

No easy act to follow—Osborne

This story was written in the spring of 1973 by Steve Strasser. At that time he was employed by the Daily Nebraskan. Strasser was awarded a William Randolph Hearst Scholarship National Award for the story, which appeared in newspapers across the nation. He is now a reporter for the Miami Herald.

By Steve Strasser

Among the dark suits of the Methodist Men's Club, he stands out in a red blazer. His close-cropped hair is the auburn of an Irish setter's coat.

His 6-3, 205-pound frame is about the same build he had 10 years ago as a professional football player.

"you're just not expected to lose"

This man has a Ph. D. in Educational Psychology and Measurements, and he wrote his doctoral dissertation on "The

Effects of Instructions on Situational Anxiety Level and Examination Performance."

He prefers to be called "Coach." And now Nebraskans will start calling "The Coach." because on Jan. 3, 1973, Tom Osborne inherited the University of Nebraska football machine from its creator, Bob Devaney.

It won't be an easy act to follow, Osborne said. Devaney has built the University's football program into many Nebraskan's ideal of success: a force that turned a mottled prairie state red on Saturday afternoons in the fall.

Osborne will be expected to continue the tradition in a state where "you're just not expected to lose." And at least in the near future, the shadow of Devaney will hang over Osborne's every act as head coach.

"It's going to be difficult to follow Bob," Osborne says. He's probably the best in the business, and comparisons are going to be made." But not by Osborne just yet: "I can't make a comparison between us because I've never been a head coach before."

There are at least superficial differences between the two men: Devaney the round-faced Irishman in baggy pants will be replaced along the sidelines this year by a tall, square-jawed Osborne in creased, double-knit slacks. Devaney has a little leprechaun in his

eyes; Osborne has a little John Calvin in his.

Before audiences, Devaney is loose on grammar and long on his patented brand of dry wit. Osborne has to force a little humor into his speech and offers to "interact" with the audience after his talk.

Osborne speaks to groups like the Methodist Men's Club in a measured, paced tone. He stands erect and still, hands behind his back. The questions are routine, the answers matter-of-fact.

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"How do you get the team up for a game?"

"We really don't try to get them up," Osborne answers. "We just try to prepare them. There's no artificial way you can pump them up."

And so on. But when it's time to leave, Osborne hesitates, and another side of him shows through, a side that doesn't have much to do with coaching football.

"I'm glad to see groups like this get together," he says, picking up his few notes. "One of the things about coaching is that you get so tied up in athletics that you think it's the most important thing in the world."



Head football coach Tom Osborne confers with NU trainer Paul Schneider during one of the Huskers' practices.