

Husker glory falls on bench-sitters

By Mary Voboril

Of about 100 Nebraska football players who suit up for a home game, often fewer than half get to play. Many of the others label themselves bench-sitters, the never-starters.

What of these unsung spurriers, often arriving from high school teams on which they had been superstars? How do they feel about having to put in as many hours practice and risk as many injuries for the chance of a few minutes of play when the team is touchdowns ahead? And where do they end up?

Surprisingly, some end up in the pros. Some with the FBI. Others in coaching. Still others in graduate school. And, to hear them tell it, life as a nonstarter on a Nebraska football team isn't that much different than that of a regular.

Despite the injuries, lost glory and long practices, seven former Huskers, all nonstarters, had few regrets about Nebraska football. None indicated he was sorry he had chosen Nebraska, although he might have gone to another school and achieved national fame.

Backups for a winning team

"The biggest regret was seeing great athletes—excluding myself—who had to sit on the sidelines during a gridiron clash, when they easily could have played on any other team in the nation," according to Henry Jennings, a monster man who came to NU in 1968 from Kimball.

Each of the seven had been recruited by other national football powers and speculated that he probably could have played more at another school.

"But I would rather be a backup player for a winning team than a starter for a losing team," said Bob Wineman, an NU left halfback who had been recruited by Iowa State, Ohio, Pittsburgh, Michigan, Indiana and Colgate as well as Nebraska. He played high school ball in Steubenville, Ohio.

Jerry Wilks, now head football coach and athletic director at Omaha Holy Name, was recruited by about 25 schools, including Ohio State. He said he thinks he might have been a starter there.

"I was enrolled there and changed my mind," said the Grand Rapids, Mich., recruit. "At Ohio State I might have played more, but I don't think I could have taken the agony of losing. They only won five games in three years — their saddest three years in Woody Hayes' tenure." Wilks came to NU in 1963, and played left tackle.

Fluke in college choice

It was something of a fluke that Doug Tucker ended up not only playing for Nebraska but playing for former Head Coach Bob Devaney.

A quarterback at Davenport, Iowa, West High School, Tucker was awarded an appointment to West Point during his senior year (1962). At that time Devaney was winding up his career at

Wyoming, and Carl Selmer, then in Wyoming with Devaney, offered Tucker a scholarship.

"I told him I was going to West Point, but that deal fell through," Tucker said. "Before Selmer could get back to me, I'd had a recruiting trip to Nebraska and had met Bill Jennings (Devaney's predecessor— and his crew. I'd decided to go to Nebraska — I guess the flair of the Big 8 or playing big time football had something to do with it.

"Carl Selmer came back to Davenport and asked me if I'd like to visit Wyoming. I said, 'No, I've decided on Nebraska and don't want to waste your money flying out to your school.' Anyway, I never did meet Bob Devaney, and it's probably a good thing I didn't. If I'd gone out there to meet him, I probably would have gone to Wyoming."

Tucker now is a special agent with the FBI in Washington, D.C.

Stars lose status

The players all lamented that they had not been able to play more.

"It's not the easiest thing in the world to be a star for years and suddenly find yourself a third or fourth stringer," said Rich Coppa, who came to NU as a center in 1963 but later quit the team.

Another player said the unfamiliar feeling of suddenly being No. 2 was "a psychological battle."

"I wasn't used to being on second string defense," said Bruce Harding, who had started at quarterback for Bellevue High his sophomore year. "I was impatient. I wanted to be first. Where some players came from, they were the very best, but when you came to Nebraska, you were only one of the guys. It got to me to the point that I was having trouble sleeping."

Harding, now a life insurance salesman in Omaha, came to Nebraska in 1966, when the Huskers already had seven quarterbacks, including Frank Patrick and Bob Churchich. Later Harding was switched to the strong side defensive line.

Liabilities

The players outlined benefits that came simply from being a Cornhusker football player, but along with the good things went the liabilities. One of them was injuries.

Jennings sprained a shoulder, "which arouses consciousness if I sleep on it more than one hour," bruised and scarred a kidney and sprained both ankles — one serious enough to leave bone chips and calcium deposits throughout his lower leg.

"However, I consider myself lucky," said Jennings, now with the armed forces in Arizona. "I've seen several other football players permanently damaged and hampered for life, from knee injuries in particular."

In retrospect he decided that such injuries really can't be classified as regrets,

"because any guy wanting to play football takes the risk of being injured." He also noted that the Nebraska football team "has some of the best doctors and trainers in the country on their side to help alleviate and correct the hazards" that accompany football.

Injuries linger on

Bob Hill, now in training to become a physical therapist, said he had two knee injuries, although neither was severe enough to require surgery. He also had hyperextended tendons and said he probably will suffer from arthritis at an earlier age.

Everyone who plays football will suffer with that," he said. Recruited from East St. Louis, Ill., Hill was an NU freshman in 1963.

Harding said that in most cases the pain a player feels "is something you don't think about because it is with you all the time. The body will adapt. You can come out of practice and not even know where the bruises and cuts come from." He described his Husker-related injuries as "nothing permanent — sprained ankles and a head injury.

"It's the nature of my bones," he said, laughing. "Some people have chronic colds; I have chronic ankles." Chronic ankles helped keep him out of the military, he said, and he suffered head injuries when he went in to make a tackle and was kicked.

Tucker, who played quarterback behind Dennis Claridge and Bob Churchich in the early Devaney years, was injured in practice.

"It's pretty ironic," Tucker said. "I never was injured in all

the years of playing football until the last practice before the Oklahoma game my senior year. I went out on an option play, made a cut and broke my foot. I went to Oklahoma, though — on crutches."

Lucky breaks

But the breaks were not all related to injuries. Playing for Nebraska had its advantages, particularly in the classroom and when one ran afoul of the law.

"I've had a number of things happen to me that came out well because I was a football player," said Coppa,

now a clerk for Burlington Northern in Lincoln.

Once a history midterm was scheduled for a Friday on which the Freshmen had to play an out-of-town game. Coppa talked with the history professor, who said he could make up the test some other time. Coppa said he never did have to make it up, with no apparent effect on his course grade.

"If they know you're a football player, generally they're a little easier on you," he said.

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Major designed to aid disabled

A new major designed to prepare students to work with physically or mentally handicapped children will be offered in the fall by the College of Home Economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The students will be trained to help the child with socialization skills and everyday activities outside of the classroom, help the child fit in as part of the classroom and work with the child at home who cannot take part in school activities. The graduate will also be able to act as a consultant for agencies working with the handicapped.

Helen Sulek, associate professor of human development and the family (HDF) at UN-L, said there is a good job demand for people with this type of training. The handicapped are being mainstreamed into society, she added. Nationally, there has been more concern for the

handicapped and an effort to get them out of institutions, she said.

Approximately 24,000-33,000 Nebraska children are handicapped. Legislation aimed toward normalization of the handicapped has encouraged them to be part of the public school system. Charlene Swanson, child development specialist of the Nebraska Office of Mental Retardation, said public schools will need backup help to accommodate the increased number of handicapped enrolled. She predicted that some teachers will return for additional training to be better able to help their handicapped students. "Often teachers dealing with the severely handicapped, need depth of understanding in development of social, physical and mental processes," according to Dr. Lois Schwab, associate professor of HDF.

Allstaters gather for study of arts

On Wednesday, June 12, students from the eighth to the twelfth grades will be on campus to participate in the Nebraska Allstate program. These students, whose interests all focus on the arts, will attend classes, rehearsals and presentations during their 16

days at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln.

In addition to the workshops that have been held in the past, such as chorus, orchestra and band, Allstaters in the music division will also have the option of attending workshops on swing choir and jazz band.

The other divisions of the program include dance, speech (which includes theatre and debate), and art.

This year over 300 students have registered for the Allstate program. This is an increase in about 20 over last year.



Incoming freshmen were on campus this week taking part in UNL's freshmen orientation program.