Two of the six national finalists for the 2006 Wooden Citizenship Cup were OU athletes—the eventual winner, Jackie Dubois, and Jacob Gutierrez. Their lives illustrate what it means to give back to the community. By Jay C. Upchurch

Sacrifice is a word that gets thrown around a lot when it comes to athletes and athletics. Ditto for the term “hero,” a popular choice anytime some competitor or team produces a performance considered above and beyond the realm of everyday accomplishments.

In truth, sacrifice and acts of on-the-field heroism are fairly common in the sports world, particularly at the Division I collegiate level where student-athletes are endlessly tested by the rigors of daily schedules that begin with early morning workouts, are filled with classroom work and demanding practices and end with a few hours of study hall. While long days of total dedication and perseverance are the norm, finding time for a personal life within these parameters is a challenge.

Jackie Dubois and Jacob Gutierrez have jumped all the requisite hurdles, yet neither has been deterred from making their lives count for something more. During their time at the University of Oklahoma, both have excelled in their respective sports, as well as in the classroom, but what they have done beyond the scope of everyday college life is the most impressive.

“We are talking about two young people with overwhelming schedules who somehow find the time, energy and passion to go out and try to help others any way they can,” says Joe Castiglione, OU’s director of athletics. “We would hope all of our student-athletes have the kind of charitable dispositions that Jackie and Jacob have demonstrated while being part of the Sooner family. It is no wonder they both were nominated for this year’s Coach Wooden Citizenship Cup.”

Dubois and Gutierrez were among six finalists who were originally part of more than 100 nominees from around the country, both amateur and professional. OU was the lone university with more than one representative in the group of finalists honored on January 24, 2006, at a formal presentation ceremony in Atlanta by the organization Athletes for a Better World. The Coach John Wooden Citizenship Cup is awarded to an athlete who the selection committee believes has made the greatest difference in the lives of others.

“The mission of Athletes for a Better World is to use sports to develop character, teamwork and citizenship through commitment to an athletic code for living that applies to life, and to
Jackie Dubois overcame the challenges of cystic fibrosis to run cross country for OU and become the only athlete in school history to win all four of the Athletics Department's top honors, as well as the national citizenship cup.

I've always been grateful for the situation. No matter whether I was fortunate to be there, competing, I always felt fortunate to be there, competing, says Dubois, who will graduate...

Dubois' story is inspirational on many levels, considering she was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at birth, a chronic and progressive disease that can cause breathing disorders and lung disease. She was not expected to live to see her 21st birthday.

But Dubois, 22, has never allowed that initial prognosis to hold her back. She began running as a preteen and quickly discovered it helped in her battle with CF. The Kansas native eventually earned All-State honors twice as a prep cross-country performer, which helped her earn a track and field scholarship to the University of Oklahoma.

"My exercise and lifestyle have been beneficial. Our family raised us to be active, and it has definitely made a difference in our lives," says Dubois, whose sister Leslie also suffers from the disease.

A four-year letter winner with the Sooners, Dubois was a key contributor on an OU squad that earned the cross country program's first national ranking. That same group also helped the Sooners to their best-ever showing in the Big 12 Cross Country Championships in 2004.

Besides earning First Team Big 12 All-Academic honors three times each in both cross country and track, Dubois somehow found time to volunteer with the Special Olympics, the American Red Cross, Norman Public Schools and the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, among others. For a person who understandably could be caught up in her own daily struggles, Dubois demonstrates extraordinary enthusiasm for reaching out to others.

"I considered it a blessing every time I stepped out onto the track or onto a cross country course at OU.
Sooner football fans learned last season what students at Madison Elementary School have known for a long time: At 5-foot-6, 185 pounds, running back Jacob Gutierrez is the complete package.

As part of Madison Elementary’s reading program, Jacob Gutierrez earned such an outstanding reputation as a popular role model that two other Norman schools drafted him; then the schools backed his selection as the 2005 United Way Youth Citizen Volunteer of the Year.

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Tradition of the OU Flag

When a muscular Ruf/Nek runs onto Owen Field waving the huge, unwieldy OU flag, the crowd knows to jump to its feet and unleash the manic vocal support that ushers the home team into the stadium. A similar scene greets the OU basketball crowds when their teams take the floor in Lloyd Noble Center. The flag and other manifestations of Sooner spirit are meant to send a message to fans and foes alike: This is our house.

The big school flag whipping through the air at sporting events is tradition now, at Oklahoma and most other college venues around the country—but at OU this particular custom was born more of desperation than calculation more than 30 years ago.

Ted Jacobs, a sophomore from Waco, Texas, and grandson of legendary Sooner track coach John Jacobs, had been named to the OU cheerleading squad just prior to the 1975 football season. The tryouts, by his own admission, were not exceptionally strenuous, the only requirement being an ability to perform “double stunts” with a partner. This Jacobs could handle.

He quickly learned, however, that he was the only cheerleader who did not have in his repertoire the typical individual gymnastics moves that have become so routine—handsprings, front somersaults, cartwheels, flips and the like. Jacobs loved his place on the squad, and just days before the first game, he was frantic for a way to keep his gymnastics shortcomings from being exposed to 70,800 game-day spectators.

Driving down Lindsey Street, Jacobs passed a car dealership flying several OU flags. He screeched to a stop and inquired where such a flag could be purchased. Then he convinced the OU cheerleader sponsor, Chris Purcell (then assistant director of the Center for Student Development and now vice president for University governance), to buy a flag and allow him to lead the team onto the field.

While tradition was born, Jacobs’ standing in the school spirit world was short-lived; the following year gymnastics skills were added to the tryout requirements, and Jacobs was out. He cannot swear that he originated the now-universal school flag practice across the nation, but he insists he knew of none other, certainly not in Big 8, except for the banner used by the Texas band in halftime shows.

By today’s measure, Jacobs’ flag might be considered puny. While the cheerleaders launch themselves airborne with increasing daring on the sidelines, the OU Ruf/Neks have assumed responsibility for leading the team with a much larger version of the University’s standard, and using it to celebrate touchdowns, victories and to exhort the fans to greater frenzy.

The original flag landed in Jacobs’ possession. Now the director of the Energy Management Program in OU’s Price College of Business, Jacobs donated the historic relic to the University several years ago. It was framed and is displayed in the recently renovated Crossroads Restaurant in Oklahoma Memorial Union.

Close inspection reveals some stains on the white “OU” portion of the flag, which Jacobs claims came from oranges tossed onto the field during a 35-10 trouncing of Nebraska. That win earned the Sooners the 1975 Big 8 title and sent them to the Orange Bowl, where a 14-6 victory over Michigan gave Oklahoma its second back-to-back National Championships.—CJB