THE “O” TEAMS

What is an “O” team? Well, the “O” is for osteopathy and the team represented the American School of Osteopathy (ASO), which is now Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine, in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s.

Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine (KCOM) was once a college of many athletic activities, such as basketball, hockey, wrestling, golf, and tennis. The main purpose of athletics initially wasn’t to produce athletes, but was used to advertise the college. The athletic teams provided a source of recognition the school would not have received otherwise. Students were encouraged to come to ASO to study and to participate in sports, and some students were actually given athletic scholarships.

The Department of Athletics at the former American School of Osteopathy was given special attention by school authorities, for it was the belief of the administration that a sound body was essential for ensuring a sound mind.

The osteopathic football team, known as the "O" eleven, officially started in 1899 and continued until 1928. In the organization's beginning, professional coaches were used to guide the teams. Due to some complications through the years, coaches never remained at the school very long. In 29 years of football, 19 coaches were at the helm. The longest anyone ever coached football at ASO was from 1921 to 1924 when Ray Sermon coached. In 1907 an Athletic Board of Control replaced the professional coaches. This board was mainly a student organization with some faculty representation, which advised the students in their decisions as far as coaching and setting up athletic contests. This board also appointed members of the student body who had considerable athletic experience as coaches for the athletic teams.

Under whatever coach or organization they had, the "O" eleven played and defeated such teams as the Universities of Missouri, Nebraska, Texas, and Wisconsin. The ASO football squad could even boast of traveling 24 hours to South Bend,

The American School of Osteopathy "O" nine of 1908. Note the early style of gloves and the bear mascot in the front row.
Indiana, and playing the Irish of Notre Dame. In order to play this game with Notre Dame, which ASO lost 28-0, a game was cancelled that same day with a school in Hurdland, Missouri.

At this time there were no set rules to keep a team from cancelling a previously arranged game to play someone else, or just not to play at all. Other rules, such as a player's right to play, the length of games, the size of the field, specific rules, and other decisions were argued before each contest. An athlete could play four years at an undergraduate college before coming to ASO, and then could continue to play as long as he studied osteopathy at ASO.

Either with or without a coach, the "O" eleven of 1899 to 1928 outscored all opponents in 23 out of 28 official seasons. ASO became a well-respected school. Some of the players of the early teams were so big that they organized their own club known as the Osteopathic Beef Trust. These men brought the 1901 Missouri State Football Championship to ASO, beating such teams as the University of Texas 48-0 and avenging a loss the year before by beating Missouri 22-5.

This state championship and the win over Missouri were especially sweet. The previous year a trainload of about 225 supporters left for Columbia. The train, which was four cars long, was covered with the school colors of red and black. After ASO lost 13-0, Missouri fans rushed the train and tore down the banners, carrying them triumphantly through the city streets. They also proceeded to take personal belongings of the ASO crew such as canes, hats, and trophies. As the students of ASO resisted, a general riot followed and several people were injured on both sides. During a short layover in Moberly, the engineer of the train was given an osteopathic treatment to calm his nerves and ease his tensions. In the following days, Columbia newspapers apologized for the outrageous conduct of their fans.

After ASO became organized in athletics, the "O" teams fell under the rules of the M.I.A.A., the Missouri Intercollegiate Athletics Association. These rules affected the requirements of ASO athletes.

Along with athletic teams came cheerleaders. The cheerleaders of ASO, who were men in those days, cheered on ASO teams with great lines such as: "Oski wow-wow! Skinny wow-wow! Osteopaths! Ribs raised, Bones set, We cure—you bet! Osteopaths!" In 1926, the name Rams became the official logo and mascot for all ASO teams.

Baseball at KCOM was started about 1900 and lasted until 1938 due to World War II. As with football, there were also professional coaches for baseball teams. Although the Athletic Board of Control did take power, there was nothing that said a professional could not be a student coach. In 1915, C. B. Ferguson, a major league baseball pitcher for six years, became active as a player coach. Under his leadership, the 1915 "O" nine were undefeated. This team went on record by beating Kansas University in 13 innings.

In a different way baseball served two members of ASO who were putting more emphasis on study rather than on competition. Harrison J. Weaver, D.O., became a physician and trainer for the baseball St. Louis Cardinals. Harold "Wendy" Wendler, D. O., became a trainer and physician for the Brooklyn Dodgers. "Wendy" Wendler was also the honorary captain of the football Rams of 1928.

When the ASO track team started in 1908, it usually took a backseat to other sports. After a few seasons, the ASO track men were well-respected by many of the large colleges. Although the teams were small, usually five to ten men, they were made up of fine athletes. In 1911, ASO track made a name for themselves. During the Pan American games, according to the 1911 Osteoblast, three members for the ASO track team competed against.

Top photo: A scrimmage of the 1911 Rams against an unknown opponent. Bottom photo: The Beef Trust of 1910. These men, in their old-fashioned uniforms, posted a two-win, two-loss record.
many of the big universities. "Denning won the broad jump, Petit tied the world's greatest pole vaulter, and White was presented with a gold medal for being the best all-around man." As a result, at ASO, track ran many years as one of the main sports instead of one of the lesser.

Although ASO had many exciting games with many schools, the greatest rivalry was with Northeast Missouri State University, which was then the Kirkville State Teachers College. Student support of these athletic contests was much higher than contests played with other schools.

The former intercollegiate sports program has now been replaced by an Intramural Sports Program that still promotes the philosophy that a sound body is essential in ensuring a sound mind. Many of these intramural contests are held at the newly built Thompson Campus Center, which was donated by the alumni of KCOM. This indoor facility replaces the old indoor facility located on the lower floor of the George Still Building.

Though not mentioned, women were encouraged to participate in sports also. For instance, in 1901 basketball and golf teams were set up for women, and a tennis team was soon to follow. As today, men outnumbered women by a high percentage in the school. Women were not dominant in numbers at ASO but they were still encouraged in terms of athletics and medicine.

Intercollegiate athletics at KCOM ceased to exist for several reasons: increased workloads on students, the inability to finance teams, and the increasing financial guarantees with other schools. At the turn of the century, ASO was a little-known school because the study of osteopathy was still relatively new. Athletics gave way to a stronger emphasis on study, and with the greatness of its athletic program, the emphasis on medical organization must also be as great. With the help of its intercollegiate sports program, ASO gained needed recognition. This, in turn, led to the development of ASO to KCOM and its respected reputation in medicine.

In 1926, the Ram became the official logo and mascot for all ASO teams.

Top photo: The ladies' lawn tennis team of 1907. The femininity of women's sports was shown by their long dresses and wide-brimmed hats. Bottom photo: The men's track team of 1908. Although these teams were usually small, they were made up of very fine athletes.

Photos courtesy of KCOM Library.