

Book Review

By Mark Purcell

Bootlegger's Boy by Barry Switzer. William Morrow, New York, \$19.95. with Bud Shrake; now also available in paperback.

The considerable sociological interest in this book is indicated in the title, and its attraction for college football fans in the name of the list author, Barry Switzer, head coach of Oklahoma University 1973-1988. The actual writer Bud Shrake comes into this field from a previous book on Willie Nelson.

Since this review runs in the CFHS Journal, we'll start with some of the football materials in Bootlegger's Boy. Switzer has some important points to

make, partly summarized below, though he follows a bad tradition in these college coaches' books of not appendicizing his full coaching record back to and including his key assistant years at Arkansas and Oklahoma. (There is a good index.)

Oklahoma fans probably do not need a technical lecture on how the Sooner wishbone works, but here in the Midwest where the Journal is published and where there are a lot of sports-TV centers, the full impact of the wishbone on modern winning college football is not understood, notably by the Midwest media -- who derive their ideas on how to win college games from switching on Sunday afternoon pro TV.

This media-fan imperviousness even survives the ability of the service academics, with less size and less talent, to wishbone the hell out of Big 10 "powers" like Ohio State/Illinois in bowl games. The Notre Dame equivalent of this kind of fan still suffers from the delusion that once Lou Holtz replaced a Rice-wishboner with a Mirer-passing quarterback, all the Irish opponents are guaranteed to roll over and fall dead, and it is the coach's fault if they don't. Such fans and experts should read the pages herein where Switzer tells how replacing Troy Aikman with Jamelle Holleway galvanized the OU offense and reproduced the old trackmeet offense to which the wishbone accustomed the OU coaches.

As Switzer is the first to point out, the success of this offense depended on the recruitment of some of the best running backs and wishbone quarterbacks ever to play college football. (These were mostly Texas blacks.). So his most striking technical point is that, because of its finesse blocking, the wishbone is a workable formation even without superior offensive linemen, breaking the John Madden rule for how you put together a winning offense.

John McKay, a loyal I-formation man, insists in his own USC book that the wishbone requires four top-level backs. But in fact the prominent names in Bootlegger's Boy all seem to play quarterback (equals tailback) and left half (deep running back). And the quarterback can get by with being a marginal passer like Holtz's Rice.

Switzer loyally insists on the potentialities of the Bone as a passing formation; but in fact the Bone revives, in a modern form, the capabilities of the old running tailback-fullback formation of the 1930s single wing.

Switzer mentions winning high-score games in which the Bone teams got by with zero or low pass completion performances. The Bone is in fact the formation least dependent on the passing threat since the Sutherland single wing or the Warner double wing, both prewar. The Bone is also, of course, a high-risk formation, at least as OU practiced it under Switzer. So an OU team could go from 82-point wins to games where fumbles and miscues produced losses to inferior-personnel foes, followed by alumni letters demanding the coaches put in something "sunder" fans were used to seeing on Sunday afternoon TV.

I have concentrated on what seems to me the most important technical football point in this book, and so have less room for the football scandals that are an equally famous part of the OU program. Point by point, Switzer makes a reasonable case against the charges that eventually brought him down, but eventually his own evidence becomes too much.

I hadn't previously known that the same star OU quarterback who peddled dope on campus, also organized the break-in burglary at Switzer's own residence. It becomes clear that the whole operation was functioning in a moral swamp

that included spoiled-by-victory fans and incompetent educators even more prominently than hoodlum athletes.

Most clear is that none of the more prominent and "respectable" people discussed by Switzer have any business influencing American education in or out of the state of Oklahoma, and this of course includes Switzer.

Bootlegger's Boy provides a serious case for the Secretary of Education requesting federal troops and teachers and librarians sent-in, to restore reading, writing and 'rithmetic.

The social problems that arise from colleges recruiting street hoodlums to entertain us on Saturday afternoons are, of course, national in scope and not invented by Switzer and Oklahoma. The media and fans who keep screaming for some sort of stupid playoff system (in December-January-February) in college football are as bad as Switzer, aside from the fact that Bob Carroll, editor of the Coffin Corner, refuted the playoff idea years ago in a letter to the CFRA newsletter, which no reader rebutted.

Anyway, I hope I have conveyed that Switzer/Shrake created a very stimulating book.