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Internet hoax lands NU fan in some hot water

By *Berry Tramel*
Staff Writer

James W. Conratt, a Nebraska football fan living in Austin, Texas, says he didn't mean to hurt Oklahoma quarterbacks Sam Bradford and Landry Jones with his Internet hoax.

So what was Conratt thinking Wednesday when he lifted a template off *The Oklahoman's* web site, NewsOK.com, wrote and pasted a bogus story about the Sooner pair's arrest on cocaine distribution charges, then posted it on a message board?

The 36-year-old Conratt says he wasn't thinking.

"I want to express my deepest apologies to the families," Conratt said Wednesday night, after his story was reported as fact by at least two Texas radio stations. "That's the thing I'm regretful about. I didn't want to hurt anyone."

An apology might not be enough to smooth this over.

"I'm going to prosecute him to the fullest extent of the law," said Kevin Jones, Landry's father. "I've got deep enough pockets to do it."

Oklahoman publisher David Thompson said, "When this was brought to our attention, we took immediate action. Through our technology and news teams, we tracked him down and told him to cease and desist. We take this very seriously and will consider legal action."

OU associate athletic director Kenny Mossman said the hoax is just the latest in a disturbing trend.

"We feel it's real unfortunate how many things have germinated from an anonymous starting point that are unfounded, untrue and, as this story proves, hurtful," Mossman said.

"Coaches and players are berated, and nobody attaches a name to it. The Internet has enabled a lot of this kind of thing to happen, and it's really disappointing."

Conratt said he was on a Nebraska message board when some OU fans began writing smack.

"I just wanted to get 'em all riled up, I guess," Conratt said.

He googled Sooner sports and came across the NewsOK.com template and says he didn't even realize it was *The Oklahoman's* Web site.

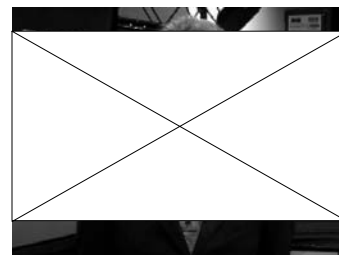
"It was a bad decision," Conratt said. "When I got home, I got on my computer, one of the moderators on the Oklahoma site emailed me and said some Oklahoma people are upset about this. That's when I took it down."

Kevin Jones said he received a couple of frantic calls after the hoax spread across the Internet.

"I knew it was a prank thing right away," Jones said. "Anybody that knows Sam or knows Landry knows the story wasn't true to begin with. But when radio stations down in Houston and Austin report it, it's very hurtful.

"Why would somebody be so malicious about it? Don't know why someone would trample two kids like this. I was just dumbfounded. People need to learn from this."

Kelly Dyer Fry, vice president of news and information for OPUBCO Communications Group, said users can determine if a story comes from the NewsOK.com server by the URL. If numbers precede "newsok.com," the link originated elsewhere.



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