

Devaney wants revenge on Crimson Tide's Bryant

by Jim Johnston

It was Monday, Dec. 13, at 2:15 p.m. in Tuscaloosa, Ala., when the telephone rang in the office of Paul "Bear" Bryant, the football coach of Alabama's Crimson Tide.

"This is coach Bryant speaking," he said. "You caught me at a bad time. I'm in the process of washing down a hamburger."

These are busy times for Bryant. He has a full schedule preparing his team for an Orange Bowl date with No. 1 Nebraska. Such circumstances force a late lunch in your office.

"Not really," said Bryant. "I haven't had much time to think about the Orange Bowl. I've been busy recruiting and Christmas shopping. I haven't seen a Nebraska film yet. The only thing I've seen of Nebraska was the last quarter of the Oklahoma game on TV. But that was enough. That last drive made me want to cancel our entry in the Orange Bowl."

That's Bear Bryant. Straight forward. Add some dry humor. Put together his coaching record. And you have one of the most colorful and successful coaches in college football.

Bryant's success and popularity remarkably parallels with that of Nebraska coach Bob Devaney.

The college game belongs to the head coach. It's not the Tagges, the Kinneys, the Mussos or the Namaths that

etch a legend in college football. Their names are saved for the professional ranks.

It's the Bryants and the Devaneys that give the game class. And it can't be denied that Bryant and Devaney—both well into their 50's—are the class leaders of the college football coaches in the nation.

In his 15 years as head coach, Devaney has compiled a 126-28-6 record for an .816 winning percentage to lead all active coaches. Bryant, who has coached three national championship teams, owns a 210-66-15 mark which is the most wins of any active coach.

Bryant has been a head coach for 27 years. Devaney and Bryant have become nothing short of legends.

What then, marks the difference between the two? Bryant has twice defeated Devaney. Devaney has never defeated Bryant.

Bryant won his third national championship at the expense of Nebraska and Devaney. And Devaney hasn't forgotten.

It was the 1966 Orange Bowl. Nebraska, rated third in the nation with a 10-0 mark, met Alabama, rated fourth with an 8-1-1 record.

But by kickoff time in the Orange Bowl, that Nebraska-Alabama confrontation was for the national championship. As in 1971, the nation's top two teams were upset New Years Day leaving No. 3 Nebraska with a shot at the national

title.

But, unlike 1971, Nebraska didn't cash in.

UCLA stunned No. 1 Michigan State, 14-12, in the 1966 Rose Bowl and Louisiana State handed No. 2 Arkansas a 14-7 setback in the Cotton Bowl. The stage was set for Nebraska and Alabama to decide the national title.

But Alabama quickly introduced Nebraska to the forward pass and made the world fit for the lightweight by scoring a 39-28 win over the Cornhuskers.

"You look at the size of those Nebraska linemen and their backs and you've got to believe the only way we can live through this thing is to keep them off balance," Bryant said before the game. "Well, we ain't about to knock them off balance—so we go overhead... I hope... if we don't, give my little boys a nice funeral."

It was Nebraska, however, that needed a funeral. Alabama quarterback Steve Sloan buried the Huskers by completing 20 of 28 passes for 296 yards to establish a new Orange Bowl record.

Devaney, who was suddenly gaining national recognition, was dealt a severe blow.

"I was outcoached in that game," Devaney said. "Psychologically and every other way—even in onside kicks and tackle eligible passes. I even went to Hawaii to coach in the Hula Bowl afterward—to get away from the alumni."



Tide's Bear Bryant... 2-0 against Devaney.

The following season, Nebraska got a rematch with Alabama in the Sugar Bowl. Nebraska lost again, 34-7.

"We didn't belong on the same field," said Devaney. "The final score indicated how much better they were."

A pair of back-to-back 6-4 seasons followed for Devaney and Nebraska. But the man who spent 14 years coaching high school football before getting a college position had enough patience to build Nebraska back into a title contender.

In 1969, Nebraska shared Big Eight honors with Missouri with a 9-2 record. In 1970, Nebraska won a national championship... the first ever for Nebraska and the first ever for Devaney.

When Nebraska opened the 1971 season, Devaney again thought of the possibilities of winning another national title. His thoughts of a chance to revenge Bryant, however, didn't enter his mind.

But as the season progressed, so did the Crimson Tide. Alabama now owns an

11-0 record and is rated second in the nation behind Nebraska. The 1972 Orange Bowl—Nebraska vs. Alabama—is for the national championship again.

How does this game compare with the others coached by Bryant and Devaney? Bryant has been the head coach in 291 college football games. Where does this one rank in importance?

"They're all important," said the Bear. "But there certainly hasn't been a more important game for myself or Alabama."

How about Devaney? How does the 1972 Orange Bowl game compare to the Nebraska-Oklahoma game Thanksgiving Day, which Devaney called the biggest game of his coaching career?

"The Orange Bowl is bigger," said Devaney. "This is the biggest one of my career."

A national championship game is naturally a big game for a coach. But there's more to the 1972 Orange Bowl than a national championship.

There's a chance for Devaney to revenge the Bear. There's a chance for Devaney to revenge the man and the team that cost him one national championship and loads of prestige.

Is it fair to say that revenging Alabama has been in the back of Devaney's mind for the past five years?

Devaney smacks his lips and looks at you from the corner of his eye when asked the question.

"Ya," said Devaney. "I've been waiting for Alabama."

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