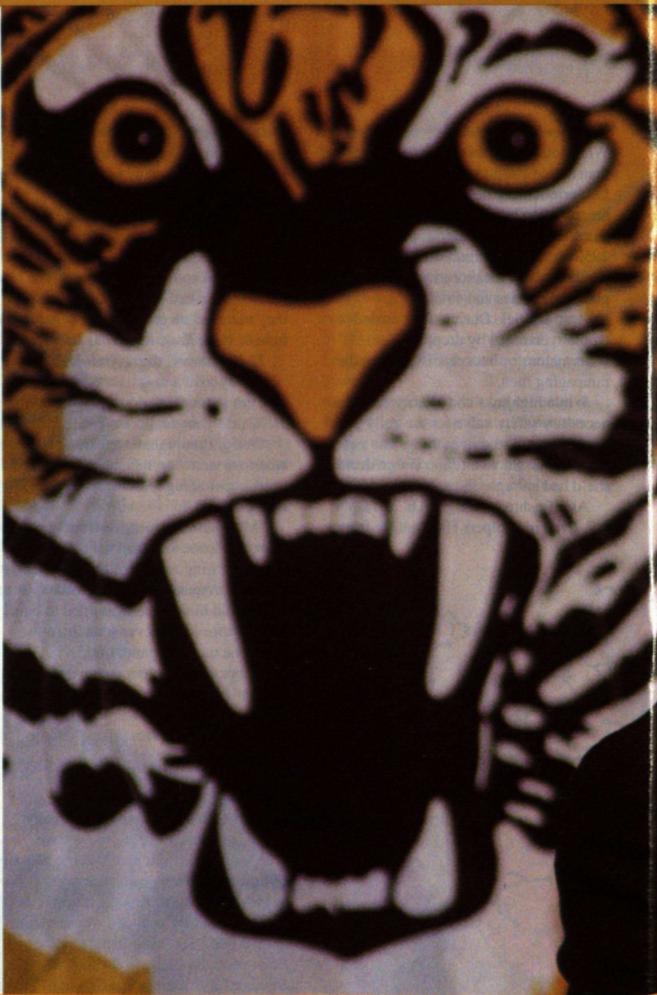


Ready  
to **WIN**  
**WIN**  
**WIN**

Former USC coach Larry Smith brings a winning record and a penchant for discipline to MU football.

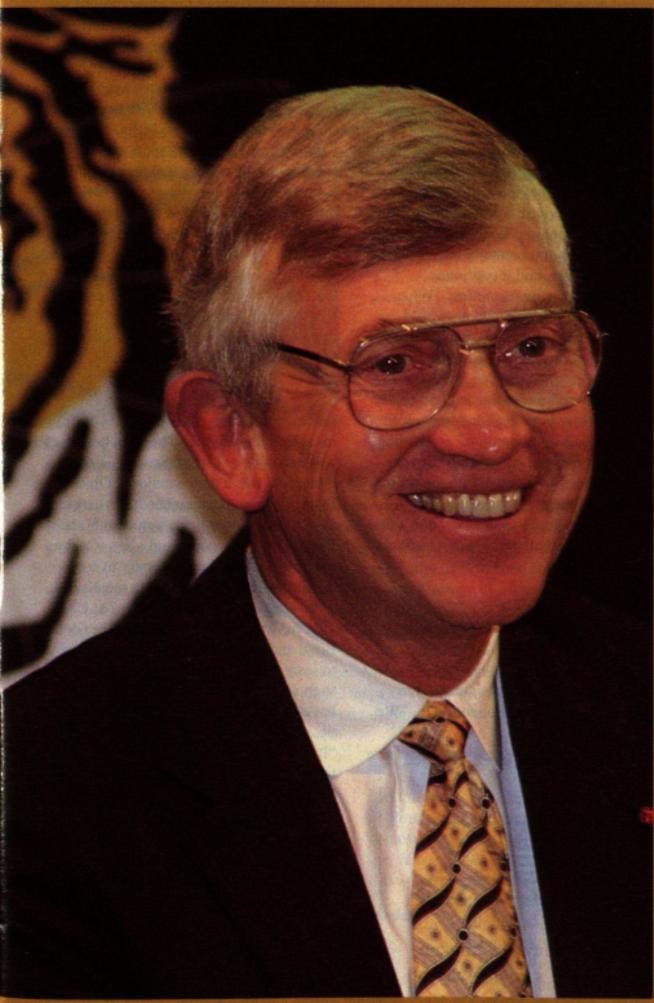
STORY BY TERRY JORDAN  
PHOTO BY NANCY O'CONNOR



**L**It was a warm September evening in 1991 at the Los Angeles Coliseum, and Joe Paterno was confident. His Penn State Nittany Lions had defeated Cincinnati 73-0 the week before, and were ranked No. 5 in the country. Now they were in L.A. to take on unranked Southern California, coached by Larry Smith, a team reputed to be a far cry from

the great Trojan teams of the 1960s and '70s.

Smith and the Trojans had their own game plan. "We thought it would be easy, but they threw some new, confusing defenses at us," Paterno says. "They blitzed us — not every other play, but intelligently. Larry did some innovative things on offense, too."



The final score was 21-10, Southern California, but it seemed worse than that. "They gave us a good licking," Paterno says.

**M**izzou fans hope those kinds of lickings continue, now that Smith is the Tigers' head coach. "He's just what we

need," says Andy Tutin, president of the 450-member Tiger Quarterback Club of Columbia. "Spend a few minutes with him, and you come away excited. He's charismatic, he's emotional, he's dedicated, and you can see how those characteristics would be passed on to his players."

Between 1980 and 1992 — first at

Arizona and then at Southern California — Smith compiled an 89-48-5 record, and his squads knocked off 12 Top-10 teams. Before that, he took Tulane from a 2-9 record in 1976 to a 9-3 season in 1979.

"You can name all the great football coaches of the last 30 years — Bear Bryant, Bo Schembechler, Joe Paterno, Paul Brown, Weeb Ewbank — and in a crunch ballgame, there is no one better than Larry Smith," said Athletic Director Dan Devine in announcing Smith's appointment Dec. 16. Added Chancellor Charles Kiesler: "We looked long and hard, and Larry Smith was the best available coach out there right now. We're excited about the possibilities."

**T**he 54-year-old Smith, a native of Van Wert, Ohio, realizes he faces a challenge at Mizzou, which has not had a winning football season since 1983.

What's the problem, anyway? And what can be done about it?

"I think there are three main reasons — facilities, scheduling and academic requirements," Smith says. "For the last several years, MU's football facilities have been among the worst in the Big Eight. That makes a big difference in recruiting; students are impressed by weight rooms and training facilities when they visit schools.

"As far as the schedule is concerned, you can't play Texas A&M one week, West Virginia the next, then launch into your Big Eight season with Colorado, Nebraska and Oklahoma, and reasonably expect to have a winning season."

Regarding academics, Smith points out that Mizzou's admission standards are among the toughest in the Big Eight.

"You're going to lose some good players that way. I'm not advocating a major reduction in our standards. I just think the playing field should be more level."

Fortunately for Smith and the Tigers, all three of those areas are being addressed. The expanded Tom Taylor/Dutton Brookfield Athletic Training Complex, which opened last fall, has increased the exercise and weight-training area from 4,300 square feet to 9,100 square feet. It is the first of four phases in a \$2.4 million improvement project for the structure. "We now have the most modern weight-training facility in the Big Eight," Devine says.

**C**oncerning future football schedules, new Athletic Director Joe Castiglione says the goal is to strike more of a balance. "We don't want to play all weak opponents in our non-conference schedule, but we don't want to play all Top-10 teams, either," he says. "We're reviewing future schedules right now." See schedule on Page 29.

Kiesler says MU is re-examining its admission process, particularly in regard to the two most-used indicators: class rank and ACT score. "We're looking at other predictors as well, such as accomplishments in core courses, leadership skills and recommendations of teachers, church leaders, supervisors and mentors," the chancellor says. "Our goal is to better predict academic performance. The focus should be on whether the student has the ability and drive to graduate. We believe our athletic recruiters will be looking at this closely in the future."

That's fine with Smith. He says that over the years, more than 70 percent of his players have graduated. "That's the No. 1 goal," he says. "My job is to take an average student and motivate him — give him the tools he needs to graduate. Even at USC, a private school with high standards, we had borderline students. You just spend more time with them, making sure that they're supervised and

tutored properly."

Motivation is a key component on the field as well. Smith has received a lot of publicity over his quote, "I came in here to win now. Waiting two or three years to win is a bunch of baloney." How will he achieve that end?

"You build on it," he says. "You start with recruiting, and you win that. Then you start the off-season in the spring, and win that. You win in the classroom. You win in the preseason. So when the season begins, the players mentally have gotten used to winning, and it continues."

He also is big on discipline. "When I call a team meeting for 8 a.m., you'd better be there at 8 a.m. — not 8:01 or 8:02. When our players go on the road, they're going to be dressed in coats and ties. Beards and mustaches will be neatly trimmed. How you dress and how clean you are says a lot about you." Regarding the current practice of wearing earrings, Smith says he'll sit down with the senior members of the team this spring to discuss the topic. "Personally, I don't like it. This is a football game, not a fashion show."

**S**mith, who scheduled 52 recruiting visits to potential Tigers from late December through early February, says nostalgia and the current situation are both a part of the recruitment pitch. "We

talk a little bit about the glory days of Missouri football in the 1960s, but then we concentrate on how they can help us reach that plateau again."

He says Mizzou has much to offer to top football players from Kirkwood High, St. Joe Central, Hickman Mills, Jefferson City or Springfield Kickapoo who can't seem to decide among universities. "We have an incredible array of degree programs. Columbia is a neat, personalized town. We're in the Big Eight. We're in the middle of the state, so mom and dad can drive in and see you play." And the clincher? "I believe that most kids want to graduate, then work in the town or area where they grew up. If they play football at Mizzou, they'll get some attention and a top-notch degree that will enable them to do that."

The new coach is very much a family man. He met his wife, Cheryl, when he was coaching at Lima Shawnee High in Ohio. She was a dance major at Ohio State. They've been married 28 years and have a daughter, Alicia, a student at the University of Arizona; and a son, Corby, a quarterback at the University of Iowa.

Smith chokes up when he recalls his wife's help during his final days at USC, after his 1992 team had lost the Freedom Bowl and university officials asked him to resign. "I'm very fortunate to have such a great wife," he says. "I couldn't have made it without her." Now he looks back on that forced resignation and says, "It was the best thing that ever happened to me."

And maybe for Tiger fans as well. Those coming to games at Memorial Stadium this fall can expect to see a balanced offensive attack, a strong defense and well-trained special teams. "He's good at bringing all elements of the game together," Paterno says. Smith maintains that his main focus is on defense. "We'll have a very physical, attacking defense. We'll come off the line strong and bloody some noses."

**A**lumni can help, Smith says, by supporting the program. "To win, we're going to need everyone's help. I can't do it alone, and the players can't do it by themselves. We're not ready for a national championship yet, but the cupboard is far from bare. We're on our way back, and we're going to surprise some people." ☐



If you've always wanted to call the big play at a Mizzou football game, now's your chance. What's your advice for new head Coach Larry Smith? Send us your suggestions for a winning season by May 1, and we'll report back next issue. Don't forget to include a daytime phone number, in case we need more details.

Help us gather MU facts for this alumni poll. Fax *Missouri Alumnus* at [314] 882-7290, or mail to MU Fax, 407 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, Mo. 65211. Include your name, degree, graduation date, address and telephone number.