

Memories unite 1950 Husker team

Editor's note: Between 1940, Nebraska's Rose Bowl season, and 1962, when Bob Devaney arrived as coach and took Nebraska to new football glory, only three Cornhusker teams had winning records. The 1950 team had the best record of those three: 6-2-1. This season marks the team's 25th anniversary and several team members are gathering for an informal reunion in Lincoln today and Saturday. The following is the first part of an update on the members of that team. Former Daily Nebraskan sports editor Dennis Onnen contacted many of them and wrote the following story as an assignment in the UNL School of Journalism depth reporting class.

By Dennis Onnen

It is Nov. 25, 1950. Nebraska center Joe McGill snaps the ball to quarterback Fran Nagle, who pivots and hands it halfback Bobby Reynolds. Reynolds runs wide right behind pulling guard Art Bauer, who springs him free at the line.

Downfield, tackle Charley Toogood applied the final block that lets Reynolds run untouched into the end zone. It is one of three touchdowns for Reynolds in a losing effort that day against Oklahoma, the nation's No. 1 team.

Today, 25 years later, McGill owns a subcontracting company in Wichita, Kan., Nagle is a professor of physiology at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and Reynolds is a Lincoln insurance executive. Bauer is a teacher-football coach in Spokane, Wash., and Toogood is in the restaurant business in St. Helena, Calif.

Those five players were among the standouts on the 1950 team, which stood out in an era of Husker frustration. The team probably was best known as the "Bobby Reynolds team." Reynolds had a spectacular year. He led the country in scoring and was second in rushing. His performance against Oklahoma cinched his selection as a consensus All-American.

Today, the 1950 Huskers are scattered throughout the country. Of 28 contacted, 15 still live in Nebraska. The rest live in California (6), Kansas (2), Wisconsin, Washington, Iowa, Texas and Illinois.

Fond memories

As they recall the 1950 season and its effect on their lives, the players talk warmly of the bond that developed between teammates. Yet today the players, even those living in Nebraska, rarely see each other. They come into contact by chance or at occasional informal gatherings after Nebraska home football games.

The bond of 1950 appears dissolved. But that is only on the surface. It still exists in the shared memories of a season that may not be the greatest in Nebraska history, but which certainly is one of the most memorable.

Perhaps each player's most vivid memories are those of the preseason camp at Curtis, Neb. Curtis, a town of 964 at the time, is 200 miles west of Lincoln and 40 miles south of North Platte. For two weeks before school started, it became an island of football in the Sandhills.

'He made summer camp like a survival training program'

Coach Bill Glassford initiated the camp when he came to Nebraska in 1949. The players stayed at the State Agriculture High School, and their schedule required them to concentrate only on football.

The daily routine went like this: breakfast, chalk talks, three-hour morning practice, lunch, more chalk talks, three-hour afternoon practice, dinner; study of plays at night. The players had Sunday and Friday nights off, but that meant little in Curtis.

"We'd walk through town—that took about 15 minutes," said halfback Ron Clark, today a sales manager for Western Supply Corp. in Lincoln. Curtis had one beer hall, he said, but assistant coaches were posted in front and rear doors. In such a situation, quick thinking was called for.

Thank Heaven!

According to Clark, fullback Nick Adduci had met the town priest by attending Mass. On the Friday night off, Adduci visited the priest, who was glad to contribute some liquor to ease the players' plight.

"The coaches couldn't figure out where

we had gotten the stuff," Clark said. "They were puzzled even after we had left town."

When Glassford played high school football in Pennsylvania, all high school teams had campus such as the Nebraska one, said linebacker Bob "Moon" Mullen, now a Lincoln insurance executive. Tackle Wayne Handshy, today a teacher in Atascadero, Calif., said Glassford was a Navy survival training officer during World War II, and that had an effect on the camp, too.

"He made his summer camp like a survival training program," Handshy said. Of about 140 players who went to camp, only about 50 remained at the end. Players who quit would sneak out at night, either walking or hitchhiking to North Platte to catch a bus to Lincoln.

"We'd wake up in the morning, and a couple more bunks would be empty," Mullen said. "He (Glassford) felt he would come back with some players who wanted to play football."

Temperatures rising

Handshy said the players were not allowed to drink water during practice and were given salt water from a canteen only when they passed out or became nauseated. Such incidents were common because of temperatures that soared past 110 degrees, he said.

"In the morning we'd lick dew off the grass because we knew it would be a long time before we'd get anything to drink."

Handshy, who weighed 265 pounds when he reported for camp ("Bill Glassford was infuriated"), lost 40 pounds in two weeks. He ate at the "fat man's table" for players Glassford considered overweight. A typical meal at that table was melba toast for breakfast, he said.

"I had diarrhea so bad for awhile, I didn't think I'd ever snap out of it."

To get to and from their dressing room, the players had to go hand-over-hand on a horizontal ladder that passed over a moat. Adduci, now a milk distributor in Frankfort, Ill., said the players were told there was an alligator in the moat, but exhausted players dropped in anyway.

The camp was not without its light moments, however.

'The greatest thing Bobby Reynolds had was that sixth sense'

"We'd be stealing faucets from the showers, putting a cat in a guy's bed, throwing plums and fruit around—little things like that to keep our humor up," Adduci said.

The sophomores were singled out in several ways. If blocking dummies had to be carried, the sophomores carried them. They all had Mohawk haircuts and each year put on a variety show for the upperclassmen. In 1950, Adduci stole the show with his Jimmy Durante impression.

Such a performance would appear normal for Adduci, however, since many teammates referred to him as the team clown.

Adduci recalls locking quarterback Nagle in a locker for an hour before the Oklahoma game "just to loosen the team up."

"Whenever we had a lead and had to stall the last two or three minutes of a game, I would tell jokes in the huddle," he said.

Surrender to Sooners

Unlike many Nebraska teams of that era, the 1950 squad had the lead much of the time. The only losses came to Colorado (28-19) in Boulder and to Oklahoma (49-35) in Norman. Nebraska held the top-ranked Sooners to a 21-21 halftime tie before surrendering three quick touchdowns in the third quarter. Despite the two losses, the Huskers finished 17th in UPI's national ranking.

Bobby Reynolds probably more than any other player accounted for that sudden upsurge of Husker fortunes in 1950.

Reynolds, a sophomore from Grand Island, rushed for 1,342 yards, a Big 8 record until Heisman Trophy winner Steve Owens broke it in 1968. Only in the Oklahoma game did Reynolds fail to rush for 100 yards.

He led the nation in scoring with 157 points, a major college record at the time, and he scored at least one touchdown in every game. The 157 points still stands as the Big 8 season record.

Reynolds appeared destined for superstardom, but tragedy struck three times



Photos courtesy of the UNL School of Journalism

These faces were familiar to Big Red fans as they watched the 1950 Huskers battle to a winning season. Tackel Charley Toogood, guard Don Strasheim, halfback Bobby Reynolds and offensive guard Art Bauer (left to right), under the direction of head coach Bill Glassford, helped the Huskers compile a 6-2-1 record. Although the faces may have aged over the past 25 years, the players still remember the anguish of practice, the competitive spirits and the welcomed victories.

within the next two years. He suffered shoulder separations in both his junior and senior seasons, dropping his combined output for those years to 854 yards rushing and 54 points. Playing baseball as a senior, he broke his leg sliding into home and wiped out any pro aspirations.

"All of us felt Bobby Reynolds was the reason for the team's success," said Toogood, an All-Big 7 player who went on to play six years with the Los Angeles Rams.

"He made the line, I don't think the line made him," Toogood said. "I probably enjoyed watching him run as much as the fans did. We linemen just stood around and watched him go by."

"By far and away, he was the best open-field runner I've ever seen."

What was it that made Reynolds so great?

Sixth sense

"First, Bobby Reynolds was not fast," Mullen said. "What he had was great hip movement and great moves, but the greatest thing Bobby Reynolds had was that sixth sense."

He said fans often can see where a back could have gotten an extra two or three yards by making a certain move. Reynolds would make that move and get the extra yards.

"He knew exactly where he was on the field," Mullen said. "It was like he had an extra set of eyes upstairs."

Many players recalled the see-saw 40-34 win over Missouri and particularly the winning touchdown by Reynolds. Offensive guard Bauer remembers making three blocks on the run which some call the greatest in Husker history.

Nebraska had a fourth down on the Missouri 33-yard line when Reynolds was given the ball on a sweep to the right. The hole was plugged, so Reynolds reversed his field and raced to his left, dropping about 30 yards behind the line of scrimmage. Penned in again, he sped back to his right, evading tacklers, picking up blocks and finally skirting the sideline for the touchdown.

"The touchdown run goes down as 33 yards in the records," wrote Floyd Olds, sports editor of the Omaha World-Herald. "But, actually, Reynolds ran a good 100 yards backwards, sideways and forward."

Center McGill remembers the win over Kansas because of a play involving All-American defensive tackle Mike McCormack, now coach of the Philadelphia Eagles. After being pushed downfield 10 yards by the Husker offensive line on one play, McCormack picked himself up and asked, "Goddamn, don't you guys ever quit coming?"

Other games mentioned frequently were the battle against Oklahoma and the 32-26 defeat of Minnesota, the first Husker win in Minneapolis since 1902.

'Don't you guys ever quit?'

Guard Tom Harper, now an Omaha insurance man, remembers the Oklahoma game, but not because of the contest alone. Sophomores like himself didn't realize that liquor wasn't sold in Oklahoma, but the seniors knew from experience and brought jugs of liquor with them for fortification after the game.

"Let's face it, you don't train every minute of the time," Harper said, "but we sophomores didn't know dry states from wet states."

Handshy recalls the Colorado game because it showed how the competitiveness instilled at the Curtis camp paid off.

"We could have blown the whole rest of the season," he said of the loss which dropped the Huskers' record to 1-1-1. But they bounced back to win their next five games.

"We just didn't let things get us down," said end Frank Simon, now a teacher-coach in Torrance, Calif. "First and 25 wasn't any worse than first and 10."

The remainder of this depth report will be printed on pg. 11 of Monday's Daily Nebraskan. It includes comments from head coach Bill Glassford, now 61-years-old, on what he remembers about his 1950 Huskers. In addition, players' also share their memories, some harsh but mostly favorable, about their coach.