



After running a pattern that left him virtually alone in the end zone, Biletnikoff fields the pass that put Florida State ahead for good.

BOWLED OVER BY A MOUTHFUL

A polysyllabic pair—Tensi to Biletnikoff—and some unlucky surprises combine to defeat the Sooners

If 1965 continues at the same unhappy pace for OU football, it might be wise to put a roof on Owen Field and make it a classroom. The first sunrise of the new year brought to light the fact that four Sooner players had signed professional football contracts before their college eligibility had expired. The reverberations from this disclosure have been felt across the country, and in all likelihood will lead to a new relationship between the colleges and the pros. Coach Gomer Jones drew praise and admiration from all corners for his prompt and forthright action in immediately dismissing the four from the team and sending them home.

January 2 was no better. The Gator Bowl became a snakepit as a mouthful of a passing combination (Tensi to Biletnikoff,—the poor announcer had to say it 13 times) was more than a handful for the Sooners. The splendid Steve Tensi (23 for 36 for 303 yards) never hit the turf. For all the Sooner fans know, his uniform may not have had to be cleaned all season (bad news

for Cheer detergent). Fred Biletnikoff, the All-America flanker back, caught a touchdown pass for every syllable in his tongue-twister of a name and had 13 catches for 192 yards all day.

Except for the football game and the unpleasantness about professional contracts, the Gator Bowl was an unqualified success for Oklahoma. Which is a way of saying that the food, the weather and the scenery were just dandy.

Jacksonville is a city of just over 200,000 situated in northern Florida 15 miles from the Atlantic. America's oldest city, St. Augustine, is 30 miles to the south, palm trees grow along main thoroughfares, the temperature stays generally in the 70's during early January and the sea food is abundant and delicious.

First on the scene were the team, coaches, athletic department officials, players' wives and the press, who flew to Jacksonville Dec. 26. Between practices and strategy meetings, Gator Bowl hosts provided the customary jaunts and diversions which are part

of the post-season game ritual. There were visits to the dog races and a hockey game, a private screening of a yet-to-be-released motion picture and after the bowl a deep-sea fishing expedition (final: no fish caught, several sea-sick) and a trip to Marineland.

Sooner fans began pouring in, which is an accurate expression, on New Year's Eve. The biggest problem facing most was whether to order lobster, shrimp or crabs for dinner that night. The next day there was something else to worry about. By midmorning the OU supporters were busy convincing each other that clouds really do have silver linings and at the Sooner breakfast on the day of the game, spirit was typically high.

And to those not emotionally involved with the Sooners, the game was exciting and highly entertaining. One of the best analyses of the bowl was given by *Norman Transcript* sports editor Jim Weeks. Jim's examination of OU's rocky 1965 start follows:

Perhaps the reason for Florida State's victory was best summed up by the Sooner

player who said, "It was just a pro offense against a college defense." Anytime the outcome of a game is summed up in one statement, it's being oversimplified. But that remark comes as close as any to describing what happened. The Florida team amassed 303 yards passing, more than the Sooners gained rushing (71) and passing (209) combined. . .

Some statistics that coaches normally think mean something in analyzing a game were amazingly even. Each team got the ball 13 times with the opportunity to start an offensive series. However, Florida State turned one of these into a one-play touchdown when defensive back Howard Ehler returned a pass interception 69 yards for the first score of the game. Including punts, the Seminoles had the ball 73 plays from scrimmage and the Sooners 70—no significant difference. . .

Florida State discovered what it needed to know when it marched 90 yards in 12 plays to go ahead to stay, 12-7, in the second quarter. It was the first drive of any length that the Seminoles had and it gave them a chance to analyze the OU defense. They learned that the Sooners were going to play a coverage-type defense instead of a strong rush against the Seminoles' primary weapon, the passing attack. This meant that the Sooners were using seven players—the three deep backs, two ends and both linebackers—to cover potential receivers and rushing the passer with only four linemen. The Seminoles changed their passing strategy to take advantage of this defense on the next two series. The change worked. They scored two more touchdowns and had a 24-7 half-time lead that the Sooners were never able to overcome.

They fortified their protection for Tensi by sending only three receivers downfield, leaving five linemen and two other backs to fight off the four outmanned Sooner rushers. They sent the tight end, Bill Dawson, only about five yards across the middle to hold the OU linebackers and safety in position and gave flankerback Biletnikoff and split ends Don Floyd and Doug Blankenship a chance to maneuver in the territory guarded by the OU ends and halfbacks on either side. Since Tensi was assured more time to throw, the potential receivers also had more time to get in the clear.

Tensi faded to pass 36 times. He never was forced to run with the ball or hang on to it and accept a loss. Florida State proved that if he had enough time, a receiver can get into the clear even when he is guarded by more than one defender.

Only an ostrich with his head stuck in the ground could believe that the loss of three veteran senior players on the offensive team didn't hurt OU's chances of winning the game. When tackle Ralph Neely, fullback Jim Grisham, halfback Lance Rentzel and reserve end Wes Skidgel signed those undated professional contracts nearly a month ago they gambled on the integrity of men who broke the rules to enlist them. Unfortunately, they also gambled with something that wasn't theirs alone to risk. They risked their own reputations but worst of all their bonus checks cost their teammates and loyal fans a higher price. Their actions reflected

on every "name" college football player in the country. . .

It was obvious that the OU ground attack which was to be relied on so heavily suffered with one of the team's best blocking linemen and two top running backs out of the game. The Sooners made only five first downs and 71 yards rushing. They had a net loss of eight yards rushing in the second half. To keep the ball away from Florida State, OU had to establish a time-consuming running attack. It did on its first touchdown drive in the first quarter but was unable to make the ground game go after that. In fact, the Sooners had to abandon the running attack in the second half to move the ball at all. It's also unrealistic to think the ineligible players would have made a difference in the final outcome, but perhaps the game would have been closer. The signing incident merely brings an unfortunate situation to the public's attention.

There's nothing wrong with a professional football career or the benefits of a good job after the playing career has ended. However, these things must be kept in the proper perspective by both the professional teams and the college players.

The four Sooner players admitted before leaving Jacksonville that what they had done was wrong. Actually they probably did no more than some other players in other bowl games. It's unlikely that among all the players being sought by the pros, that only four on one team would sign before competing in their final college game. They simply got caught.

"It was our own stupidity," said Rentzel but it was not the Sooners' "stupidity" or the fact that they got caught or that OU lost the football game that is the real point.



Warm weather and palm trees lend proper atmosphere as Sooners leave for practice.

The point is that these four players had lost their sense of values. Whether realizing it or not they put their personal gain above everything else.

Perhaps guard Ed McQuarters, who did not have an outstanding season and was not highly sought but was drafted by St. Louis, gave the only answer that will remedy the situation. When asked why he hadn't signed, McQuarters answered with a question: "Do you think I would do that to Gomer Jones after all he's done for me?"

Gator Bowl hosts provided the Sooners with a visit to the dog races, Ben Hart (left) and Ron Fletcher (center), who later teamed on a 95-yard score, watch with Eugene Ross.

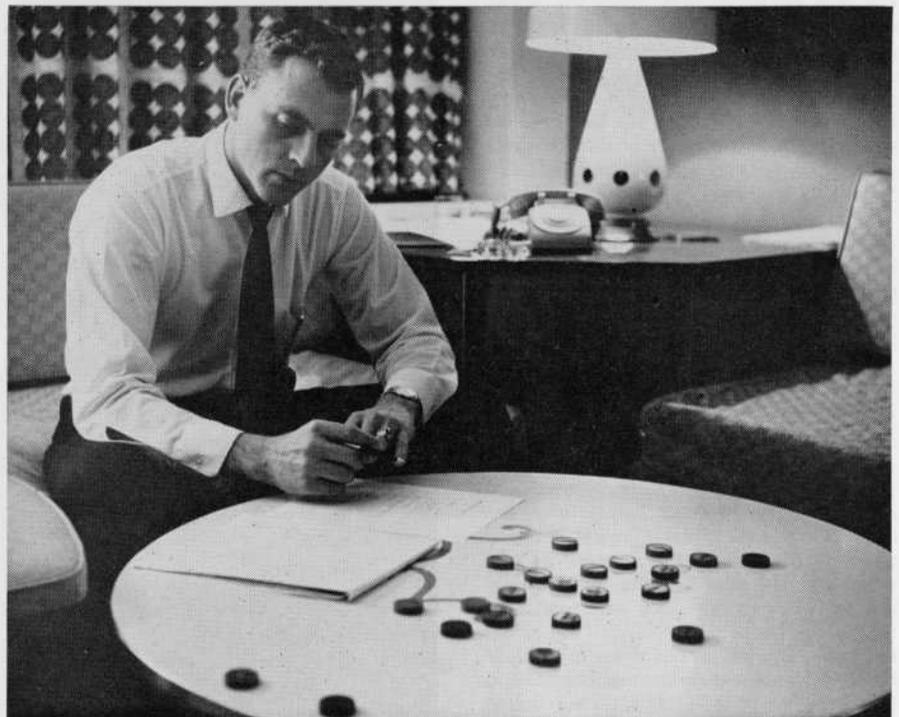




Mrs. Larry Shields (left) and Mrs. Vernon Burkett are equipped with the correct tourist paraphernalia as they record their visit to the ancient city of St. Augustine, Florida.

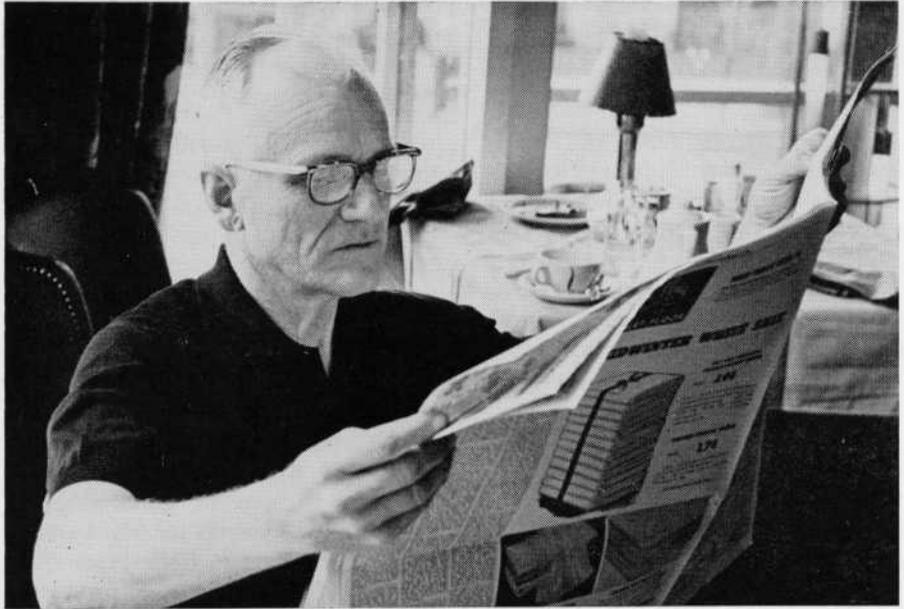


An excursion to our nation's oldest city, only 30 miles from Jacksonville, provides players' wives with an entertaining day of sightseeing and, yes, souvenir-buying, too.



What's Assistant Coach Jay O'Neal doing with checkers when he should be thinking about football, you ask. Well, if it's any help, there are twenty-two of those checkers.

On New Year's Day the story of the pro contracts breaks in the newspapers. Publicity director Harold Keith is a picture of stoic calm as he sifts through the bad news.



PHOTOS BY NED HOCKMAN

Dr. Cross, flanked by emcee Boyd Gunning at left and Alumni Association president Dr. Harold Tisdal at right, speaks to the Association's pregame breakfast for fans.

It's halftime at the sun-drenched Gator Bowl as the Pride of Oklahoma performs in 75-degree weather before a crowd which has set the all-time Gator attendance record.

