The Sooner Magazine

Lawrence "Jap" Haskell, '22 sc., one of the great Sooner stars in his own right, captured the eyes of the Big Six baseball world this spring with his remarkable performance with the Sooner nine. A great team and a great coach brought up Oklahoma's athletic stock for the Sooners tied with Missouri for the league leadership.

BY HAROLD KEITH, '29

The word is pitch and pay" quoth one of Shakespeare's characters in "King John," who might possibly have been referring to the average American college baseball team. Not so with the Sooners of 1931. "The word is pitch and collect" could much more appropriately be said of them for Oklahoma owes its second consecutive "Big Six" co-championship almost entirely to its corps of excellent right-handed hurlers.

With a light-hitting squad whose team batting mark was only .264, and just a fair fielding squad, which had thirty errors charged against it in a schedule of eleven contests, Coach Lawrence "Jap" Haskell's club was apparently a mediocre one this year. How, then, could Oklahoma drive through to a co-championship?

Good pitching is the answer. The Sooner staff's earned run average for the season was 0.999, an amazing figure. That means enemy teams couldn't earn as much as one run per each nine-inning game off the Sooner pitchers. Occasionally enemy teams made more than one run per game but usually those extra runs resulted from Sooner errors and consequently couldn't be debited to the Sooner pitchers.

Not all the credit should go to the Oklahoma hurling staff. In Captain-elect Ray Watson the team had a catcher who could hit, field, throw and what many fans don't appreciate—get the most out of his pitchers. In Bus Mills and Johnnie May it possessed the greatest two-man batting punch in the conference. Every man on the team was smarter than the average college baseball player. Yet in the final analysis it was pitching that brought the tie for the title.

It wouldn't be hitting too shy of the mark to say that the Sooner team's makeup this year is strikingly similar to that of the Philadelphia Athletics, world's professional baseball champions. The great Philadelphia team ranked only fourth in American league hitting last year, possessed but two outstanding hitters and only two pitchers who triumphed consistently. Yet it won 102 games.

Now mark carefully the Sooner and Philadelphia parallels.

In Mickey Cochrane the A's had the greatest catcher in baseball, just as Oklahoma possessed the outstanding receiver in the "Big Six" conference in Ray Watson. In Simmons and Foxx the world's champions owned a pair of corking long distance hitters, who comprised perhaps sixty percent of their team's hitting power and that figure just about represents the portion of Oklahoma's batting strength furnished this past season by Mills and May. In Earnshaw and Grove the big leaguers had a pair of pitching giants who won 50 and lost but 18 games. Oklahoma's Cannon and Young worked four-fifths of the innings Oklahoma played this season and won seven of the ten games.

When a big league baseball team is constructed in the above manner, a tremendous burden is placed upon its pitchers. However in "intercollegiate baseball, in which the teams don't play every day, the pitching problem isn't so acute. Owing to the fact three games of the already shortened Sooner schedule were rained out, Cannon and Young went into nearly every game with plenty of rest.

The lone exception occurred at Lawrence, Kansas, May 13 when a postponed game was played between Kansas and Oklahoma on the day after Cannon and Young had won a double-header from Nebraska. Joe Hess, inexperienced right-hander, started for the Sooners but became a trifle unsteady and Cannon, who had hurled a scintillating two-hit shutout against the Cornhuskers the preceding afternoon, worked the last seven innings and was bumped for an 8-to-6 defeat although only three of the runs against him were earned. That was the only game Oklahoma lost all year.

Cannon was the wheelhorse of the staff. The Stroud boy worked about half the innings the team played, won five games and gave but six earned runs for an average of but 1.05. Besides he accepted 28 fielding chances without error, hit .315, and scored the winning run in the final game of the season that gave Oklahoma the co-championship. It was a big year for the likeable Sooner captain. Few athletes end their intercollegiate careers so brilliantly.

The surprise of the year was Coach Haskell's metamorphosis of Paul Young, the big football center. From an awkward plodder whose chief baseball experience had been playing catch, Haskell developed Young into the most effective moundsman in the "Big Six" conference, a pitcher who had control, a fast ball, a puzzling knuckler and who, when the going became rough, was cool as spring water. Enemy batsmen faced Young in 32 full innings and yet at the season's
Four games with the strong Central Teachers’ college nine of Edmond prefixed the regular conference season for the Sooners and in each of these four they were opposed by Ray Richards, big Broncho “ace,” who is the ranking member of the famous Richards pitching family of Crescent, Oklahoma, and had been standing Oklahoma college teams on their heads.

With Edmond leading, 2 to 0, Bus Mills smacked a terrific home run down the deepest diagonal of the playing field in left center to start the Sooners off. They tied the score in the fourth on doubles by May and Stogner and won it in the sixth on singles by Chappell, May and Mills, a Central error, and a towering fly by Watson that enabled Mills to score the winning run.

At Edmond six days later Richards showed the Sooners some real pitching. Not until the ninth could they score on him, Watkins driving in the tying run. Arrayed against Richards was Young, who toiled five innings and held the Bronchoes hitless, and Cannon who twirled the last seven innings and gave but three hits. Oklahoma finally won when Beck drilled a single to right in the twelfth frame, scoring Watkins who had singled.

Central was easy in the third and fourth games, the Sooners winning 17 to 1 and 9 to 2. In the third contest Mills, May and Lobaugh each gathered four hits. In the fourth Beck and May each collected three blows. Four flashy fielding plays brightened up the finale, Beck twice snaring fouls off the first-base screen, Stogner making a leaping grab of a Broncho liner and Watson neatly trapping Beck’s low pickup to tag Frost at the plate. Eph Lobaugh also performed a nimble bit of footwork when he scored from first on Cannon’s drag down the left-field foul line.

Missouri, which ultimately tied Oklahoma for the conference co-championship, was first on the Sooner conference schedule but a soaking rainstorm drenched the field, kept both teams indoors and finally compelled the Tigers to return to Columbia. Thus the two best teams in the conference never met, a fact that should draw the spectators when Missouri and Oklahoma tangle in baseball next year.
in the course of time, our rhythms being different, I go up as he comes down and finally manage to escape.

The United States and all her customs are the big influence on the Continent at present. Everyone speaks English—American English, with its slang and idioms. All dance music is American, all phonograph records are English, styles are American. The French beret, which the French have always worn straight across the forehead, must now be worn on the back of the head in the American fashion in order to be chic. In some sets it is fashionable to speak French with an American accent—Maurice Chevalier speaks English with a French accent, and French with an American accent.

One day, walking with a friend, I decided to go into a large hotel to inquire the prices—not intending, of course, even to think of stopping there; merely out of curiosity. The lady who was with me, an Hungarian who spoke fluently besides her own native tongue, French, German and Italian, said to me: "Speak English, it will make a better impression." Business men prefer English or German to other languages.

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State go ahead 3 to 2 as the eighth inning loomed.

Then Haskell's big guns, Mills and May, fired a salvo that tied the score. Mills drilled a tremendous triple to right field and scored standing up when May smote the first ball Auker threw him for him with a flock of errors. But Bell came through nicely. In the first two innings his buddies made it hard for him with a flock of errors. But Bell bowed his neck, pitched out of hole after hole, and when he fanned Pinch-hitter Maddox with the bases full in the seventh, was well on his way to victory. Not until Oklahoma led 12 to 1 did he ease up, Ames scoring four times in the ninth.

As usual, Mills and May were the big noise with the stick. Mills got a home run, a double and a single. May collected a homer and two singles. Bell even came through by slashing a hit through the infield with the bases full, scoring two runners.

The Sooners apparently made a triple play in the third inning of this game. With Iowa State players on second and third and nobody out, the batter drove a ground ball to Shortstop Lobau of the Sooners who threw him out at first. Meanwhile Humbach, the Ames runner on second, had hustled down to third only to find that Gustafson, his team mate, hadn't left the bag. Andy Beck, baseball player, was given charge of the squad.

But rain drowned out both games at Lawrence and also the first game at Lincoln, forcing Oklahoma to play a double-header against the Cornhuskers Tuesday. Captain Cannon submitted the prettiest pitching exhibition of the season in the opener when he shut out Nebraska with two singles. Young won the nightcap, 2 to 1, although it went 14 innings before Mills singled and May drove him home with a long double to left.

Next day the Sooners stopped over at Lawrence and played off one of the postponed games with the Jayhawks but the 23 innings of the previous day, plus a long automobile drive and a keen Kansas fighting spirit, let the Jays carry the day, 8 to 6. Cannon got three hits, driving in two runs, while Mills blasted a homer with Newman abase.

Two days later Iowa State invaded Owen field for the final games of the season. Oklahoma had to win both of them to stay in the running. But who would pitch? Cannon was an impossibility as he had worked full games Tuesday and Wednesday. Young had but three days rest.

Coach Haskell, limping to the bench despite the pain of his rheumatism, solved the riddle by deciding to gamble. He summoned Dick "Fire Ball" Bell, a relief twirler who had pitched but five innings all season, to the hill. Bell's chief stock in trade is a curve ball so slow that you can time soft-boiling eggs with it. The Iowa State coach countered by using Gustafson, whose fast ball throws off smoke and fire.

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quick-witted Sooner first-baseman, sized up the situation in a wink and running across the diamond to third base, tagged out Huntbach who tried to dodge back to second, and then threw out Gustafson at the plate, Ray Watson handling the putout. The jubilant Sooners, patting Beck on the back, ran to the bench.

However Umpire Roy Fisherr ruled Beck hadn't touched Huntbach and that the latter hadn't run too far out of line when Beck made a pass at him with the ball. So the play was scored only as a two-ply killing and Coach Haskell's players had to return to the field and put a fourth Iowa State batter out.

The final contest of the year wasn't so easy. Captain Cannon, toiling his third full game in five days, was in fine form but so was Loufek, his Cyclone rival, and as the two teams trotted past one another midway in the seventh, Iowa State led 1 to 0, thanks to a homer by Shea, first-sacker, in the second.

Beck walked to start the Sooner half of the seventh, was sacrificed to second and with Mills striding to the plate the crowd began to hammer the wooden seats in unison with their heels, begging for a home run. The Texan chose this propitious moment to touch off his sixth circuit clout of the season, and maul a whistling liner far into left field, the ball rolling nearly to the cinder away with all the Iowa State outfielers in pursuit.

As Mills sprinted around the sacks the great roar that went up from the spectators must have warmed the cockles of his heart. All through his varsity career he had been making Sooner crowds yell. In 1928 he plucked a forward pass out of the air and dashed 45 yards down the right sidelines to a touchdown in the Homecoming game against Nebraska. Last October he repeated that stunt against the Cornhuskers, although that time an off-tackle gallop of 63 yards did the work. His 49-yard touchdown cruise against the Kansas Aggies before the big Homecoming Day throng three weeks later had also drawn an avalanche of cheers and now he had ended his athletic career at Norman just as he would have chosen to end it with this thundering home run thump.

Iowa State tied the score in the eighth without making a hit, a Sooner error contributing to the run, but Oklahoma was not to be denied and put two on the sacks in the ninth whereupon Pitcher Loufek walked Mills purposely. May, the clean-up hitter, who was leading the club in batting and needed just one more bingle to raise his average above .400, sacrificed the opportunity by working the Cyclone pitcher for a base on balls, forcing in the winning score.

Meanwhile up at Columbia, Missouri kept pace with the Sooners and earned an equal share of the conference flag by dramatically coming from behind in the last of the ninth to score three runs on Nebraska and win.

For the fifth time in the last seven years, Oklahoma had won or tied for a conference baseball title, Bill Owen's great Soonerteams of 1925, 26 and 27 having taken three Missouri Valley championships in a row.

Captain Cannon, Lobaugh and Mills are the only graduating members of the team and although each will be sorely missed, the Sooners will no doubt be in the thick of the pennant fight next season.

Baseball was the only sport in which Oklahoma could even tie for a "Big Six" championship this year, although the Sooners garnered seconds in football, two-mile team race, indoor track and tennis.