



Bill Hancock, '71
Executive Director, College Football Playoff

On Saturday, the Sooners will kick off the 2021 football season with hopes of winning their eighth national title. While OU will be looking to secure a spot in the College Football Playoff field, the university is already well-represented within the organization since its executive director, Bill Hancock, is an alumnus. Hancock, who finished his journalism course work in December 1971, recently shared more about his journey from Hobart, Oklahoma, to the CFP, some memorable moments from his career in sports and more.

What is your favorite memory from your time at the J-school?

My favorite memory and also first contact with the J-school was working in the back shop of the Oklahoma Daily, under the legendary W. C. Verderwerth. When I wasn't in class or sleeping or eating or taking care of our adorable infant son, I was working. I wore bib overalls and bought cookies from the Hester-Robertson cafeteria

teams every year. We have a great staff and they do all the work!

The suddenness of OU's and Texas's move to the SEC shocked everyone in college sports. I have been around this before, and the rough emotions of this summer will fade eventually. You know, schools have been changing conferences for 100 years—for example, 1928, OU, Kansas, Kansas State, Missouri, Nebraska and Iowa State left Oklahoma A&M and other schools behind when they formed the Big Six Conference. That was 93 years ago! I'm sure there was angst, but it didn't mean as much back then.

What do you consider to be the most significant moments of your career so far?

I love college football and attended my first OU game in 1954. I remember walking up that long ramp under the west stands and out into the bright sunshine in Section 5, where our seats

when I had an extra 25 cents which wasn't often. I set headlines on the Ludlow machine, read proofs and made up pages. I loved "Van" who was on the front lines of the eternal battle between the editorial staff and the production staff—tension that was further complicated by the stormy political climate in 1969. Van was an extraordinary craftsman who appreciated the fine art of printing more than anyone I have ever known. He and his crew put out a beautiful product. Van had no patience for the deadline-abusing lefties from the front shop; remember, this was the height of the Vietnam struggle and many reporters were long-haired hippie people. But I do believe that Van secretly shared many of their progressive values. Almost reluctantly, I moved from the back shop to become a sports editor of the Daily and later, editor. I THINK I wrote the story in the Daily about Steve Owens winning the Heisman.

Despite my moving to the dark side of the Oklahoma Daily operation, Van always considered me one of "his boys." I loved everything about the J-school, even Copeland Hall's rather disgusting vending machines!

Do you have a favorite faculty/staff member at the J-school?

Every day, I still use what I learned from the faculty. Where to begin?! I must start with C. Joe Holland, the brilliant gentleman who taught us to write. And more: Louise B. Moore, the beloved Daily advisor and a real sweet stickler. The affable Mack Palmer. Slashin' Jack Whitaker, who pounded the history of American journalism into our unwilling heads. Mary Lyle Weeks, another top-notch writing practitioner. The incomparable Jack Bickham.

How did your career path lead you to the College Football Playoff?

My dad published the paper in Hobart, so I was a newspaper person from birth. But it was the Oklahoma Daily that really propelled me. Johnny Keith, OU's SID at the time, must have liked my writing in the Daily because he invited me to become a student assistant in the SID office after my sophomore year. That was my next step on the path to the College Football Playoff, although I had no idea of the end game at the time. That led me to the full-time position as assistant SID. Strange as it

were located. Hey, my team never lost! Literally, not until 1957.

Professionally, I suppose the most significant was in 2012 when the conference commissioners created the College Football Playoff and asked me to be executive director and start the new enterprise from scratch. We had a real good attorney, a wise group of board members and me. It was a sensational opportunity that I cherish. We found office space in Dallas (our building's leasing agent was OU grad Kirby White, by the way), slowly hired people to join the staff, recruited people for the selection committee—sometime I will tell you about the day I invited Condoleezza Rice to join the group—and started the playoff only two years later. Going back a few years to 1989, another significant moment was when the NCAA invited me to become director of the men's basketball tournament, of course. I do love the tournament; next year will be the 43rd consecutive Final Four that I have attended. I'm going for 75.

How did Gaylord College prepare you for your future career?

At Gaylord (H. H. Herbert at the time), I was exposed to the larger world, and to people with different perspectives. As a kid from Hobart, my view had been pretty limited. My most grand adventure was when Louise Moore found a Reader's Digest grant that allowed the Oklahoma Daily to fly me to New York City to cover the 1970 National Invitational Tournament (NIT) in Madison Square Garden. I know Gaylord College is still setting people on the right path today!

What advice would you give to current students aspiring to a career in mass communication?

It's a "people" business. Treat people the way you want to be treated. Also, read everything you can get your hands on.

What do you do for fun outside of work?

I enjoy classical music, Broadway theater, walking and bicycling and reading—history, mostly. I miss my favorite activity, which was running. I ran 15 marathons but had to retire after breaking my hip in a fall on the grounds of the Leaning Tower of Pisa in 2013. Italian doctors inserted an artificial hip and it's working just fine.

sounds today, only three people worked in the SID office in 1972 full time.

Traveling to the Big Eight Conferences and working conference events for OU led me to Big Eight Commissioner Chuck Neinas, who invited me to join the conference staff. That, in turn, propelled me to the job as director of the NCAA men's basketball championship. And that led me to the College Football Playoff. It all started at the Oklahoma Daily.

Describe your role at at the College Football Playoff – current and former. Also, do you have any comments regarding OU joining the SEC?

Basically I manage our staff of 20, and serve as the public face of the CFP and the primary administrator of the selection committee that chooses the

Are there any other organizations or projects you're involved with outside of your full-time job that you want to highlight?

I am heavily involved with my church in Kansas City. And I have served on the United States Olympic and Paralympic staff for 14 Games dating back to 1984 in Los Angeles. And several years ago, I decided to learn as much as I could about my hometown of Hobart. So I spend my rare free time researching Hobart's history. I love helping people who are looking for tidbits about the town. One man said his ancestor lost a valuable piece of jewelry at the old post office and asked me to help. I had to tell him that the old post office was last used in 1931! The librarian, the school superintendent and the current publisher of the Democrat-Chief—my nephew, Todd Hancock—like to direct questions to me, which is really rewarding.



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