 seasons. The only interruption came in 1996, when Stoops worked for Steve Spurrier at Florida and left Venables behind to work for – and live with – Mike Stoops.

So Venables is like an honorary brother in the Family Stoops.

"I've shared my highest highs, professionally speaking, and my lowest lows (family deaths), with his family," Venables said.

The football results have been spectacular. They helped Bill Snyder build a miracle story at Kansas State, then at OU have produced a championship-caliber program. Venables stays in hot water with the Sooner crowd that doesn't appreciate quality defense in the 21st century, but OU's defenses have remained high-performing in his seven seasons as coordinator.

Stoops was a whiz as a defensive coordinator himself, at both KSU and Florida. So pleasing the boss who once had your job can be dicey.

"Sometimes you need to switch your staff up," Stoops said. "But I've been pleased. We've had consistent success on both sides of the ball. It's been seamless no matter who we've lost."

Four coaches remain from Stoops' original OU staff: Venables, Bobby Jack Wright, Jackie Shipp and Cale Gundy.

Stoops knew the latter three barely or not all upon their hiring. But Venables, he knew well, and Stoops now sees Venables as a virtual equal. Even if Venables doesn't see himself that way.

"I don't know how to describe it," Stoops said. "We're good friends. Probably in his eyes, I'm more the coach or the mentor. But after working side by side all those years, you figure you become more as comrades."

Venables buys into that a little, but he also expresses enormous admiration for Stoops. Still sees his boss, in some ways, as the guy who lured him to Kansas State and into coaching.

"I know this, I have incredible respect for him, the kind of man he is," Venables said. "He's helped me learn as a coach, how he's handled adversity, the strength he exudes every day."



PHOTO BY CHRIS LANDSBERGER

Venables said he and Stoops have a common value system.

"We have a strong belief system that's very similar in regards to discipline," Venables said. "Incredibly demanding, but at the same time understanding."

The Stoops/Venables tandem will end some day. Probably with Venables becoming a head coach. But he's turned down some inquiries and said he will learn from his mentor/boss/friend, who waited on the right job.

"If he's taught me anything, it's patience," Venables said. "All I know is, I love what I'm doing and I love what we're doing."

And so the Dynamic Duo continues. It could even threaten the 17-year Bud Wilkinson/Gomer Jones relationship, the longest for a head coach and assistant coach in OU history.

Mentor/protégé, brother-like friends and football coaches who have the Sooners riding high.

Berry Tramel: Berry can be reached at (405) 760-8080 or at btramel@opubco.com. He can be heard Monday through Friday from 4:40-5:20 p.m. on The Sports Animal radio network, including AM-640 and FM-98.1. You can view his personality page at newsok.com/berrytramel.

'Lethal Weapons'



Broyles, Jones have chemistry

BY MIKE BALDWIN | STAFF WRITER

Midway through the fourth quarter of last year's Big 12 title game, Oklahoma trailed Nebraska 20-17.

When Landry Jones lofted a pass deep down the sideline, OU coach Bob Stoops' initial reaction was get ready for a critical third-and-10 call from midfield.

"I'm thinking, 'Ah geez, it's overthrown,'" Stoops said. "Then I realize it's Ryan (Broyles). I say to myself, 'He'll get it.'"

Broyles turned on the jets and hauled in a 47-yard reception that led to a game-tying field goal. The Sooners eventually won to win their seventh Big 12 title.

For many quarterback-receiver combos, that play would be the highlight of the season. For Jones and Broyles, it's difficult to pick a top 10, much less a play of the year. Jones to Broyles could fill up an entire half hour special.

Last season, OU's Dynamic Duo connected 131 times for 1,622 yards and 14 touchdowns.

Jones led the nation in pass completions. Broyles was second in receptions.

"Landry is a great quarterback," Broyles said. "We definitely have our timing down and confidence in each other. He'll put the ball in a place where he thinks I can go get it. The more times you do that, the more confidence it builds."

They don't complete each other's sentences, but Broyles has run so many routes in practices,

spring drills and summer seven-on-seven sessions, sometimes it's like they know what the other is thinking.

OU receivers coach Jay Norvell saw a similar connection as an assistant coach with the Indianapolis Colts when Peyton Manning and Marvin Harrison first played together.

"Ryan and Landry see the same picture," Norvell said. "That's what Marvin and Peyton had for so many years.

They saw the same holes in the defense. Anticipated the holes together. That's what chemistry really is."

Defensive coordinator Brent Venables over the years has called the perfect play only to watch a special quarterback-receiver combo complete the pass. He sees similar qualities in Jones and Broyles.

"Ryan can improvise a route better than anybody," Venables said. "He recognizes coverage and Landry always seem to be on the same page with him. They have a special, special bond that's hard to coach. They've played a lot of football together."

Jones has completed 217 passes to Broyles the past two seasons.

The first completion was a 3-yard pass in the third quarter of the 2009 season opener against BYU, a game Jones was pressed into duty at halftime after reigning Heisman winner Sam



Bradford injured his shoulder in the first half.

It was that game Stoops knew his young quarterback had a chance to be special. As the Sooners exited the halftime locker room Jones was confident he could lead the offense.

“You can’t fake it with guys who know it, guys who have played,” Stoops said. “Players can’t fool players. As a coach I can tell when a guy is real and when he isn’t. And he was ready to go. He genuinely couldn’t wait to get out there. ‘Let me go play, finally!’ ”

The following week Jones and Broyles connected for seven passes for 155 yards and three touchdowns. The third game, they connected for three more TDs.

Jones and Broyles have been frustrating defenses ever since.

Broyles uses nifty moves to create so much separation sometimes he’s wide open. But there are times the duo doesn’t need more than a small crack to move the chains or produce a big play.

“In tight man-to-man coverage, sometimes you might not be as accurate as you need to be,” Jones said. “With a guy like Ryan, he can go up and make a play for you. That really makes it a lot easier for a quarterback.”

Broyles’ uncanny ability to get open builds trust, a valuable commodity, especially when a quarterback is under pressure, a mammoth defensive lineman charging like a bull.

“When you get to this level there’s very little disparity talent-wise,” Jones said. “Ryan separates himself with a feel for the game, settling down in space or running by someone in man-to-man (coverage). Ryan has a great knowledge of the game.”

Broyles already owns 10 school receiving records. He could finish his career with 400 receptions, 5,000 yards and 50 touchdowns.

Jones is on the brink of owning most OU passing records, passing Bradford and Jason White, who each won a Heisman.

If Jones is one of the top four candidates invited to New York for this year’s Heisman ceremony it’s a good bet he and Broyles connected on another 100-plus passes.

“Ryan probably thinks I’m going to go to him on every play,” Jones said, smiling. “But some of his catches are so amazing. It’s pretty easy to throw to Ryan. Sometimes all you have to do is put it up there and let him run to it.”



PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY

Jones, Broyles expect the same

Ryan Broyles compiled solid stats his redshirt freshman year when Sam Bradford was winning the Heisman Trophy. But it was when Landry Jones took over as the starting quarterback when Bradford was injured in 2009 that Broyles' career really took off.

With Jones as the starter, Broyles has compiled 220 catches for 2,742 yards and 29 touchdowns the past two seasons. This season, there is a new variable, a new offensive coordinator. Jones and Broyles are confident OU's offense will continue to compile big numbers.

You connected for 131 catches for 1,622 yards and 14 touchdowns. Is it realistic to think you could improve on those stats?

Jones: I think we can improve. On the road we didn't play as well on offense as we did at home. Me and Ryan see some of the mental mistakes we made on the field. There are always things to clean up in the game of football. There are always things to get better at.

Broyles: I feel there are more balls to be thrown.

But if defenses try to double team Broyles more often, more passes could be thrown to Kenny Stills and the other receivers.

Broyles: I understand that. It comes down to play calls and the way the defense runs their defense. But it's really not about numbers. It's about winning the big game this year.

Jones: Whether you run it in or throw to score, it really doesn't matter to me as long as we score and we score more than the other guys.

Will the offense look much different with Josh Heupel as the offensive coordinator?

Broyles: I don't think it will change much. We'll rotate more running backs. I felt coach Heupel called a good game against Connecticut in the bowl game. I really don't see us missing a step at all.

Jones: We'll still run the shotgun, the pistol and mix in some going under center. We're still going to do our stuff. But it might be a little different from a play-caller standpoint, just a different style.

Do you expect the play-calling to change much?

Broyles: I don't think so. His demeanor is he's one of those guys he'll rely on more people. That's how our offense has been flowing in the past. He'll go to the receivers coach and ask him how his guys are feeling and how he feels about the play calls.

Jones: The game plan will be similar. You saw it a little bit in the bowl game where coach Heupel maybe did a little more play-action passes or threw a little more in the red zone.



PHOTO BY NATE BILLINGS

So you think there might be more passing in the red zone?

Broyles: Yeah. But the whole point of running the ball at the goal line is to build your moxie. You have to have a run game. That's where you really build toughness. If it doesn't work I don't think coach Heupel will have a problem throwing it.

Jones: Coach Hype might flip it around sometimes and throw it when coach (Kevin) Wilson ran it or vice versa. But it will be subtle, nothing extreme.

BY MIKE BALDWIN

Duo they most resemble



Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson

Landry Jones is Sherlock Holmes, a fictitious detective famous for his astute logical reasoning and his ability to use forensic science to solve difficult cases.

Jones uses checks and reads of defenses to break down difficult defensive schemes.

Ryan Broyles is like Watson, the highly intelligent sidekick, an excellent doctor and the perfect complement for Holmes.



PHOTO BY CHRIS LANDSBERGER

QB POSITION ANALYSIS

A Heisman candidate and two solid backups have Sooners in good shape at QB

Doesn't get much better than a Heisman candidate Landry Jones is a Heisman candidate that will own most school passing records. The only criticism is he's 4-5 as a starter in road games. Drew Allen and Blake Bell have talent but no experience. If Jones suffers a long-term injury there's a good supporting cast, but this offense is built around the quarterback.

A

UNIT GRADE

It doesn't get much better than having a Heisman candidate leading the offense.

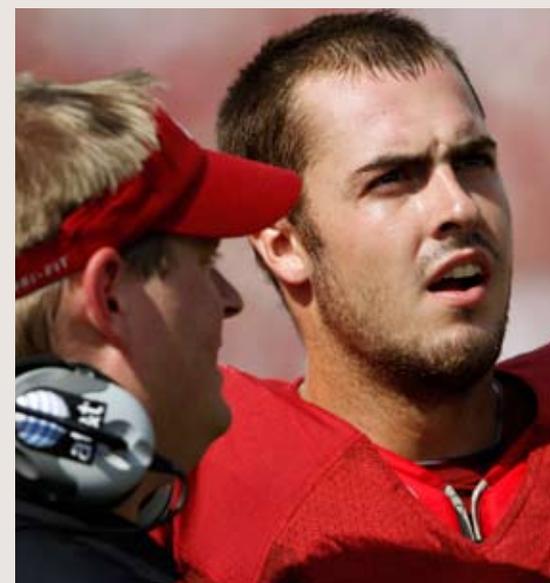


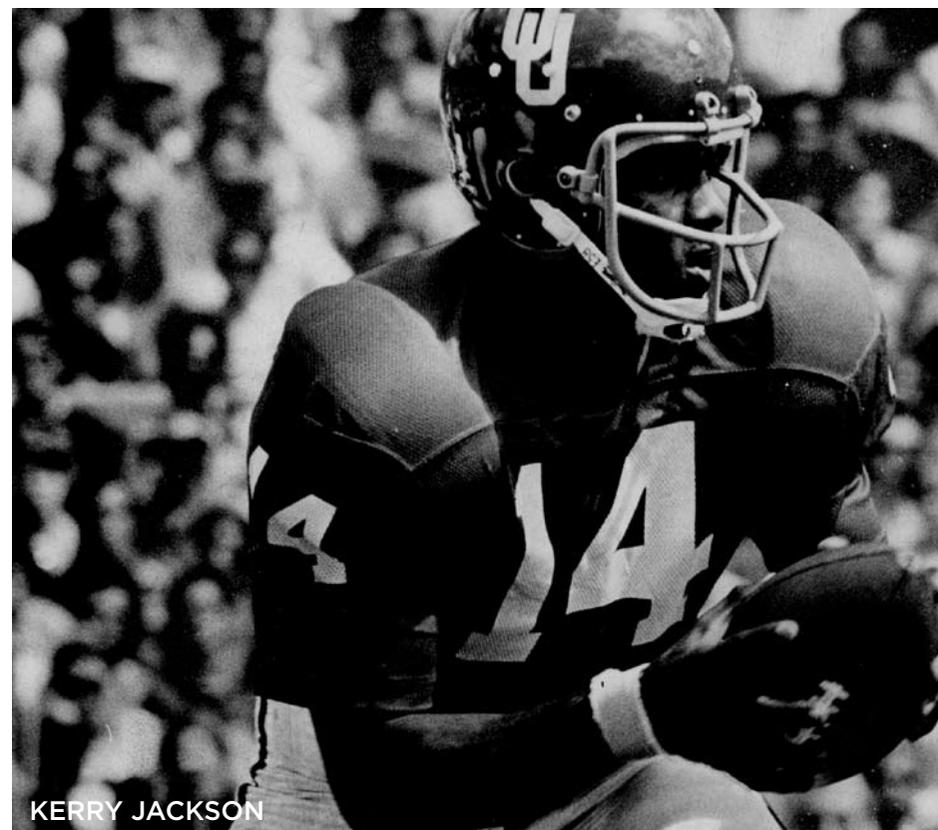
PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY

OU QUARTERBACKS DYNAMIC DUO



DAVE ROBERTSON

Dave Robertson and Kerry Jackson, 1972



KERRY JACKSON

The Sooners on occasion have used two quarterbacks. But rarely week to week, and usually because they needed to. Not because they wanted to.

But in 1972, Chuck Fairbanks deployed both Dave Robertson, a senior recruited to be an I-formation QB, and Kerry Jackson, a freshman well-suited to the wishbone. Robertson made all the starts, but Jackson rushed for 109 yards in the

season opener, and Fairbanks used him frequently.

Against Texas, Jackson relieved Robertson in both halves and directed the first touchdown drive of a 27-0 victory. The results were superb. OU went 11-1 and averaged 33.3 points a game.

Robertson rushed for 310 yards and threw for 1,136, completing more than 50 percent of his passes. Jackson rushed for 314 yards and threw for 164.

**'We
got
the
good
hair'**



PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY, THE OKLAHOMAN



OU'S QUARTERBACK DYNAMIC DUO: DREW ALLEN & BLAKE BELL

How has your relationship developed over the last year or so, battling for the backup spot?

Bell: "Me and Drew, we've been pretty good friends. Like Coach (Josh) Heupel says, we're a group. We're a team. We're not going to veer off."

Allen: "We just feed off each other. We're really good friends. We do a lot of stuff together off the field. Really tight-knit group. Go to a movie, go to dinner. We all live in the same neighborhood. Landry will call, and they'll come over"

What is the relationship like on the field?

Bell: "We're always joking around, though you have to know when you have to be serious. Drew, he's kind of the jokester. He'll say some things out on the field."

Allen: "There's no animosity. There's going to be one guy out there, and that guy needs to produce."

What do you find admirable about the other guy?

Bell: "Off the field, he's a pretty good guy. He's got a pretty good attitude. He handles his business, but he talks all crazy. Lightens the atmosphere."

Allen: "Blake's a good guy. He's a little sensitive now and then. He'll get after you if you get on him. If Coach Heupel gets on him, he'll fire back."

What do you find most annoying about the other guy?

Bell: "He'll come at you pretty hard when he's joking. You throw a bad ball, he'll let you know about it. You just gotta know it's Drew."

Allen: "There's nothing irritating, but he is the younger guy. So I do have to initiate him a little bit. The initiation is overdue. It is time to pick on the younger guys."

BY MIKE BALDWIN



Offensive coordinator Josh Heupel on OU quarterbacks

"Landry has better command of our overall offense. He understands what we're doing and how the defense dictates where we're going with the football. He's a lot better with his recognition of defenses. Blake Bell and Drew Allen make sure to get better each and every day. We've seen a lot of growth out of Blake so we're excited about the progress he's made. Drew is taking care of (the football), communicating well and playing up tempo so we're really impressed with Drew as well."

Duo they most resemble



Starsky and Hutch

Allen is a lot like Ben Stiller's character, David Starsky, a streetwise cop, a curious risk taker.

Bell is more like Owen Wilson's character, Ken "Hutch" Hutchinson, laid back, easy going. "I'm kind of the chill guy," Bell said. "Drew is a real funny guy. He's the chirper. But it's funny. You laugh most of the time."

And they make a great team. "Get us together and we'll get after somebody," Bell said. "If someone slips up and says something wrong we'll stay on the thing. If somebody says something Drew will chirp in."

'He's a lovable person'



Roy Finch, Brennan Clay expected to lead crowded OU backfield

Oklahoma may have lost the steady production of running back DeMarco Murray from last season, but it returns the duo of Roy Finch and Brennan Clay.

Last season Finch emerged as the Sooners' second-leading rusher with 398 yards and two touchdowns in eight games. Clay saw limited action in nine games last season, rushing for 127 yards on just 36 carries.

Both missed time last season due to injuries. Both return this season expected to bolster a crowded backfield for the Sooners.

They can also be found frequently on Twitter and carry that relationship on the field with each other.

What is your relationship like?

Clay: That's my boy right there. Him and I are always going to go at it and compete. I think we like to definitely push each other because we pretty much are similar in skill set — he's just small and shifty and I'm more like the bigger guy. I love the boy to death. Him and I go right together.

Finch: We have a lot fun on the field together. Brennan's a great talent. We both present a lot of similar things that we can present to the field. Just competing against him has really upped my level of play.

What is it like on the field during practice together?

Clay: On the field we're pretty much boys. On the kickoff return we'll joke around a little bit, but other than that we're pretty serious besides in the film. Film room is where we go at each other.

Finch: Me and Brennan always joke on each other because sometimes I'm on the A Field and sometimes he's on the B Field, and vice versa. We watch film on each other and during film we just kind of crack jokes on each other. If he has a bad play or I have a bad play, we crack jokes on each other but it's all fun and games.

What is one thing someone doesn't know about the other?

Clay: He's a lovable person. He has so much love to share, so much love to spread. He'll tell you in a heartbeat that he loves you and he might not even know you, but he's one lovable person.

Finch: He talks way too much. Way too much. He talks too much, that's all.

Is there one habit that stands out?

Clay: He's late all the freaking time, but it's all good. That's my boy. He's always going to be there, he's always going to work hard and he loves what he does.

Finch: I'm late, but I'm not always late to everything. I got to prioritize a little better and get to my meetings more on time, but I'm working on that.



BRENNAN CLAY

PHOTO BY STEVE SISNEY

BY MIKE BALDWIN



ROY FINCH

PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY

Duo they most resemble



Siegfried and Roy

Siegfried Fischbacher and Roy Horn were Germans who traveled thousands of miles to entertain Las Vegas audiences for three decades, becoming American citizens along the way.

OU's running back tandem — Roy Finch (Florida) and Brennan Clay (California) — traveled more than a thousand miles to be part of the Sooners' tradition.

But in this comparison, Roy is Siegfried and Brennan is Roy.

Finch has shifty moves and magic feet like Siegfried the illusionist.

Clay is the dependable back who picks up blitzes like Roy, who organized white tigers and white lions for the show.

POSITION ANALYSIS

Sooners talented but unproved at running backs

There's talent but it's unproven. No one will carry the load. Carries will be divided. Whoever has the hot hand jumps to the front of the line. The Sooners can go with speed (Roy Finch), physicality (Jonathan Miller), a receiver out of the backfield who picks up blitzes (Brennan Clay) or a talented true freshman (Brandon Williams) who is still learning the offense.



UNIT GRADE

B A talented group but it's uncertain who will step up in crunch time.



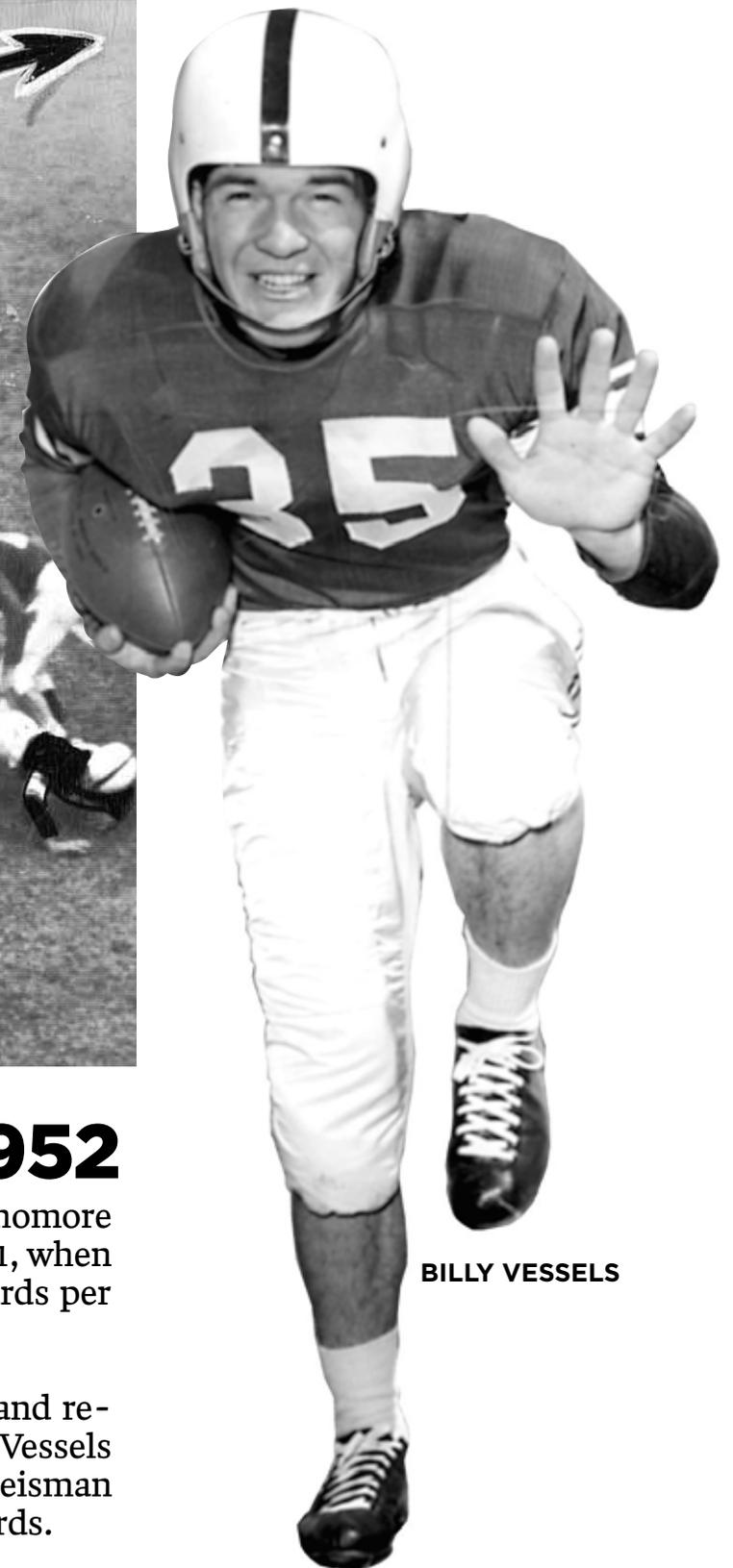
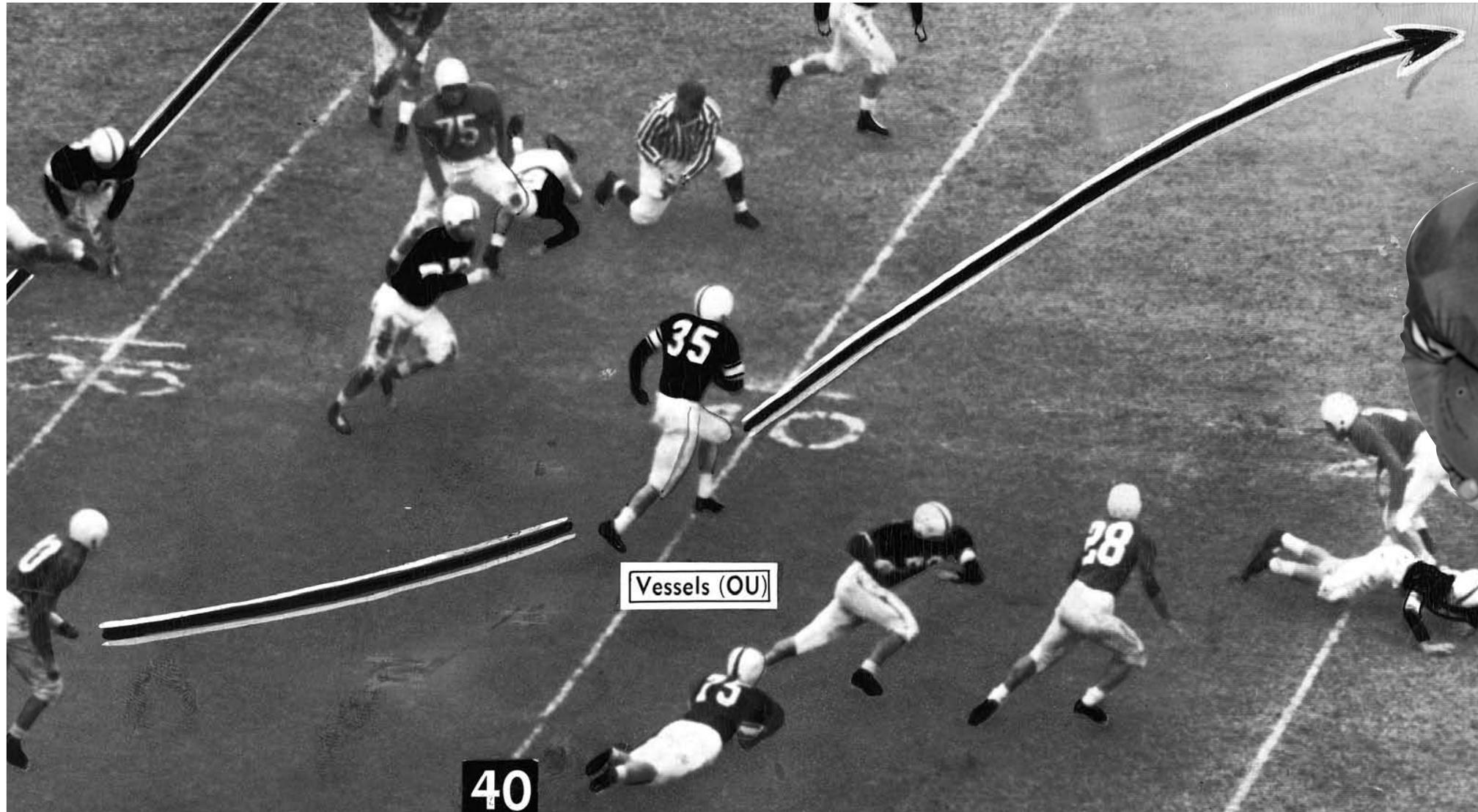
Assistant coach Cale Gundy on OU running backs

“There’s a lot of potential. There are a couple of guys that are really explosive, very dangerous. But it’s not an experienced group. It’s a younger group. Everybody is fighting to get reps. That’s why every day after practice we’re watching film, we’re taking notes. If you miss a pass protection and our (quarterback) gets hit in the back, we fumble and turn it over in a key situation or he gets knocked out of the game you’re going to be standing alongside me on the sidelines.”

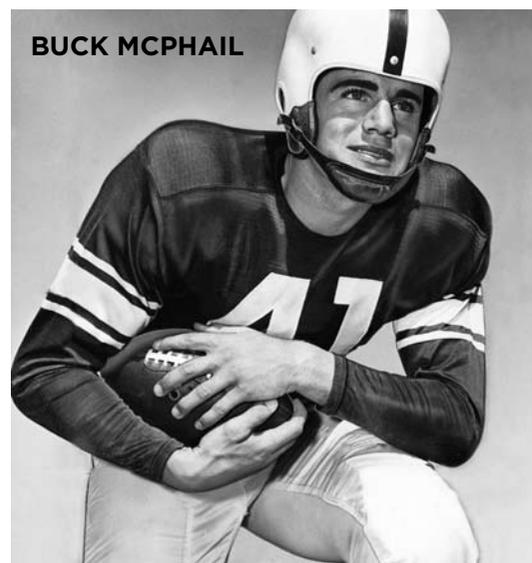
Brennan Clay leaps in front of a Colorado defender.

PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY

OU RUNNING BACKS DYNAMIC DUO



BILLY VESSELS



BUCK MCPHAIL

Billy Vessels runs against Kentucky.

Billy Vessels and Buck McPhail, 1952

Clendon Thomas and Tommy McDonald. Billy Sims and Kenny King. Steve Owens and Ron Shotts. Greg Pruitt and Joe Wylie. The Sooners have had a ton of great running back combos. But the best ever might have been Vessels, the halfback, and McPhail, the fullback.

McPhail played behind the great Leon Heath

in 1950, when Vessels was a sophomore star. Vessels was injured most of 1951, when McPhail averaged a stunning 8.6 yards per carry, on 101 rushes.

Finally, they were together in 1952 and responded with an historic season. Vessels rushed for 1,072 yards and won the Heisman Trophy. McPhail rushed for 1,018 yards.

BY BERRY TRAMEL

Sooner defensive stalwarts Brian Bosworth (No. 44) and Tony Casillas (No. 92) gang tackle Buffalo running back.



ARCHIVE PHOTO

OU DYNAMIC DUOS

Landry Jones and Ryan Broyles have formed quite the Dynamic Duo, combining for 28 touchdown passes, the most by any Sooner tandem ever. Can they crack this list of the top five OU duos, any position?

5. Jack Mildren & Greg Pruitt, 1970-71: These guys made history passing the ball backwards; OU's move to the wishbone the Mildren-to-Pruitt pitchout the most lethal play in Sooner history.

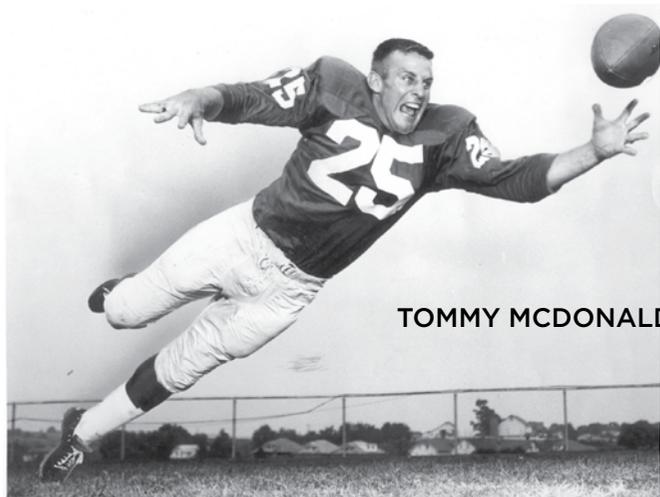
4. Jason White & Adrian Peterson, 2004: White won the 2003 Heisman and might have won again in '04, except for his new teammate. Peterson, a freshman tailback, made such a splash he finished second in the Heisman. White was third. USC's Matt Leinart won the trophy, with his teammate, Reggie Bush, fifth. The OU duo outpointed the USC duo 1,954-1,922.

3. Billy Sims & Greg Roberts, 1978: Sims won the Heisman Trophy, and his great blocking guard, Roberts, won the Outland Trophy as the nation's best lineman.

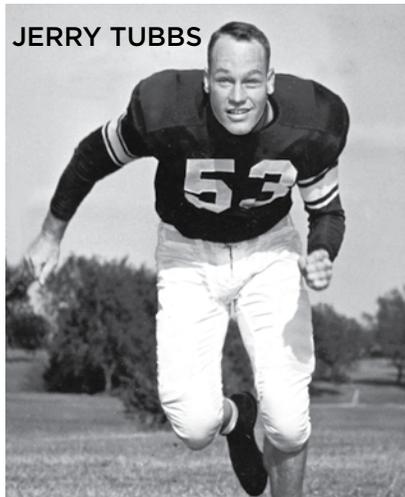
2. Tony Casillas & Brian Bosworth, 1984-85: OU's defense was great in '84 and even better in '85, when the Sooners won the national championship, Casillas (nose guard) won the Lombardi Award as the nation's outstanding interior lineman and Boz won the Butkus Award as the nation's best linebacker.

1. Tommy McDonald & Jerry Tubbs, 1954-56: Time has not altered the remarkable '56 season in which McDonald, a halfback, won the Maxwell Award as the nation's best player and his teammate, Tubbs, a center/linebacker, won the Walter Camp Trophy as the nation's best player. They finished 3-4 in the Heisman voting, with McDonald only 93 points behind winner Paul Hornung.

BY BERRY TRAMEL



TOMMY MCDONALD



JERRY TUBBS



PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY, THE OKLAHOMAN

Pair growing up together

They both grew up around San Diego. They came to OU together. They live together. They both love Twitter. Kenny Stills and Tony Jefferson seem to have as close a friendship as two college football players could have. But it wasn't always that way.

What kind of relationship do you have?

Stills: Tony and I weren't always so tight. There were days when we stayed in the dorms when we first got here

that we didn't say anything to each other. But now, it's rough for me to go a day without seeing him now. We went through so much, workouts and improving each other — we have high expectations of each other. That's huge in a friendship.

How is it going against each other in practice?

Jefferson: During the summer to now, I end up covering Kenny a lot in practice. I actually got a pick covering him





Oklahoma's Tony Jefferson recovers a fumble during the second half of the college game between the Sooners (OU) and the Missouri.

and I was talking crap to him later on that day, so it was funny. I don't cover him all the time, but when it happens, it happens, and whoever wins, we're obviously gonna talk trash to each other.

Stills: I was in the slot and I ran an out route. Landry (Jones) kind of threw the ball behind me. Tony undercut it and I had to chase his butt down. There's always a lot of fun when both of us are out there going against each other. I'm trying to make him improve and that's what he's doing for me.

What should people know about the two of you?

Jefferson: We just have that relationship where it's like two brothers. I annoy him sometimes and he annoys me, but whatever. I've been living with him since I got here. We went through the recruiting thing with each other.

BY SCOTT WRIGHT

PHOTO BY CHRIS LANDSBERGER

Duo they most resemble



Luke Skywalker and Han Solo

The San Diego products are "Star Wars" headliners.

Stills is Han Solo, a dynamic wide receiver who produces highlight-reel plays. He likes to talk big. At times he can be a little controversial. Stills would enjoy being captain of the Millennium Falcon and hanging with someone like Chewie.

Jefferson goes by the book, plays fundamentally sound but the nickel back delivers hard hits. Jefferson is a cerebral player who would pick Yoda's brain to improve his play on the field.

WR POSITION ANALYSIS

One of the country's best

A question mark a year ago, the Sooners have one of the best receiving corps in the country. Ryan Broyles might set records that will never be broken. Kenny Stills set freshmen records. Trey Franks would start for many teams. Senior Dejuan Miller is 100 percent recovered from a knee injury. Jaz Reynolds is back on track. True freshman Kameel Jackson impressed during fall camp.



UNIT GRADE

An All-American and several talented young receivers that will continue to improve.



DEJUAN MILLER



Oklahoma's Ryan Broyles (85) gets by Oklahoma State's Andrew McGee (6) during the Bedlam football game.

PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY

Assistant coach Jay Norvell on wide receivers

“We are talented, but we are still so young. We’re just scratching the surface of how good we can be... Ryan (Broyles) is kind of at the top end, then you’ve got four or five guys that are really just learning they can do special things. So that part of it is really exciting because every day we go out we’re kind of tapping into new limits of what we can be. When everybody starts firing on all cylinders then we really have something special.”

Oklahoma’s Kenny Stills (4) spikes the ball after a touchdown reception during the first half of the college football game between OU and Texas Tech.

PHOTO BY
CHRIS LANDSBERGER

OU RECIEVERS DYNAMIC DUO

Tinker Owens and Billy Brooks 1973-'75

Owens (70) and Brooks (24) combined for just 94 catches in their careers. They had just 17 combined as seniors in 1975. Ryan Broyles alone had 15 against Iowa State last season.

But Owens and Brooks were fabulous receivers in an era of little Sooner passing.

Both made all-American as seniors and were among the greatest big-play producers in OU history.

Owens averaged 26.5, 22.9 and 25.3 yards per catch his final three seasons. Brooks averaged 26.2, 25.1 and 22.8 his three OU seasons.

For good measure, they combined for seven rushing touchdowns (Brooks four, Owens three) on reverses.

In Bob Stoops' offense, they would have been a national sensation. In Barry Switzer's offense, they were something even rarer. Difference-maker wide receivers.

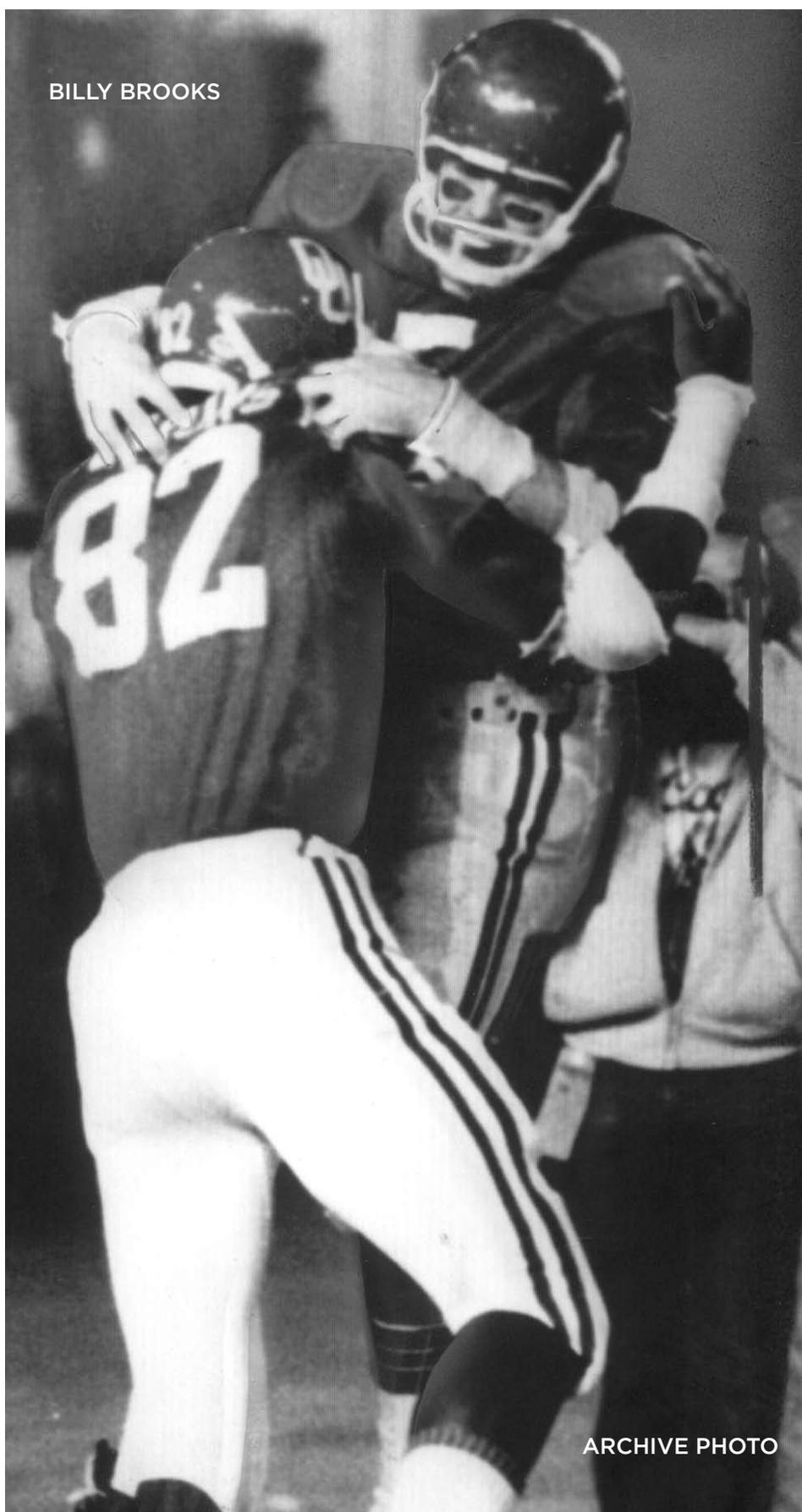
BY BERRY TRAMEL

TINKER OWENS



ARCHIVE PHOTO

BILLY BROOKS



ARCHIVE PHOTO

PHOTO BY
BRYAN TERRY,
THE OKLAHOMAN



OU OFFENSIVE LINEMAN DYNAMIC DUO: GABE IKARD & BEN HABERN

A match made in food

Unlike last season, the Sooners return six players with experience on the offensive line.

Junior Ben Habern started each game last season at center, while sophomore Gabe Ikard, a Bishop McGuinness graduate, is expected to start at left guard after playing in every game last season.

Last season, though, the offensive line was a big concern for the Sooners, but it instead helped them win the Big 12 Championship and the Fiesta Bowl.

The 6-foot-4, 292-pound Habern recorded 123

knockdowns last season and was an All-Big 12 honorable mention by The Associated Press. He also started 10 games his freshman season at center before suffering a season-ending injury against Texas Tech.

Ikard, who is now 6-foot-4 and 295 pounds after entering OU as a tight end, started 12 of 14 games last season and was an Academic All-Big 12 first team member behind his 4.0 GPA.

What is your relationship like?

Habern: (Laughs) Gabe's one of my really good friends. Gah, he's out of control. He cracks me up all the time. We always give him a hard time



because he came in as a tight end and he was 245 pounds and now he's 295, so he's gained like 50 pounds. We give him a hard time and joke around with him, but we love joking around with each other and give each other a hard time.

Ikard: Very close, since I really didn't know him that well until I switched to the offensive line. We just get along really well. He's a great guy and fun to be around.

Habern likes to cook, does Ikard get involved or just eat the food?

Habern: (Laughs) Let's just say he eats the food. He'll add his 2 cents in, but at the end of the day he likes to eat.

Is Habern the best cook on the team?

Ikard: I wouldn't know that. I've had a Habern meal or two. They've treated me right; he can cook it up a little bit. I don't know if he's the best. I'd have to eat somebody else's cooking.

Is there anything embarrassing you want to share about the other?

Habern: We give him a hard time for his butt. The thing is, his butt's huge.

Ikard: There's really no arguing that point. It's been there my whole life. He has very, very small hands; baby hands. He has been known as baby hands, T-Rex arms, which explains his ridiculous strength in the weight room. But small hands, short arms, and he kind of looks like a bear cub.

Is there anything you tease each other about?

Habern: (Laughs) Just that he gained 50 pounds over like four months. He definitely had to eat a lot of food to do that. When we go out to eat and stuff, the kid will order an unreasonable amount of food, which is so funny. He doesn't want to have to keep that weight but he has to. So, he'll go and get like three or four burgers at once and eat them all.

Ikard: When I don't come in for him at center, he gets really mad. When we're doing like a set of six and we switch out, and I don't come get him for awhile, he's not very happy. He'll let me know about it.

BY JACOB UNRUH ■



Starting center Ben Habern (61) directs blocking as Landry Jones (12) looks on during the Sooners first day of practice.

PHOTO BY STEVE SISNEY



DeMarco Murray (7) is congratulated after a score by Trent Ratterree (47) and Gabe Ikard (64) during the second half of the Air Force game.

PHOTO BY STEVE SISNEY

Duo they most resemble



Timon and Pumbaa (Lion King)

Timon, the meerkat, has a unique sense of humor like Ikard, who enjoys making others laugh and has been known to fire a snappy one-liner. Pumbaa, the warthog, is steady like Habern, who makes sure the offensive line knows all of its checks and can have some fun, sometimes at Timon's expense.

Habern told Ikard: "You have a big butt like Pumbaa."
Ikard responded: "And you have little hands like Timon."

Offensive line coach James Patton on OU's offensive line

"As a group we have some game experience so we should be better than last year. We have some young guys who will push (the starters) and make us better every week. We need to be more physical run blocking and do a good job pass protecting, pick up blitzes, give Landry (Jones) time to get passes off. We're making pretty good strides but we still have a lot of work to do."

OL POSITION ANALYSIS

OU offense will be anchored by veteran offensive line

Be more physical

A veteran unit with 81 career starts needs to be more physical but the O-line helped the offense average 481.4 yards. Center Ben Habern is a preseason All-Big 12 selection.

B UNIT GRADE

A solid but unspectacular group that has something to prove.



Lineman Ben Habern, left, and tight end James Hanna, right, celebrate following Hanna's touchdown against Colorado.

ARCHIVE PHOTO

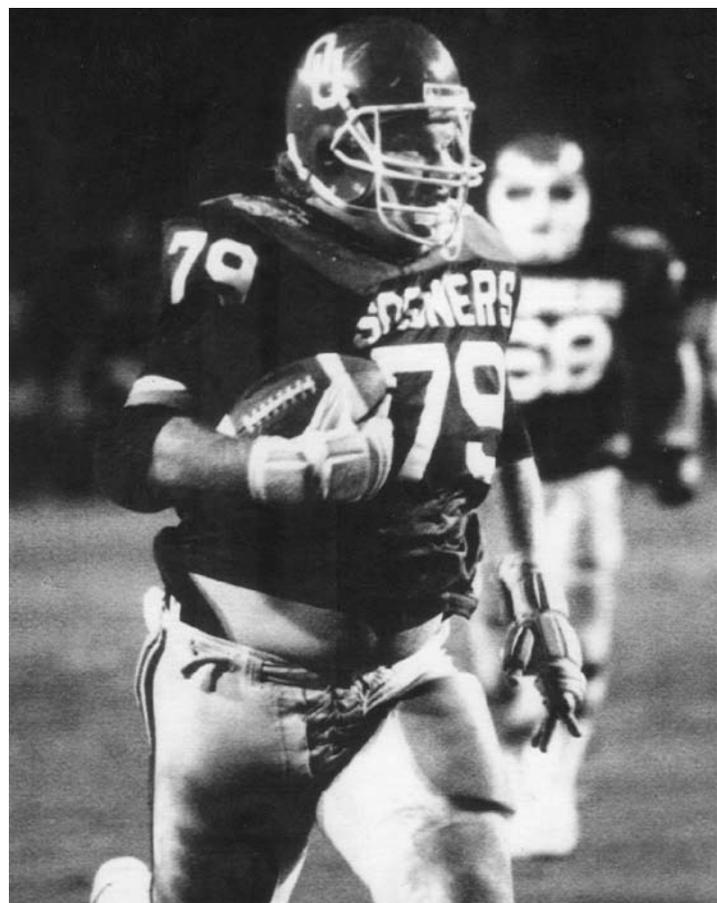
OU OFFENSIVE LINE DYNAMIC DUO Mark Hutson and Anthony Phillips 1985-87

Offensive line coach Merv Johnson moved both Phillips and Hutson from tackle to guard, and the result was perhaps the best O-line in OU history during the great 33-3 three-year run they were together.

Phillips is one of only three Sooners to make all-conference four times. He was an all-American in 1986, then

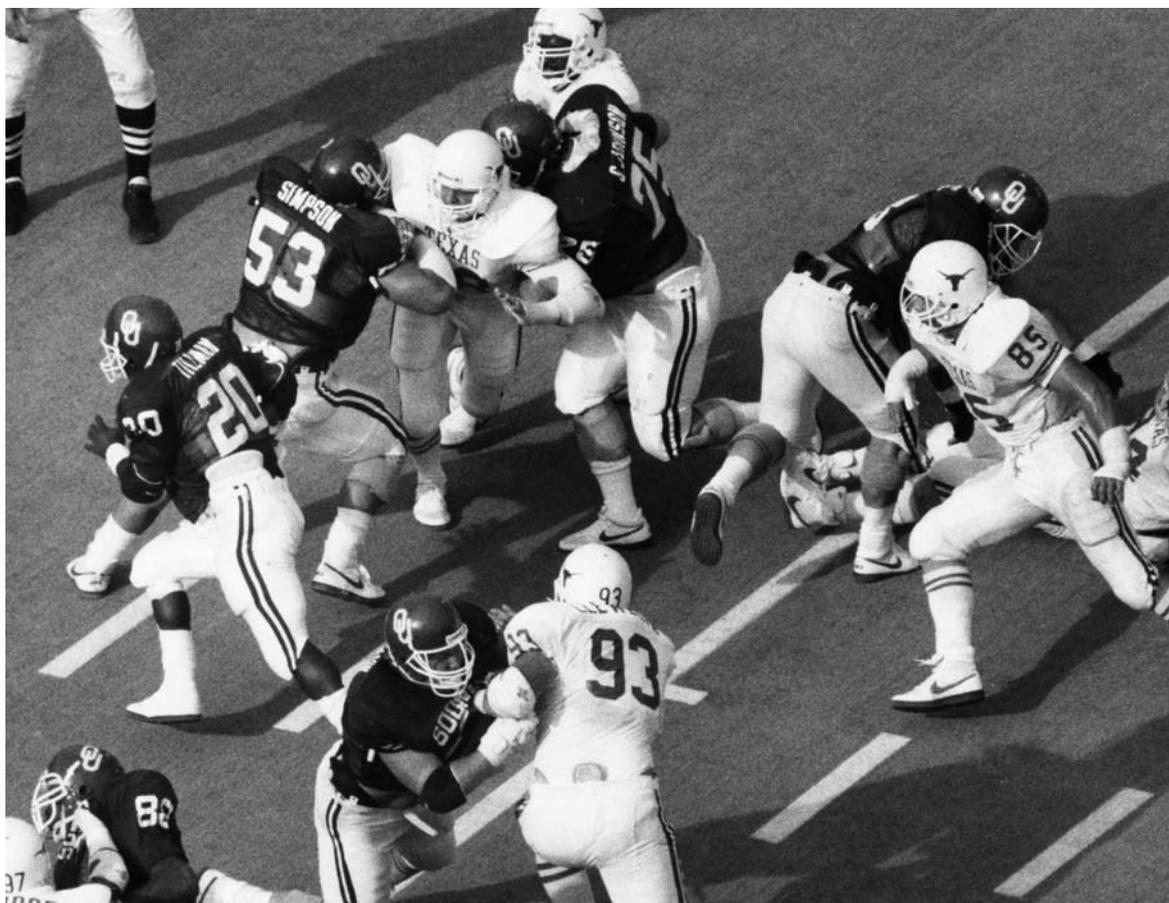
returned to all-American status in 1988, the year after Hutson left.

Hutson started as a freshman in 1984, then moved to guard and with Phillips made Jamelle Holieway's wish-bone sing. Hutson was all-Big Eight three times and made all-American in both 1986 and 1987.



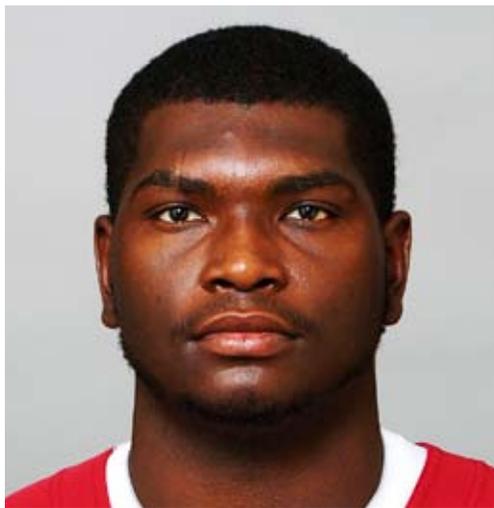
OU tackle Mark Hutson gallops 29 yards on a fumble for a TD against the University of Miami in the Orange Bowl.

PHOTO BY DAVID MCDANIEL



Behind blocks by Greg Johnson (75), Anthony Phillips, Travis Simpson and Mark Hutson (left).

ARCHIVE PHOTO



STACEY MCGEE



CASEY WALKER

'Two peas in a pod'

It's hard work down in the trenches on the defensive line. Stacy McGee and Casey Walker have been grinding it out together since they both arrived at OU in 2008, and this year, they'll be two of the most closely watched players in crimson and cream as they try to hold the defensive front together. Of course, with that kind of scrutiny comes a lot of pressure, which also leads to some intense meetings with defensive line coach Jackie Shipp.

A lot of defensive linemen have to work to keep their weight up during the season. Is it a bad idea to be around you guys at dinner time?

McGee: Yeah, because we usually just got out of meetings and everybody's mad about something. We'll probably take your plate.

Walker: After that meeting and it's time to go eat, you just want to be by yourself. Don't say nothin' to me right now. Just give me 15 minutes to regroup.

Does Stacy ever stop smiling?

Walker: No, that's McGee.

Have you guys always been good friends?

McGee: Yeah, we're brothers now. We had to come in and deal with coach (Jackie) Shipp, deal with everything you get used to playing college football, and playing at Oklahoma. That was an experience for us. Coach Shipp calls us two peas in a pod. When I'm in trouble, he's in trouble. When he's in trouble, I'm in trouble. So I try to keep him out of trouble.

BY SCOTT WRIGHT

Duo they most resemble



Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis

Like Jerry Lewis, Casey Walker can get a little loud and silly.

Stacy McGee is the quiet one. And he can sing a little.

DL POSITION ANALYSIS

Sooners' defensive line gaining experience, expectations

Coaches believe with a year's experience this unit is better than given credit.

B UNIT GRADE

A solid but unspectacular group that has something to prove.



STACEY MCGEE



Defensive coordinator Brent Venables on the defensive line

“The tackles — Casey (Walker), Stacy (McGee), Jamarkus (McFarland) — have looked very good. Torrea (Peterson) has some special ability. We’re hoping he can come along and expedite his development. Our ends — Ronnell (Lewis), Frank (Alexander) and David King — we feel are capable of playing at a dang good level. Geneo (Grissom) and Chuka (Ndulue) have pleased us with their sureness, quickness and physicality. After having a good spring, Chuka has taken it to another level and is earning our trust.”

OU DEFENSIVE LINE DYNAMIC DUO

LEE ROY & DEWEY SELMON 1973-75

There’s a good reason Dewey Selmon didn’t win the Outland Trophy or Lombardi Award. His little brother beat him to it. Lee Roy Selmon, generally acknowledged as the greatest player in OU history, played alongside Dewey in both ’74 and ’75, with Lee Roy at tackle and Dewey at nose guard. With the Selmon brothers on the line, OU gave up more than 20 points only twice in three seasons and never more than 27.



BERRY TRAMEL

LeRoy and Dewey chat with coach Barry Switzer.



OU lineman Lucious Selmon makes a stop against Texas. Brother Dewey Selmon is No. 91.

**OU LINEBACKER
DYNAMIC DUO:
JAYDEN BIRD & TOM
WORT**



PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY

Serious business

The Oklahoma linebackers seem to take on the personality of their boss, defensive coordinator Brent Venables — loose and laid-back away from the field, giving way to hardcore intensity when there's work to be done. Tom Wort and Jaydan Bird have been through the wringer at OU since arriving in January 2009, and they're even closer friends because of everything they went through together. But all the fun and games are over once a guy goes and gets married.

What are linebacker meetings like?

Wort: There are times we can laugh and joke around, but for the most part, it's serious and down to business. We're pretty serious in meetings.

Bird: Coach (Brent) Venables will let the jokes go pretty far, but it just depends on the day. Some days, he'll cut it out pretty quick.

It seems like all the linebackers here are pretty tight. Is that the case?

Wort: To play linebacker at Oklahoma, you've got to be a different type of person. All the stuff we go





OU's Tom Wort brings down Iowa State's Jerome Tiller.

through together — workouts and meetings and practice — you have no choice but to form a close group.

You guys came to OU at the same time. Do you have a different kind of bond because of that?

Wort: We came in early, went through all the workouts together. Me and Jaydan were walking around crunched over because our abs were hurting so bad.

Jaydan, how long have you been married?

Bird: Since May 29. They tease me and they nag me about it, but it's all fun and games. I'm kind of a chill guy who just lets it happen, because I'm above that.

BY SCOTT WRIGHT

Duo they most resemble



Jake & Elwood (The Blues Brothers)

Jayden Bird is the outgoing partner, a rascal like John Belushi's character Jake. Tom Wort is the down-to-earth complement, Dan Akroyd's character Elwood. Their conversations might not be that different than the Blues Brothers' most famous exchange.

"First you traded the Cadillac in for a microphone," Jake said. "Then you lied to me about the band. Now you're going to put me right back in the joint (jail)."

"They're not gonna catch us," Elwood responded. "We're on a mission from God."

LINEBACKER POSITION ANALYSIS

A deep unit suddenly is thin.

Travis Lewis, the preseason Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year, is sidelined early with a broken toe. Austin Box tragically died in May. Coaches say middle linebacker Tom Wort is much improved. Talented Corey Nelson fills in for Lewis. Nickel back Tony Jefferson delivers big hits and played well as a true freshman. Joseph Ibiloye, a versatile backup, received rave reviews in fall camp.

B UNIT GRADE

The grade improves to an A-minus when Lewis is healthy, an A if Wort matches expectations.



OU's Casey Walker, top, Travis Lewis, and Frank Alexander tackle an Idaho State running back. PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY



OU's Quinton Carter, left, and Travis Lewis bring down Texas A&M's Cyrus Gray.

PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY

Linebackers coach Brent Venables on OU's linebackers

"We're not real deep but there are some good players. It's a group likes to play, likes to compete. They're physical. They're instinctive. And they have really good chemistry. We've been fortunate to have guys like Travis (Lewis) who have been incredibly successful. Tony (Jefferson) has a real knack and a chance to be a special player. The development that Tom (Wort) has had this year compared to last year is not even close. Corey Nelson loves to work and always is around the ball. Joseph (Ibiloye) has



Nebraska running back Andrea Franklin (39) is halted by OU defenders George Cumby (28) and a flying Daryl Hunt (85).

ARCHIVE PHOTO

OU LINEBACKER DYNAMIC DUO GEORGE CUMBY & DARYL HUNT 1977-78

Hunt came to OU as a heralded recruit out of Odessa Permian and lived up to the billing, playing as a true freshman on the 1975 national championship team. Cumby came to OU as an unheralded full-back the same year, was moved to linebacker in 1976 and was a star by 1977.

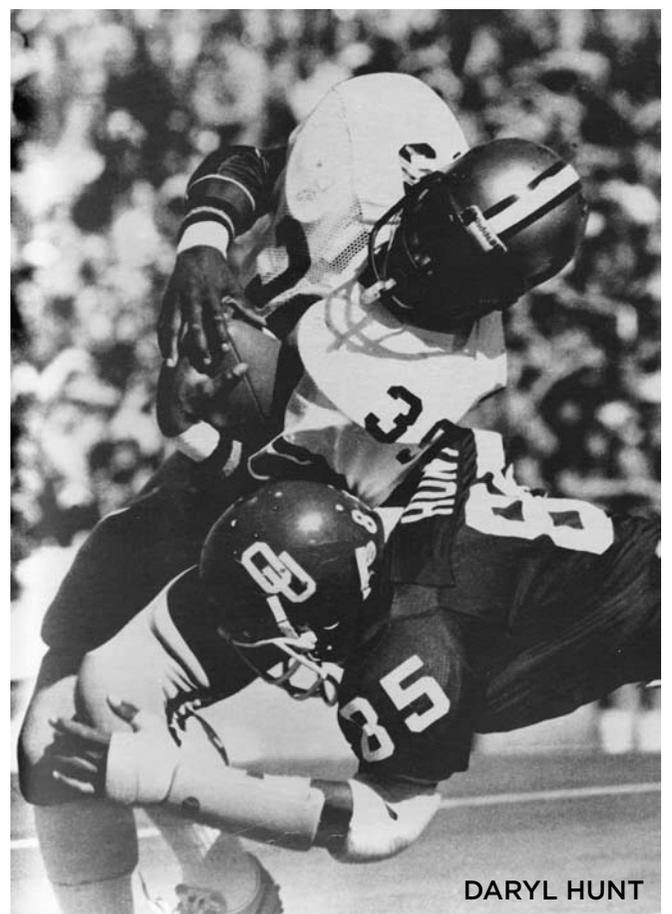
For two seasons, Hunt and Cumby were defensive terrors together. Both made all-American in 1977; Hunt made it in 1978, then Cumby made it in 1979 after Hunt went to the NFL.

Both were three-time all-Big Eight picks. They finished their careers No. 1 (Hunt, 530) and No. 3 (Cumby, 435) in total tackles.

BERRY TRAMEL



GEORGE CUMBY



DARYL HUNT



OU's Demontre Hurst, bottom left, and Tom Wort tackle Utah State's Xavier Martin.

PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY

'Everybody doughties from Texas'

OU'S DEFENSIVE BACK DYNAMIC DUO: JAMELL FLEMING & DEMONTRE HURST

OU'S BOUNDRIES IN GOOD HANDS

The Oklahoma secondary will look quite a bit different this season with the departures of Quinton Carter and Jonathan Nelson. But the Sooners bring back a lot of talent at the corners in Jamell Fleming and Demontre Hurst.

Hurst and Fleming teamed up for 121 tackles and six interceptions in 2010 and should be even more productive this season in a pass-happy Big 12.

When did you first meet and what were your impressions of each other?

Fleming: We played in high school. I didn't know he was on the other team. But when we got here he told me he was from Lancaster. I couldn't believe it. The first impression I got was I bet he can run.

Hurst: I knew of him. My coaches were saying they had one of the best secondaries in the state. I didn't know he came up here (to OU) until I met him and recognized him.

What do you remember of that game? Did the other stand out?

Fleming: Nah, man. He did all right (laughs). Nah, they did beat us though. But we didn't have a quarterback. And he knows that. They could just tee off on us because we couldn't throw the ball.

Hurst: That was our last little rivalry with each other. My team beat his team. We won that day so we're the best.

What's one thing most people don't know about you two?

Fleming: Demontre likes to dance. He can dougie a little bit, but everybody dougies from Texas.

Hurst: Everybody don't know that Jamell is really low-key funny. He says the weirdest thing and it's so funny. I don't think everybody else knows that except the DBs. His personality is totally different in the DB meeting room. He just blurts out stuff and it's the funniest stuff in the world.

Jamell, what was the funniest moment you've seen from Demontre?

Fleming: Halloween. He had this mask on. I didn't even know it was him. He scared me so bad. It was a Jason mask and he came in here dancing all up on me.

BY DARNELL MAYBERRY



Jamell Fleming returns an interception for a touchdown during the Fiesta Bowl.

PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY



OU defensive coordinator Brent Venables on the secondary:

“We’re not real deep in our secondary but we really feel good about some playmakers there, guys (like Jamell Fleming and Demontre Hurst) who have proven to be playmakers. When you look at what Gabe Lynn did this spring, we’ve got three corners. Aaron Colvin (and Javon Harris) we feel really good about those guys and the knack they’ve shown. Those two guys are young players but they’ve shown the innate ability to be around the football and make plays.”

Duo they most resemble



Bad Boys (Miami police detectives Mike Lowrey and Marcus Barnett)

Jamell Fleming: “I’m Mike Lowrey (Will Smith’s character) because I’m cute and I’m funny.”

Demontre Hurst: “I’m Marcus (Martin Lawrence’s character). I’m funny, too, but I’m always getting mad at him because he’s doing stuff he’s not supposed to be doing.”

Fleming: “But I’m the one who likes to do things out of the ordinary.”

Hurst: “And he thinks he knows everything.”

Fleming: “But I get the job done. And I’ll take a bullet for him.”

Hurst: “He gets the job done the hard way. I get the job done the correct and easy way.”

Jamell Fleming breaks up a pass.

PHOTO BY STEVE SISNEY

POSITION ANALYSIS

Corners return strong, two new safeties have experience

Cornerbacks Demontre Hurst and Jamell Fleming played well their first year as starters. Fleming was second in the nation in passes defended. Gabe Lynn, who played well last spring filling in for Fleming, gives the Sooners three solid cornerbacks. There are two new safeties. Aaron Colvin made a smooth transition from cornerback to strong safety. Free safety Javon Harris played well in Bedlam.



UNIT GRADE

B The cornerback tandem played well. Colvin is solid. Lynn is on the spot.

PHOTO BY PAUL HELLSTERN



ROY WILLIAMS

OU DEFENSIVE BACKS DYNAMIC DUO Roy Williams & Derrick Strait, 2000-01

Perhaps the best single-game defensive performance in OU history came in the 2000 national title game, the 13-2 victory over Florida State in the Orange Bowl. Williams at strong safety and Strait at cornerback were common denominators on those teams.

BY BERRY TRAMEL

DERRICK STRAIT



PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY

OU'S SPECIAL TEAMS DYNAMIC DUO: TRESS WAY & JIMMY STEVENS

'We're on the same page'

PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY, THE OKLAHOMAN





Jimmy Stevens kicks the game-winning field goal in the Big 12 Championship.

PHOTO BY CHRIS LANDSBERGER

A DIFFERENT BREED

Kickers often have a unique viewpoint. Other than a brief special teams session at the start of practice, kickers work out by themselves while teammates are pushing and shoving and colliding on the practice field.

Tress Way owns a 45.4-yard career punting average and vows to improve after correcting some technique glitches. Jimmy Stevens unfairly has been viewed as a liability. The Heritage Hall product is 30 of 36 on field goals the past two seasons.

How do you guys help each other?

Stevens: I might see him doing something in practice that might affect his kicking if he's not hitting the ball as well as he could be. I'm not a punting specialist but I've been around it awhile so I can kind of tell things that he does wrong and things he does right.

Way: Jimmy and I have been through all those national camps and have learned from the best. It's cool when he comes back. I listen to what he's saying. I know what he's saying is right. The same thing on a field goal, if he miss hits, I can help him with what's going on. It's cool to feed off each other.

Stevens: We joke around quite a bit, but at practice it's serious whenever we need to be. If we're stretching or after we're done kicking, we like to joke around.

Way: It wasn't really like that when we first came in because I didn't think I'd be punting. I thought I'd be kicking so it was sort of a competition. Now we're on the same page, rooming on the road.

How do you compete with each other?

Stevens: We'll play some games here and there. Occasionally we'll go out and play some golf and get a little competitive in that. He's pretty good at golf. He hits the ball well and is getting better.

Way: During bye, only bye week, a week we take it a little easier during practice, the specialists play 3-on-3 (touch football). It's usually me and Jimmy and somebody else versus Michael Hunnicutt and Patrick O'Hara. I'm the quarterback. Jimmy is a dirty wide receiver. He's real quick, low to the ground. He runs a post and I hit him for a touchdown.

Are there any quirks or annoying habits that stick out?

Stevens: No, not really. We all get along pretty well.

Way: Jimmy can get so mad about a situation. It's so funny. He does this yell really loud without opening his mouth and grunting his teeth. It's like an "urrrr." I crack up every time. When he sees me laughing he starts laughing.

What's something about him that maybe a lot of people don't know?

Stevens: He's really hard on himself. People might not think that, but he wants to be the best. If he's not hitting the ball well, he might not show it, but I know that he's frustrated with himself.

Way: I'm a little more talkative. Jimmy is definitely not afraid to get in trouble. Not in bad trouble. He sometimes just has a really funny attitude about stuff.

BY MIKE BALDWIN & JACOB UNRUH

Tress Way reacts after an 85-yard punt.



Bob Stoops on the special teams

“I think we’re a lot better. Out kickers are doing really well kicking the ball. Jimmy Stevens and Michael Hunnicutt are much better than a year ago (on kickoffs). It’s not even close. All of them are much better on field goals, too. Jimmy and Michael have been much more consistent... (Punter) Tress Way is really hitting the ball. He gets as many 70 yarders as 50 yarders (in practice). He’s getting a bunch of them, so hopefully that will continue (into the season).”

Duo they most resemble



Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid

Similar to the notorious Hole in the Wall gang, Jimmy Stevens and Tress Way constantly are trying to escape trouble.

Way’s booming punts are like Robert Redford’s character Sundance, who devises plans to divert disaster. Way’s booming punts can flip the field to assist the defense after the offense has been backed up near its goal line.

Stevens, scrutinized as much as anyone on the roster, is like Paul Newman’s character Butch Cassidy. Stevens gets criticized for missing field goals but comes through in the clutch more often than given credit (19 of 23 on field goals).

PHOTO BY CHRIS LANDSBERGER

POSITION ANALYSIS

Special teams strong, kickoff coverage needs work

Tress Way is one of the nation’s top punters. He claims his mechanics were off last season, so he could be in for a huge season. Kicker Jimmy Stevens made 19 of 23 field goals but was limited to kicks inside the 40. Ryan Broyles is an elite punt returner. One area that needs dramatic improvement is kickoff coverage. The Sooners gave up four kickoff returns for touchdowns.



UNIT GRADE

B Overall, pretty solid but Stevens must expand his range and kickoff coverage must improve.



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2011 football schedule

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www.newsok.com/footballpreview

SEPT. 3 vs. Tulsa

Norman, 7 p.m.

TV: FX
Radio: Sooner radio network

SEPT. 17 vs. Florida State

@ Tallahassee, Fla. TBA.

TV: TBA
Radio: Sooner radio network

SEPT. 24 vs. Missouri

Norman, 7 p.m.

TV: FX
Radio: Sooner radio network

OCT. 1 vs. Ball State

Norman, 6 p.m.

TV: PPV
Radio: Sooner radio network

OCT. 8 vs. Texas

@ Dallas, Tx., 11 a.m.

TV: ABC
Radio: Sooner radio network

OCT. 15 vs. Kansas

@ Lawrence, Ks., TBA

TV: TBA
Radio: Sooner radio network



OCT. 22 vs. Texas Tech

Norman, TBA

TV: TBA
Radio: Sooner radio network

OCT. 29 vs. Kansas State

@ Manhattan, Ks. TBA

TV: TBA
Radio: Sooner radio network

NOV. 5 vs. Texas A&M

Norman, TBA

TV: TBA
Radio: Sooner radio network

NOV. 19 vs. Baylor

@ Waco, Tx., TBA

TV: TBA
Radio: Sooner radio network

NOV. 26 vs. Iowa State

Norman; 7 p.m.

TV: FX
Radio: Sooner radio network

DEC. 3 vs. Oklahoma State

@ Boone Pickens Stadium, TBA

TV: ABC
Radio: Sooner radio network

OU schedule analysis

BY MIKE BALDWIN, OKLAHOMAN STAFF WRITER

Sept. 17 date at Florida state looming large for Sooners

Sept. 3 vs. Tulsa

A good test for a defense that expects to be vastly improved. Tulsa returns 18 starters, including 10 from an offense that averaged 41.4 points and 506 yards.

Sept. 17 at Florida St.

The Seminoles' potent pass rush will provide a formidable road test. Don't place too much stock in a 47-17 rout last year. OU is 4-5 in true road games the past two years.

Sept. 24 vs. Missouri

The Tigers, returning a ton of talent, upset the Sooners when they were ranked No. 1 last season. But that game was in Columbia. This one is in Norman.

Oct. 1 vs. Ball St.

David Letterman's alma mater was 4-8 last season but returns 17 starters. Since 1990, the Cardinals are 1-38 on the road against BCS teams.

Oct. 8 vs Texas

The Longhorns have many questions following a surprising 5-7 meltdown. It's anyone's guess how quickly two new coordinators can make an impact in Austin.

Oct. 15 at Kansas

Turner Gill faces a huge challenge just to be competitive in the revamped Big 12. The Jayhawks hope a crop of young players can lay a solid foundation.



OU schedule analysis

Oct. 22 vs Texas Tech

Tommy Tuberville's debut season was filled with inconsistency. His focus is improving the defense. This game might be dicey if the game was in Lubbock. It's in Norman.



Oct. 29 at Kansas St.

Bill Snyder's teams are capable of posting an upset in Manhattan. The Wildcats improved their depth but the talent gap is too wide to pose much of a threat.



Nov. 5 vs. Texas A&M

A pivotal Big 12 showdown. The Aggies upset the Sooners last year but have been outscored by an average score of 50-12 in six Norman meetings in the Stoops era.



Nov. 19 at Baylor

The Bears are much improved and are always dangerous with quarterback Robert Griffin III. Phil Bennett should help the defense. But OU is 20-0 all-time versus Baylor.



Nov. 26 vs Iowa State

This game would be more competitive if it was in Ames. It won't be as lopsided as last year's 52-0 blowout but the Sooners will enjoy Thanksgiving leftovers.



Dec. 3 vs. Oklahoma St.

The Sooners have won eight consecutive Bedlam meetings but games in Stillwater are always close. OSU is a top 10 power. Can Mike Gundy end his 0-6 OU drought?





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