

JACK MATTHEWS: THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION'S ALL- AMERICAN DEAN

By Jack Taylor

Reading order to disperse, Jack Matthews has final confrontation with students last month. Later that week, the Alumni Association announced it was presenting its Distinguished Service Award to Matthews, who is retiring this year as Dean of Students. In the following story, Matthews tells some of the incidents of his 20-year tenure and some of the differences between the student of 1950 and 1970.



**"This year I
reached the zenith of
my unpopularity."**

Not long after Jack Matthews became dean of students in 1950 he was invited to occupy a seat of honor at the Farmers Fair—on the dunking board above the water tank of a popular concession.

Even then the dean was a prime target of student fervor. The price of three baseballs to be tossed in his direction promptly soared from 10 cents to a quarter. Business was uncommonly brisk as students eagerly purchased their three chances to drench the dean. He was dropped into the water half a dozen times in quick order—the contrivance having been so rigged as to unload its victim if the baseball came anywhere near the release gadget.

The fun soon ended, however, when a prankster slipped a purple dye into the water, but the dripping dean, having coated his body with oil, escaped without changing colors. (The culprit was apprehended by husky ag students who shaved his head and painted it an appropriate purple).

No question but what this carnival episode served as a thorough baptism for the new dean, in a literal sense, but actually his real induction came about even earlier through two more burdensome events.

One of his first official duties was to carry out a mandate to remove the bars and rathskellers that had flourished in many of the fraternity houses. Then, in 1952, a segment of the student body staged a mighty panty raid. Dean Matthews became chief investigator, and more than 200 participants were disciplined.

If Jack Matthews had been conducting a personal unpopularity contest, he was off to a flying start. In the intervening years his image has had its ups and downs in student favor, but in the last 18 months or so the dean has, in his own words, "reached the zenith of my unpopularity." He attributes this dubious distinction to two campus controversies—the so-called "free speech" issue and the more recent confrontation over intervisitation rights in the organized houses.

The dean's appraisal of his standing on the popularity chart is an obvious overstatement and fails to jibe with several campus demonstrations in his honor. These were the dinners given by the Interfraternity Council and the Panhellenic Council, the senior honor societies, Alpha Zeta, Zeta Beta Tau, and the general testimonial banquet which brought an overflow crowd to Memorial Union on May 20. The wording of the IFC-Panhellenic citation was typical of others: "In recognition and apprecia-

tion of his many faithful years of steadfast devotion and interest in the students of the University of Missouri-Columbia."

As a student on this campus in the late '20s, as athletic coach, professor, counselor, and disciplinarian, Jack Matthews probably knows Mizzou students better than anyone else—more of them and more about them, too.

Discussing the students of today and those of the past, Dean Matthews likes to begin with a physical comparison.

"The difference in students now and those in the 1950s is that their hair is longer and their skirts are shorter," he quipped. Then, seriously:

"Students today generally are much more concerned about everything—the world in which they live, about society in general, about all the problems which they think the older generation has not solved or even worked at solving very hard. And, of course, the war—we've always had student opposition to wars, and I think the real crux of student dissent nowadays is the war in Indochina.

"The quality of our students now is certainly superior. The average intelligence is considerably higher than 10, 15 or 20 years ago.

"One difference in students today is that they don't accept without questioning anything that is told them. I have no objection to dissent, and I think it's a good thing as long as it is carried on without violence or without interfering with the rights of others. I've been picketed any number of times in front of Read Hall (his office) and I tell students, picket all you want to, walk in circles, but do not interfere with anyone who is trying to come into my office."

The dean said today's students are concerned about improving the overall University.

"But they want it to happen right now. Change doesn't occur like that. The change must come after getting people informed and knowledgeable. But this is youth for you, they want it now."

Dean Matthews recalled former years when he knew hundreds of students by name and contrasted that relatively easy-going state with today's more complex situation.

"When I first came into this job I knew the presidents of every fraternity and sorority. One night, Kathryn (Mrs. Matthews) and I went to 12 or 13 formal dances. We did this because we wanted

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**"You may be hard;
you may be an s.o.b.,
but you're fair."**

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to and because we wanted to know these students.

"Now that the office staff has expanded I am out of touch, so to speak, with many students that I would have known on a first-name basis in earlier years, and I regret this change very much. Now I know fairly well only the top officers of our top student organizations.

"This limitation is the result of more administrative work, larger staff, larger enrollment, and it has been one of our big problems. This has resulted in thousands of students knowing me by reputation only.

"When these students are in here with some problem or difficulty, they're a little surprised that my horns at least are retracted. I am not quite the guy they expected to see."

Through it all the dean has kept himself accessible, practicing an open door policy. In his home he has four telephones. He has told students, "Call me any time you need help, or if you just want to communicate with me."

This invitation to call has been taken too literally by many a prankster through the years. For the phone to ring in the Matthews home at 2:30 or 3:30 in the morning is not unusual. Invariably it is a student with a gag or a silly question. Surprisingly, this doesn't bother the dean at all, and he can go right back to sleep. He accepts it as part of his job, and goes along with the gag. On one occasion late at night Mrs. Matthews answered the phone

**At Alumni
Association
dinner,
Matthews
was recipient
of friendly
barbs, jibes.**



and spoke sharply to the anonymous caller. "You shouldn't have done that," Jack said. "If word gets around that the old dean blows his top I'll get 89 calls a night."

For 18 years of his deanship, Jack Matthews has also served as chairman of the Committee on Student Conduct.

"On the one hand you're trying to help students as individuals and as organizations to achieve whatever their goals are," he said. "On the other hand you have to discipline them. This is a rather difficult dual role if you think you're in a popularity contest."

The dean appears to thrive in his job. The former crew cut has been allowed to grow to regular lengths, and the man retains much of his old bounce. He can discuss the vicissitudes of his work with almost jovial ease.

"I would say that my unpopularity reached its zenith, if that's a good word, with something that occurred last year in connection with SDS (distribution of a publication) which was called inaccurately the free speech issue.

"I suppose I was taken to task by students more over that than anything that has happened during my career, unless it was the matter of the infamous panty raid of 1952. We had to make judgments on many students involved in that most destructive raid. That centered for the first time a lot of negative attitude toward me.

"Now this last year I suppose I've had more un-



**Usually willing
to go along
with a gag, Jack
acts as waiter
to aid student
money-making
project.**

usual, difficult, controversial problems arise than in any year I've been on the job. Anytime you have to take a position, to thwart, to slow down, to confront anybody or any group of people, whether they are students or whatever group, then you can, in the eyes of a certain group or maybe a large section of the population, become pretty unpopular.

"The thing that heartened me in that situation last year was the large number of letters and telephone calls I had from people, in the University community, citizens of the state, every rank and file of people. It was absolutely amazing. This support of the people meant more to me than anything that has happened in my long 20 years.

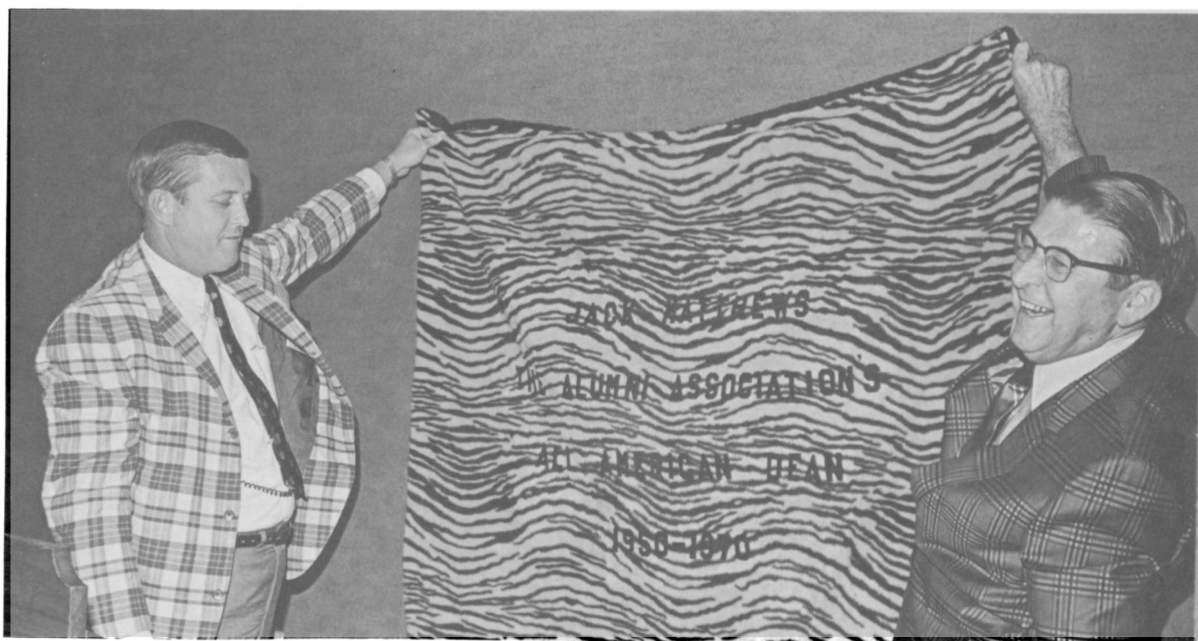
"It was interesting that the highest percentage

retired dean will be prepping himself to resume teaching physical education courses in the winter semester. These activities probably will be scheduled so that he can still preside at the public address system for football games in Memorial Stadium, as he has done for years.

To the inevitable question a retiree expects, "Would you like to do it over again?" Matthews replied in a positive way:

"I'd like to do it over again. The only reason is that I could carry some of my learnings back and start all over again. Because when everyone gets to this point in a game you think, well, there were some good plays and we had some touchdowns scored, but gee, I sure made a mistake on that; I wish I could replay that one.

Matthews and Mitch Murch, left, display "All-American Dean" blanket presented by Association. Murch was master of ceremonies for the event.



of letters backing my stand, which was in support of a Board of Curators regulation, came from the lawyers of the state."

The intervisitation issue has also made the dean's last year in office memorable from the standpoint of the number of students involved. Even in the month of May he was still interviewing members of 20 fraternities and 250 students from residence halls accused of wittingly violating University regulations.

During the next semester Dr. and Mrs. Matthews plan to do some traveling, probably abroad, and the

"Yes, I've made mistakes. There isn't a person that works a day who doesn't make a mistake. Sometimes there are injustices done; we don't want that.

"There is no greater compliment a student can pay me—and several of them have paid me this compliment as they left the office. They said, 'You've certainly been fair.' This is the thing you hope that students will feel. So those remarks of students who say, 'You may be tough, you may be hard, you may be an s.o.b., but you're fair'—that's it. You can't want any more than that." □