By Harold Keith

A tailback who can kick, pass and run his routes smartly appeared the greatest Sooners need as Coaches Dewey "Sooner" Luster, Dale Arbcackle and Harry Phillips started practice September 1 at Owen Field.

The sudden ending of the war probably won't see any of the University's 132 lettermen or star freshmen with eligibility left arrive home in time to make the football team. Not before the second semester, and maybe not that soon, were the Sooners stars who marched away to war expected to return to straddle quantities.

Good tailbacking is a necessity for a successful college football team. Oklahoma A. and M. rode to a Cotton Bowl title last fall behind the running and passing of Bob Fenimore, an All-America triple-threat back. Tulsa's greatest teams were fielded the years she hadKeithly and Dobbs alternating. The Sooners themselves became a national power during the era of such great tailbacks as Hugh McCullough, Beryl Clark and Jack Jacobs.

With Derald Lebow, the converted fullback who so competently passed and powered Oklahoma to Big Six championships in 1943 and 1944, headed for duty on a destroyer and Tommy Meason and Johnny West, his 1944 alternates, neither available this fall, Sooners coaches have been under tremendous pressure of finding and schooling a tailback in three weeks.

Two high school lads, 17-year-old Alfred Needs of El Reno and 17-year-old J. O. Thompson of Oklahoma City Capital Hill, and Johnny Steward, a Navy lad from Los Angeles who played last season at Louisiana Tech, were the cream of the summer crop. All will be challenged in the autumnal workouts by Howard Hawkins, 180-pound Purcell High School boy who lays out a long punt and was recently discharged from the Navy.

The coaches didn't get much of a look at Bob Foote, a 145-pound Navy trainee from Petersburg, Texas, who played some last fall at Millsaps College but missed much of the Sooners summer drills because of a "charley horse." Jack Fentem, a clever-running little Ada cottontail who was a substitutions back in high school, was even switched to half back as the hunt was hotly continued this summer.

If the fullbacking looks like it can take care of itself without Basil Sharp, 190-pound standout at that position last fall, Sharp has the talent to make a tailback of the Phil White and Frank Potts type. He kicks and passes better than is generally realized and runs with power and speed. He is the only returning back who lettered here last year.

Sooners coaches like the potentiality of Thompson, Needs and Steward. Thompson's booming off-tackle running when the hole closed has been reminiscent of Hugh McCullough. Needs' height gives him a fine view of his pass receivers in the secondary and he runs slashingly. He may be used at fullback. Steward is the smallest of the three but is game and tough and wants to play. The Sooners usually letter three or four tailbacks so there's plenty of opportunity for all.

Although military calls may alter it somewhat, here's the way the Sooners line up position by position in August, with the Nebraska game only eight weeks away:


Glass Backboards

And New Maple Floor

With a brand new Sooners basketball layout consisting of glass backboards, improved lighting and a shiny new maple floor nearing completion, Bruce Drake, Oklahoma coach, has a good-looking point with high school players this summer.

The new Sooners basketball layout is part of a reconstruction plan designed to ready the Fieldhouse for the University's vastly-increased physical education program. By September 1 the Fieldhouse floor will be able to accommodate three classes simultaneously and will have twice as much floor space, says Hugh McDermott, chairman of the men's physical education department.

The roof will be patched to keep the rain out and the lights lowered to improve illumination. Downstairs bleachers have all been removed and the old floor ripped out. Two concrete slab foundations from wall to wall with a moisture and termite-proof covering are being laid, over which will go the maple strip flooring.

Built in 1928 by Athletic Director Bennie Owen, the Fieldhouse was only one-half finished. It was hurried to completion in time to be filled by a crowd of 5,280 fans who saw McDermott's all-victorious Sooners basketball team that year defeat Dr. F. C. "Phog" Allen's Kansas Jayhawkers 45 to 19, ending a Jayhawker domination of six consecutive Missouri Valley Conference basketball titles.