Just say "Bennie"
And you've summed up Sooner spirit

By Charles H. "Chuck" Newell, EX '13

IT IS not given to anyone to comprehend ALL that Bennie Owen has done for the University of Oklahoma. It's not likely that even Bennie realizes all he has meant to the school. And it is certain he would never claim the credit that is his merited due.

No man west of the Father of Waters has served any school longer in an athletic capacity than Bennie has served the Sooners. That in itself tells a story of vital significance to anyone blessed with a lifelong enthusiasm for athletics, mostly of the school and university variety.

It places Bennie's name alongside that of Yost of Michigan, whose pupil he was, Stagg of Chicago, and Dan McGugin, of Vanderbilt. That, I believe, composes the list of men who, either as football coaches or as athletic directors, have seen twenty-five years or more of consecutive service in the same American college.

Thus has come to Oklahoma, through Bennie, national fame, well deserved and thoroughly appreciated in Soonerland. Because of Bennie an Oklahoma ex-student can speak up in any company of college men anywhere in the land and be sure of striking a spark of interest.

This much I can pledge every Oklahoman I know to be true from my personal experiences as a newspaper man that have ranged from the Yale club in New York to the University club in Seattle and from the broad expanses of Texas to the press box at Stagg Field in Chicago.

Never have I injected myself into football fanning bees anywhere in the land without letting it be known that the game is known in Oklahoma. And never has some such assertion failed to provoke questions about Bennie Owen. Mostly the comments run something like this:

"That man Owen must be a whiz. How does it happen that Oklahoma got him? And how has Oklahoma been able to keep him?"

Since Sooners are celebrating, all too informally to some of us, the rounding out of twenty-five years of service to the school by Bennie, it may not be amiss to answer those questions somewhat at length.

The answer may be of some benefit to those long out of school who have been too busy making a living, getting married and raising children to realize how time has passed and how much Bennie has done for their Alma Mater.

Certainly the story, inadequately as I may tell it, should, because of the facts and not their manner of presentation, be nothing short of an inspiration to the younger Sooners who may be seeking the best of guidance for their careers yet to crown their efforts.

BENNIE OWEN was a whiz of a football coach before he came to Norman in the fall of 1905. He had coached sensationally winning teams at Washburn and Bethany college after assisting Yost at Michigan the first year "Hurry Up" startled the Middle West with a championship eleven at Ann Arbor.

Oklahoma, with fewer male students enrolled in both church and school and the university proper, than now have football suits issued to them each fall, had games scheduled with the Haskell Indians, Kansas and Texas. The "Terrible Swedes," who had beaten Oklahoma under Owen much as they pleased, had no such attractive schedule.

My recollection is that it was Bennie's desire to coach a team that was to meet Kansas as well as Oklahoma's desire to acquire the services of the best coach in the southwest, that caused a union of a coach and a school that has meant twenty-five years of unbroken progress for both.

At any rate it would be hard to imagine any new coach being received with more genuine enthusiasm per capita than was Bennie when he reached Norman early in September, 1905. And enthusiasm was almost all he found.

There were very few football players. Mostly the suits were old, unwashed and rotting with the sweat and blood of former battles that all too often had found the Sooners on the small end of lopsided scores.

The contrast between the size of the new coach and the enormous confidence in him was startling. Those who attended the decidedly damp homecoming game last November saw more than eleven of Bennie's first varsity. It was my privilege to know them all as a fellow student. I lived in the same house with many of them. I massaged their bruises and knew their most intimate thoughts connected with their football as well as other student activities.

I risked and escaped expulsion by a narrow margin to write of their heroic efforts and the indifference of some few faculty members for their physical welfare. So I think I am qualified to speak authoritatively of the spirit of both coach and players in giving birth to the successful, long and strictly honorable Owen system which has become Oklahoma's most cherished tradition.

In a month's time Bennie had made good beyond all question. This came about through an 18 to 12 victory over the best team the Haskell Indians ever had. It was achieved on a Monday afternoon after sixty minutes of the fiercest fighting—and I mean exactly that—that I have ever witnessed on any gridiron anywhere.

Those Indians were big, fast, tough, mean and clever as the deuce about slugging their opponents when the referee and umpire weren't looking. After acquiring a number of black eyes and bruised jaws there was enough retaliation to put an end to that phase of play.

The school went wild over the victory. Students saved the faculty the trouble of suspending classes the next day. Norman saw more shirt tails the night after the game than McCall ever had in stock at one time. And the next day was given up to whole-souled celebration by students and faculty alike.

The team was too badly bruised up to do more than take a sound licking from a giant Kansas team the following Saturday at Lawrence. But for the first time in the history of the school a real crowd of fans had gone outside the state with a Sooner football team. That constitutes Bennie's second big contribution to the school.

In four weeks he'd shown the school a winning team. In another week his success had been responsible for crystallizing Sooner spirit to a greater extent than ever before.

A week later Oklahoma's first victory over the Texas Longhorns had put football and school spirit permanently on a higher plane than it had occupied before.

BENNIE not only made good football teams. He made men of players and students alike. He did this by example, not by preaching.

As a college reporter that first fall of Bennie's presence in Norman I dogged his footsteps night after night as he followed his players up and down Boyd field. I listened to his talks before games. I never heard him use profanity on or off the field. I never heard him abuse a
player for boneheaded playing. And yet he seldom failed to make his men feel their failures and learn valuable lessons from them.

"Murder, Murder, Murder," was his favorite and most repeated exclamation when a pet play failed to work or a player missed a wideopen tackle.

When players lagged Bennie often injected himself into the scrimmage. Then the fur flew. It seemed every man of the opposition became animated with the desire to stop Bennie and even undress him in the bargain. They used to throw him pretty hard and pile up on him. But all he did was grin.

Bennie capped his first season with a triumph over his former team, the "Terrible Swedes" from Bethany. There were many students that rainy Thanksgiving night in Oklahoma City who wanted to make much of what is now called "whoopee." Saloons were as open, as warm and almost as well lighted as the modern picture palaces. Most of us had some extra change in our pockets as a result of the game.

Everyone wanted Bennie to join a rollicking parade that proposed to tour brass railed emporiums. But Bennie knew better than to get out of character that way. His refusal didn't offend. It simply increased the respect of the student body for their new coach.

"Boys I feel just great the way I am about the victory this afternoon," said Bennie as he was surrounded in the old Lee hotel lobby. "I don't drink. You don't want me with you. I don't blame you for feeling as you do. If you must celebrate try to remember that your conduct tonight will reflect on your school just as the team's conduct reflected on it this afternoon."

The celebration didn't last so long as it might have. There was much yelling. Sooner yells were given on the streets and many other college yells were roared out stumblingly from before the long mirrors behind the mahogany bars. None missed the midnight Santa Fe to Norman because of the celebration. Yet all were very, very happy.

Through the next twenty-four years, in season and out, Bennie Owen has continued to shape the destiny of Oklahoma athletics and mold by fine example the character and manhood of Oklahoma. What the school has achieved in athletics is due primarily to him and his rare ability to lead the youth of his chosen state.

Owen field and the stadium are magnificent physical tribute to Bennie and the university's growth. But best of all is the Owen spirit that has been imparted to thousands.

He has overcome physical disaster met in a hunting accident and gone on undaunted to greater victories. Because of his character and charm he was privileged to marry a lovely daughter of Oklahoma. Because of that and the nearly always proper appreciation of his ability by Sooners other schools were unable to lure him away by offers of gold.

Bennie has worked from the first for Oklahoma because he loved his business and knew how to play the game as it has been played by few other men anywhere in the land.

He wasn't a Sooner born but he's truly a Sooner through the highest order of sacrificial services to the school and thousands of Oklahomans hope that when he dies he'll be a Sooner dead.

J. L. RADER, UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN SINCE 1909.

Realizing his dream

J. L. Rader has nurtured Oklahoma library

By JACK FISCHER, '32

TWO YEARS ago a young man sat in a room lined with a few pine bookshelves and dreamed a dream. Today he is watching that dream come true in hard brick and stone and mortar. Jesse L. Rader, '08 arts-sc., University of Oklahoma librarian who took charge of the school's first tiny store of books in 1909, is about to realize a lifetime-ambition—the completion of the finest college library in western America.

A decade of work and hope and worry has made the new library building a thing too close to the heart of the quiet, silvery-haired librarian for much discussion.

"It means more to me than I can try to explain," he said hesitantly. "Almost as much as it will mean to the state and the university. I scarcely dared hope for