



## These Walls

# Boone Pickens Stadium

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TULSA - How can a bunch of Tulsa architects improve a collegiate football program? By giving it a home to be proud of.

That's the goal of Gary Sparks and the 12 other Oklahoma State University graduates now serving the architectural and engineering firm Crafton Tull Sparks. Their \$267 million, three-phase reinvention of the old Lewis Field, with possibly a fourth and fifth phase still ahead, will make a unified stadium out of a hodgepodge of add-ons cobbled together over 60 years.

"Our ambition, really, was to bring our football operations from being towards the bottom of the NCAA to the top," said David Reed, project manager for the \$180 million third phase to encircle the west end zone.

Although OSU officials knew for many years that Lewis Field had fallen behind in key maintenance projects, it took the year 2000 facilities inspection by Tulsa-based Sparks Sports (now part of Crafton Tull Sparks) to jump-start improvement prospects. With their immediate attention on the Gallagher-Iba Arena, remaking the football stadium waited until 2002.

That's when alum T. Boone Pickens stepped in with what amounted to the largest collegiate athletics donations in American history - some \$188 million after Wall Street fluctuations. His vision for Lewis Field, and a larger athletic village, challenged 80 years of OSU history.

Although its football field dates to 1913, named one year later for former president Lowery Laymon Lewis, the school rarely made iconic stadium development a priority. When Oklahoma A&M (OSU's name until 1957) decided to enter the Missouri Valley Conference, school leaders considered building a \$50,000 horseshoe stadium of concrete and steel (\$601,598 in



Boone Pickens Stadium in Stillwater

COURTESY PHOTO

adjusted dollars). But as donations came in a trickle, not a flood, campus leaders soon adopted a "pay as you go" philosophy, adopting cheaper materials as needed.

From piecemeal additions in 1924, 1929, 1947, 1950, 1971 and 1980, OSU gradually grew a 51,000-seat stadium from under the shadow of the neighboring Gallagher-Iba Arena, lowering the untraditional east-west field to squeeze in more seats. There the faithful enjoyed the glory days of Terry Miller, Thurman Thomas and Barry Sanders, taking away memories of pigskin exploits, but not stadium atmosphere.

"It was an embarrassment," said Sparks, the founder of Sparks Architecture and an executive vice president with Crafton Tull Sparks. "It was an



eyesore. It was bad."

Pickens wanted to change that, making a real stadium out of Lewis Field. Not just with state-of-the-art services and amenities, but in its substance.

"He wanted it to look and feel as if it had all been built as one piece," said Sparks. "What we did was way beyond our original intentions and then some."

Phases one and two, started by Flintco in 2002 and 2004, brought modern luxury suites, restrooms, concession areas and other creature comforts while fixing the support structures. Both sections also received a new skin of brick and stone to match the Georgian architecture theme at Gallagher-Iba and the rest of the OSU campus.

While those phases involved some

interesting challenges, from ground-line and street adjustments to wavering guidance on an unexpected building in their way, Senior Architect F. Ivan Griffith said creating a wraparound west end zone topped them all. Not only did they encounter underground flooding problems, but the Sparks team had to craft exacting plans to line the end zone circle up with north and south bleachers that stood at different elevations - and they had to build it over an uneven ground slope.

"Apparently no one every dreamed of having them line up," Reed said of the Lewis Field sidelines.

Perhaps more important, Pickens wanted phase three to serve the players and coaches, with two floors dedicated to improved football operations. Having toured many of the finest stadiums in the nation, Reed expects OSU's new meeting training, therapy and locker rooms, as well as coaches offices and suites, to rank among the very best - which should have a dynamic impact on player recruitment.

"Our coaches and our players have not had an equal opportunity because our facilities have not measured up in a lot of instances," said Sparks. "This is going to go a long ways to changing that."

For his staff, remaking Lewis Field represents a career high-point, a chance to give back not just to the players and fans but to their alma mater. Just as their Gallagher-Iba renovation drew national praise, so they expect the 60,000-seat Boone Pickens Stadium to draw raves when phase three wraps in January.

In many ways they give the credit to Pickens, for whom OSU renamed the facility in 2003.

"Without his involvement phase 3 probably wouldn't have happened in my lifetime - if it would have happened at all," said Sparks. "Or it wouldn't have happened like that."