

The following story was written as an assignment in the Depth Reporting class at the University of Nebraska School of Journalism. The author is a senior from Lincoln.

By CHARLES HARPSTER

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla.—When disc jockey Steve Rivers of radio station KOMA predicted during his evening show a two-touchdown Thanksgiving Day Oklahoma victory over Nebraska, the "shuckers" from the north struck back.

A screaming dorm of NU freshman girls telephoned Nebraska cheers from Lincoln. From Bassett, Neb., a high school student wrote, "Our geometry teacher, Mr. Dan Miller, said we will take the wishbound (cq) slush and make cornmeal mush."

"I thought Oklahoma fans were bad," Rivers said, "but they don't compare with Nebraskans in spirit." They come darn close, however.

The Game to decide who really is Big Red in the Big Eight has been called the Game of the Decade (the Century?) by its most hyperbolic promoters. It could end in a dull, thudding scoreless tie.

Without the fans it would be just another game. But, like a championship soccer match in Brazil, the public is part of the game. As an OU public relations man put it, "Oklahomans, since the Wilkinson era, had forgotten how to be greedy fans."

KOMA, with a 50,000-watt power plant bringing in Sooner fan mail as fast as the Wishbone-T gains yards, has stacks of out-of-state letters generated by The Game.

La Bolt, S.D. Luck, Wis. Aztec, N.M. Julesburg, Colo. Rock Springs, Wyo. Letters, poems, predictions and drawings, all depicting how the Huskers are expected to be carved Thanksgiving Day.

Take, for example, "Twas Thanksgiving Day in Soonerland":

"Now Pruitt! Now Mildren! Now Joe and Leon!

On Chandler! On Roy and John!

To the 50! To the 30! and down to goal!

Now score away, score away, score away all!"

A Cornhusker visitor to Oklahoma City-Norman would find sympathy only at the Nebraska Embassy. Just outside of Will Rogers World Airport, on Interstate 35, a billboard reminds him "There is only one Big Red in the Big 8—Boomer Sooner." At McDonald's you get a "Beat Nebraska" sticker with your Big Mac.

The Junior Achievement people are passing out "Beat NU" matchbooks. Store signs urge an OU victory. There are posters, bumper stickers, and wishbone brooches. In a state where front license plates haven't been required since metal-scarce World War II, plastic OUSA license tags are a bumper crop.

Has the entire town gone berserk, as some Oklahomans think Lincoln has? Not quite. It is true everyone is talking about The Game. And in stores there are \$4 OU ashtrays, \$9 OU plaques and \$30 OU wall clocks. But the GO BIG RED clothing boom familiar to Nebraskans seemed to be small business around Oklahoma City.

In Oklahoma, big games are measured against the annual third game of the year with Texas. How does The Game compare? Some sources said nothing beats a victory over Texas, but most authorities put the Texas game No. 2 this year.

OU students are higher on this game than on any in history, said ticket manager Red Reid. Evidence, he said, is found in the card section, which is turning away volunteers for the first time.

There was a pep rally Monday night with entertainment by a newly formed Norman group called, "The Coming Storm." A bigger rally is planned for Wednesday. Dwight Short of Henryetta, Okla., a member of the Sooner Rally Council, announced last week that there would be no boundaries to restrict groups vying for the Sooner Spirit Award.

Last week a shot fired into the Black People's Student Union and several arson-connected fires diverted the attention of many students from the game. Capt. David D. Stenhouse of University Police said Owen Field was under 24-hour guard, with men working 12-hour shifts.

Wishbone-T formation. Splitend Jon Harrison is split to his left. This is basically a running formation, however, if Harrison is not covered quarterback Jack Mildren is capable of throwing to him while tolling to his left.

Stenhouse said Owen Field is always guarded before televised games because equipment is stored inside. He added that "because of incidents the last couple of days" security had been tightened around the Tartan Turf field. The field is reputed to be flammable, according to assistant OU sports information director Bill Hancock.

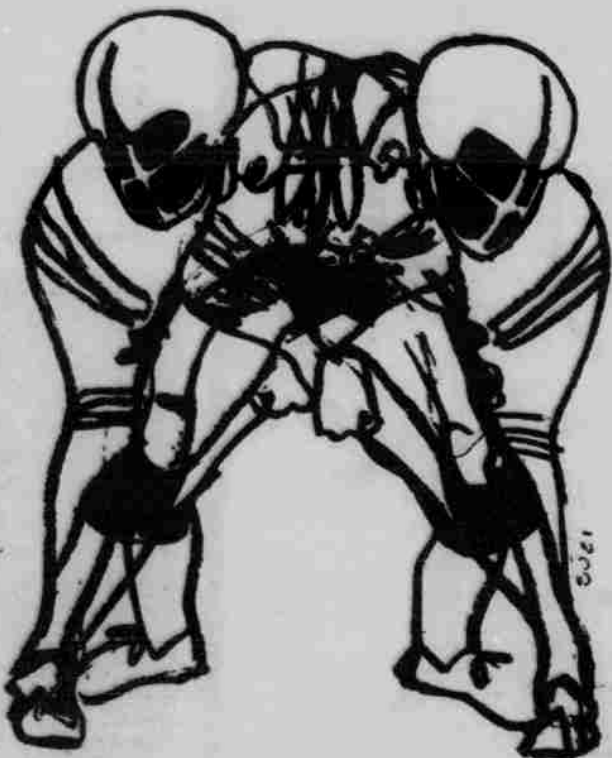
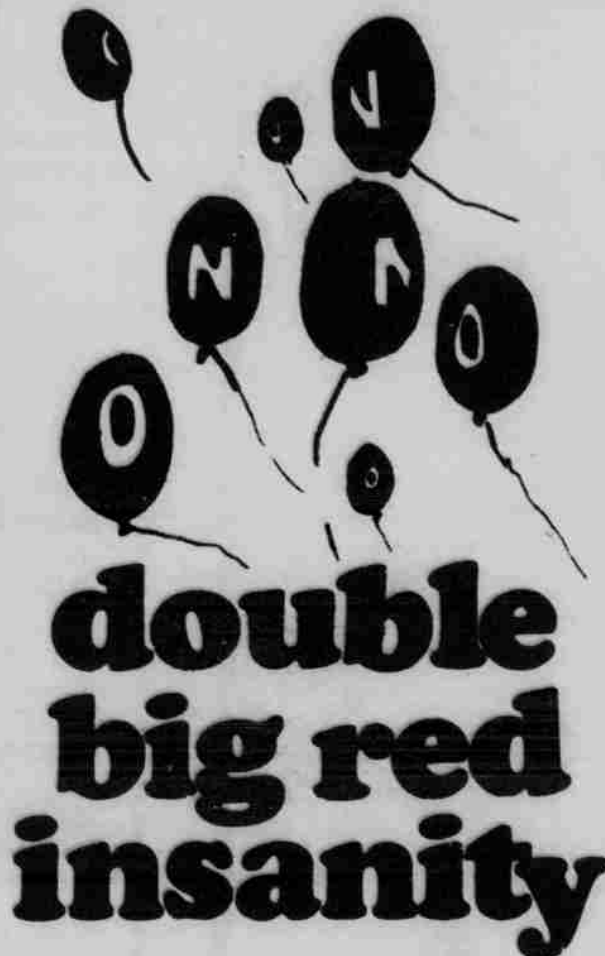
Campus police said little trouble is expected after The Game, regardless of the winner. After OU games at Texas, Stenhouse said, "people walk the streets of Dallas, shoop and holler, but there's

not that much to do in downtown Norman."

"This game means a hell of a lot to Oklahomans," said Ernie Wilson, owner of the Town Tavern on Boyd and Asp Street, a short walk from Owen Field. "I've never seen a game built up like this," he said. "If we lose, I might not open up after the game."

"Nebraska fans may be the best in the Big 8," he said, adding a feeble request not to be quoted. "They're even better than OU fans. The closer Oklahomans get to the stadium, the meaner they get."

Rumors were circulating that scalpers were asking up to \$.00 for a good seat, but anonymous calls to numbers listed under "miscellaneous for sale" in the student newspaper indicated prices between \$25 and \$35. The following night, however, one \$35-ticket seller was asking \$75, with plans for asking \$100 closer to game time.



Scalping tickets is legal in Oklahoma—that is, it's not illegal. Ticket manager Reid said a Regents' ruling forbids selling tickets on OU property, but the ruling provides no means of enforcement. Capt. Stenhouse said "our orders are to disregard" scalping.

At last count, 97 sports writers from 65 papers in 22 states will be bumping elbows Thursday in the press box, aptly named. The New York Times will be there, along with three papers from Philadelphia.

In anticipation of the demand, the 72-man capacity of the press box was expanded to a capacity of more than 100 during the layover between the Iowa State and Kansas games, Hancock said. It may not be enough, he said, because 30 writers might cover the game in the open air.

Hancock said the athletic department decided last week not to allow press box space to any more

writers, "regardless of their prestige." Aghast eastern papers since have been turned down, he said, and "little bitty Oklahoma papers we hadn't heard from all season are coming out of the walls. Nothing turns on an Oklahoman as much as football."

Malcolm E. Rosser, 70 vice president of the Halliburton Oil Co. in Oklahoma City, and John L. Champe, 76, a retired NU anthropology professor living in Lincoln, have bet a silver dollar on the OU-NU game every year since 1930. Since the early 30s, Rosser recalled, they have passed back and forth the same 1926 silver dollar.

Rosser said he has the edge on possession time and is confident he'll get the dollar back after The Game. In a recent letter to Champe, Rosser wrote, "I will pay for the silver polish. I'll expect you to pay the postage."

Soon after The Game, Oklahoma City Times columnist Wayne Mackey will take a \$3.50 check to the Western Union office. The check will pay for a 19-word cablegram to Pearl Kiser, Mildred Cordell and Tressa Cole, in care of the Tollman Towers in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The three Oklahoma City women, who left last week on a 35-day tour of Africa, told Mackey they couldn't bear the suspense of not knowing the score until they returned.

The typical Sooner booster is not Cecil D. Samara, widely known as OU's No. 1 fan. "He's far and away the most radical fan we've got," Hancock said.

Samara sells flags and patriotic emblems from his northwest suburban home in Oklahoma City. Since 1952, when he drove his bright red 1923 Ford to the Texas game, Samara has driven to most of the Sooner's important away games. On the way to Chicago, Pittsburgh, and five times to Miami, Samara has been seen in the "Big Red Rocket", with the loudspeaker blaring "Boomer Sooner" and the model T's "sy-REEN" wailing.

"I could be in the stands 24 hours a day watching OU football, eating hot dogs and sleeping between halves," Samara said. Sitting in his den amid the greatest collection of OU football memorabilia, or trivia, ever amassed, Samara told of a game in 1958 which Oklahoma lost.

Driving back to his hotel, Samara said, he ran into the back of his police escort with his model T. "Tears came down my cheeks," he said, showing how with his fingers. "Not from hitting the cop but from losing the ball game." On Dec. 4 Samara will celebrate his 55th birthday at the Oklahoma-Oklahoma State football game. "Right on," he said. "All I want's a victory."

"The kids think he's God," Hancock said of Samara. "But everybody else in the state is embarrassed." "He's the most obnoxious man in the United States," said Oklahoma City Times columnist Frank Boggs.

Robert Martin, sports editor for the OU student newspaper, The Oklahoma Daily, has received several letters and poems from Sooner fans, but he said he couldn't print some because they were in bad taste. He printed this one, from the self-described "Poet of the Ozarks," Charles Hastings Smith of Bartlesville:

Sooners, Let's Bury Nebraska
And embalm them all with defeat...
Hang crepe on their locker-room door
And make their funeral complete
Sooners, Let's Bury Nebraska
And make their grave long and deep...
Cover them over with touchdowns
And leave their fans to weep.
Sooners, Let's Bury Nebraska;
Let's bury their short-lived conceit...
Let's dump their ratings beside them
Interred by the claw of the cleat.

And so the poem goes on. The death image also runs through the "Big Game Contest" sponsored by the Daily Oklahoman and the Oklahoma City Times. "To bolster the morale of the Sooners," the papers will send free to contest entrants a black armband with the inscription "Bury Nebraska."

Other Big Game spin-offs around Oklahoma City might come up in a discussion of taste. Several Sooner fans in downtown Oklahoma City were seen chuckling over a "misspelling" on a 50-cent poster which put an extra "s" in the middle of Nebraska.

The Cornhuskers are not without support in the Oklahoma City area, however. "My husband helps me sing 'There is No Place Like Nebraska,'" said Mrs. Ulah Paul Floyd, NU class of '41, who sits in enemy territory at the OU-NU games. "I'm pretty fond of this Oklahoma team, but I can't forget that I was born in Omaha," she said.

"I'll always be a Nebraska fan," said Donald N. Bykerk, a 1950 NU Law College graduate formerly of Lincoln, now practicing law in Oklahoma City. "I'm going to sit right in the middle of the Oklahoma section with Nebraska banner and all."

Bykerk, with a son at Oklahoma University and daughter at Oklahoma State, said he "knows both sides." "Oklahoma spirit is tremendous," he said, "but no better than in Nebraskaland."