The Sooners will be better than in 1966, and it’s too bad that the Big Eight is too

It’s unfortunate for sportswriters that football isn’t as predictable as those free elections in South Vietnam. It would make some of their preseason estimates less embarrassing in December, though it would also make the game certainly less interesting. There are just too many factors involved—some intangible, others inexplicable—which combine to make one team click, another clank. In assessing the potential of the 1967 Sooners, one is confronted with a tangle of pluses, minuses, and maybe which are difficult to unravel with any certainty.

In the plus column are new coach Chuck Fairbanks (see pages 4-7) and his staff. Another asset is the offensive backfield, all back from last year, with some strong, swift sophomores backing it up. The linebacking is in pretty good shape, and Mike Vachon’s toe has returned. Also, the defensive secondary, second best in the country last year, is two-thirds intact.

In the gray area is the offensive line, which wasn’t too terrorizing last year and must be rebuilt for this campaign. The defensive line is also problematical though it appears as good or better than the 1966 line, because of the experience accumulated by a few returning starters, the most prominent being Granville Liggins, who, because of his first two injury-plagued seasons, must be considered a question mark himself. Another key aspect of the game, punting, must be resolved. Tom Stidham, a 43-yard punter, is gone and must be replaced. And another Ben Stidham, a 43-yard punter, is gone and must be replaced. And another clank. In assessing the potential of the 1967 Sooners, one is confronted with a tangle of pluses, minuses, and maybe which are difficult to unravel with any certainty.

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Pass Defense

Bob Stephenson

Everything is pretty well set in the secondary. Steve Barrett and Bob Stephenson at safety and cornerback, are veterans, and Bruce Stensrud, a sophomore, is looking good at the other corner. Billy Gray, frosh coach in '66, has a lot to work with.

Offensive Line

Bob Kalsu (center)

Attend a practice and you will undoubtedly hear the beseeching roar of Buck Nystrom, in his first year at OU and saddled with the most challenging assignment on the staff. He must develop an offensive line. If anyone can, Nystrom can. After two weeks of practice, a few experiments were still in the works. Randy Meacham, tight end last year, is being tried at weak side tackle. Steve Zabel, a junior college split end, is working at tight end with Bo Denton; Byron Bigby, a tackle last year, is at guard; soph Ken Mendenhall, a center in high school, is at guard, and a fullback named Bill Elstrom, is at guard. These will be the boys who will have to make it go, along with two proven regulars, Bob Craig at center, and Bob Kalsu, a fine tackle and with Meacham the largest man on the squad at around 220. Wes Butts is an experienced interior lineman who has seen action and shows talent. A redshirt, Ed Lancaster at guard, could play a lot. Pray a lot for the offensive line, and send Nystrom throat lozenges—he'll have to roar a lot this fall.

Linebackers, Receivers

Don Pfrimmer

Don Pfrimmer attacks with the fatalism of a Kamikaze pilot, and he's going to be a delight to watch at linebacker. A transfer who has only this year of eligibility, the newcomer will add zest and skill. He is ably assisted by Rick Goodwin and Harry Hettmannsperger, who last year led the team in tackles. Monster is the key to the defense, and Jimmy Linn or Done Nelson must come through. Bill Michael, another new coach, like Nystrom, has a demanding job in his debut. Galen Hall coaches the receivers. Joe Killingsworth has looked good at split end. He's tall and runs well after the catch. Denton and Zabel are also 6-3 or over and good receivers. Johnny Barr and Bob Broton, who weighs 149 and fortunately is fast, are also trying their hands at split end.

Defensive Line

Granville Liggins

Assistant head coach Pat James thinks his defensive line will be better than last year's. It's anchored by the redoutable Liggins, and he has John Koller, another senior, at defensive end. Koller is good. The tackles are sound with Dick Paaso and John Titsworth back for another season. Available at any of the interior positions is senior Larry Crutchmer. Jim Files looks set at the other end. James knows what he's talking about, and he thinks opponents will have trouble running against his young men.

Kicking

Vachon will kickoff and kick PAT's and field goals. He had nine of the latter last year for a school record. The punter is who knows? Maybe Zabel, who was pretty good at NMMI, maybe Donny Wheeler, maybe kid named Armstrong or Rickey. We could do without the maybes.

Summary

Great backfield, sound place-kicking, good secondary, better than average linebackers, pretty good defensive line, unproven receivers, questionable offensive line, unknown punting game. Better non-conference schedule, tough conference. With a little luck, we've got a winner. With a little more, a contender; with quite a lot, a bowl. END