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Go Team "O"

What do you get when you cross two Shetland ponies, a champion partner-stunt duo and a determined new coach? The spirited bunch at the University of Oklahoma.

By Jen Jones

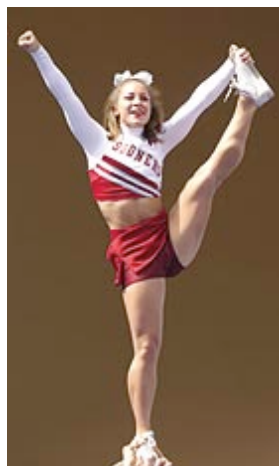
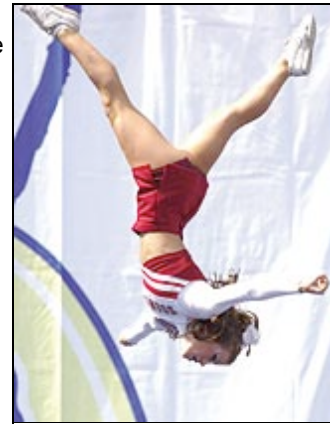
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I'm Sooner born and Sooner bred, and when I die, I'll be Sooner dead!" So goes the battle cry of Boomer Sooner, the signature fight song and chant for the spirit squads at the University of Oklahoma in Tulsa. Without a doubt, the OU cheerleaders personify the die-hard credo professed in their beloved chant, and they're not shy about showing it.

The Tulsa Tradition

"Our team run-on for home games is remarkable. I haven't seen anyone put as much spirit into the pregame show as we do," says Lori Kemmet, spirit coordinator for both the coed and all-girl squads. Before every football game, approximately 50 cheerleaders from both squads run out ahead of the team carrying the Sooner flag and tumbling down the field. Coach Lori says that as they do so, "the Boomer Sooner chant takes over the stadium. It sounds like thunder and it's really awesome!"

While fierce believers in tradition, the Sooner squads also take pride in setting themselves apart from the rest. Unlike many teams, the OU squad does not have a costumed human mascot, but rather two Shetland ponies that pull a covered wagon around the track during football games, make the trip to high-stakes away games and have even marched in the Rose Bowl Parade. The team's equine buddies also sprint down the field after scores, while the team members do standing backs for every point scored. (Quite a feat for a squad whose football team averaged 42 points per game last season!)



Making The Cut

The team's gung ho attitude and camaraderie hasn't gone unnoticed by hopefuls who want their own piece of Sooner cheer glory. Coach Brandy Copeland says that she's had to introduce a new tryout format to accommodate increased interest in joining the squad.

Once a month, open auditions are held in order to pre-evaluate potential squad members and narrow down the field of contenders that can attend the actual team tryouts in April. "We do it this way so that when the people who are invited show up in April, they know exactly what skills they'll need to make the squad," says Coach Brandy, who knows firsthand what it takes to make the team, having cheered for the Sooners from 1990 to 1994.

Many have also transferred to OU in hopes of cheering. Senior

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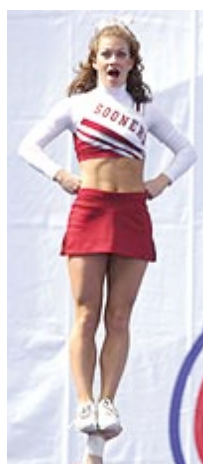
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squad member Nicole Grazier says “A lot of people transferred last year after seeing how we work together as a team at nationals.” Nicole’s stunt partner and fellow senior squad member, Ross Johnson, offers a case in point: his roommate transferred from the University of Arkansas despite a sizable scholarship just for a chance to spend his senior year cheering with the Sooner team.

Taking It Up a Notch

Ever since Coach Brandy took over the coaching reins just a little more than a year ago, her teams have been hungry and poised to kick some butt at NCA Nationals, which they attend every year. Though OU cheer squads haven’t won a national championship since 1993, Brandy and her team members think this is the year to reclaim their title.

“We went down last year and gave them a scare,” laughs Coach Brandy. In 2003, the coed team placed fourth, while the all-girl squad came away with third place. “We’re ready to go down to nationals and show everyone that we’re back. We had a few difficulties in finals last year, but that came along with me needing to know my team and them needing to know each other. We’ve worked through those bugs now and everyone is hungry. This year will be a whole different story!”



To prepare for the upcoming competition, the team opted not to attend NCA summer camp at Southern Methodist University in Texas per their usual tradition, instead choosing to attend a more intense camp in Myrtle Beach, SC. “We felt like SMU wasn’t getting us competition-ready because no teams who compete in our division attend that camp,” says Coach Lori. “So we went out of state to a different camp that hosts a lot of big-name schools. We wanted to go head-to-head with some of our major competitors before we hit the mat with them in April.”

Another of the team’s secret weapons in the quest for the trophy is the dynamic partner-stunt duo of Nicole and Ross. What Ross calls their “clean and crisp” repertoire landed them third-place berths in the national partner stunt finals last year for both UCA and NCA. After their routine aired on national television, the media even named a Basket Toss after one of their stunts, aptly dubbed the “Grazier.”

According to Nicole, “It’s almost like a Pike Arabian. At the top, I do a split, and then a one-and-a-half down. A lot of guy gymnasts have told me that since last year they’ve been working on my Basket in their on-floor tumbling!”

Whether the team will capture the win in 2004 has yet to be seen, but you can bet both the coed and all-girl squads will be in it to win it come April. Their Lone Star neighbors to the south may think everything is bigger in Texas, but this Oklahoma squad gives them a run for the money with their big presence and even bigger potential!

Sooner Snippets

Fast Facts About OU And Its Cheer Crew

School Enrollment: 28,954

Location: Tulsa, OK

Mascot: Sooners

Colors: crimson & cream

All-Girl Squad: 26 members make up the all-girl team’s roster and cheer for sports including football, volleyball and wrestling.

Coed Squad: 27 members make up the coed team’s roster and cheer for sports including football and men’s and women’s basketball.

Practice Schedule: The two teams go through a conditioning workout together for three hours every Sunday at a local gym and conduct two to three separate practices during the week.

Website: www.oucheer.com

What The Heck Is A Sooner, Anyway?

Forget all those common mascot names like Tigers or Wildcats! OU has the distinction of being the only school with the mascot name Sooner and they’re all about shouting it to the rooftops with traditional cheers like Boomer Sooner. But what does “sooner” mean?

Defined as a slang word synonymous with “native or resident of Oklahoma,” the word is derived from a term applied in the late 1800s to enterprising settlers in the land run for the Oklahoma territory.

A Tale of Two Teams

Though the sporting rivalry between University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University (Stillwater, OK) is no secret, the cheer squads for the two schools have had a long-standing (gasp!) friendly relationship. The two teams also run into each other every year at NCA Nationals, with both squads typically ranking in or near the top 10, enhancing the friendly rivalry. For many years, the teams also met annually for a cross-squad cookout the weekend of the "big game," but after both squads went through coaching changes, the tradition fell by the wayside. Coach Brandy says she hopes to re-institute the social gatherings next season with the help of OSU coach Tracey Wittwer.

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