

# 'Big Eight Football' historical flop

By Ed McClymont

Because of the success of "Big Eight football" in recent years, the influx in the number of reading materials written on the market having something to do with the sport has been tremendous. Both good and bad material has come with this development, and a new book just published, aptly named "Big Eight Football," falls under the category of bad.

## review

The author of the book is John McCallum, a writer of several football histories. His previous attempts, such as "College Football, U.S.A.," have met with favor from this critic, but McCallum clearly has little knowledge of the history of Big Eight football. At times, the reader wonders if he is discussing the advantages of the single wing over the T formation or Big Eight football. McCallum, with his eastern background, would be much better of writing about the Ivy League.

The veracity of the book is questioned immediately in the first chapter when McCallum describes Nebraska as being unbeaten until the Missouri game last season and holding the number two position in national polls "for much of the season." In reality, Nebraska was beaten by Alabama the first game of the year and achieved the lofty number two ranking for only one week, after the victory over Oklahoma.

THE FIRST PARAGRAPH of the book is ominous. McCallum writes: "... down there in the old dirt-kicking Big Eight territory the natives think THEY invented football. . . Why, football out there is bigger than cowboys boots and the Stetson hat—it's bigger than country music, bigger even than girls." From this excerpt, one conjures up the image of New Yorker sitting behind his desk in Manhattan trying to relate to "the natives" as he writes. This beginning gives little credibility to the author.

Throughout the book, McCallum quotes from newspapers, various players, and coaches, which, if used correctly, could provide excellent insights into the game. The number and lengths of these quotes are entirely too many and too long, however. One example is a three-page essay by former All-American Jim Owens about his coach, Bud Wilkinson. We all know Wilkinson was one of the great all-

time coaches but three pages of hearing what a sweet guy some coach is, regardless if it is Wilkinson or Bob Devaney, can be nauseating. It is almost as if McCallum is trying to fill space to cover up for his lack of knowledge on the subject.

As McCallum begins the history of the conference, he finds it necessary to first relate the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher's feelings on college football in 1883. What this has to do with Big Eight football, past or present, is beyond me.

The book is salvaged, in part, if you are a Nebraska or Oklahoma fan, as most of it is devoted to those schools. Nebraska gets most of the ink from the early years to the 40's, when Oklahoma and Wilkinson take over until the 50's, and then the two schools share the spotlight for the rest of the book.

There is obviously more to Big Eight football than Huskers and Sooners, but if you are looking for more, you would be better off looking elsewhere. Iowa State, Colorado, Kansas State, and Oklahoma State are hardly mentioned until the last 15 years of the league are discussed.

WHEN MCCALLUM discussed the football situation during World War II, a reader wonders if he was writing a history text book or a football story. The author manages to list the top movies of the era (Room Service and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, to name two) as well as popular Broadway musicals.

Several times in the book McCallum is redundant about events. Twice he told the relatively same story on how Bob Devaney became coach for Nebraska. Twice he describes the 1978 season in the Big Eight. Twice he describes Bud Wilkinson's appointment to the University of Oklahoma.

The book is 310 pages long with 100 of these being devoted to statistics, which are fairly relevant and worthwhile. In the 210 pages of copy there are several pictures, which are another pitfall of the book. Most pictures are press mugs and there are few action photos. A lover of Nebraska press guides will notice two pictures from the guide in McCallum's book. One is from the 1941 Rose Bowl and the other from the 1964 Orange Bowl. It appears that any attempt to get some worthy pictures was not made.

From cover to cover, "Big Eight Football" is of little use to true Big Eight fans. The price is \$14.95 and that money would do the reader much better in a piggy bank.

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