

Sundberg says Nebraskans idolize players

By Jeremy Felker
Staff Reporter

As a former quarterback, it would seem that Craig Sundberg would be the last person to criticize the veneration fans have for Nebraska football. But that isn't the case.

"I think it's sad to say how some people just idolize the Nebraska football program or anyone associated with it, and I would put myself in that category," said Sundberg, an insurance agent in Lincoln for Massachusetts Mutual. "I'm sure somebody somewhere at one point and time thought I was the greatest thing since sliced bread."

When Sundberg was the Cornhuskers' starting quarterback in 1984, he said there was no escaping the recognition by fans on the street.

Four years later, he said, the notoriety still exists.

"That's crazy to me," Sundberg said. "It's like they react — 'gee, you're this super-human person.'"

And I'm not even playing anymore." Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said he's not surprised by Sundberg's statements.

"I think Craig is a very sensitive, level-headed person," Osborne said. "He's concerned about how out of proportion the whole thing has gotten. Players get way more attention than the average student."

Osborne said an incident last summer in which Husker quarterback Steve Taylor received a lot of publicity for firing a BB gun is one example.

"If a player shoots a BB gun, it's a national crisis," he said. "I think (Sundberg) is correct in saying there's so little middle ground."

Sundberg said the hype isn't all bad.

As an insurance agent, he said his past connections with the program have not always been a hindrance.

According to Sundberg, there are business opportunities and connections that evolve from contact with Husker football fans.

"(For example,) having a chance to meet with Joe Smith," he said, "who maybe otherwise wouldn't want to give me the time of day."

Many times, he said, such privileges aren't easily recognized.

"Usually people don't come out and say 'Well, Craig, really the only reason I wanted to meet with you was because I remembered back when you played football and I thought it would be fun to talk to you about that.'" Sundberg still feels a commitment to the Husker program.

"Just to say that you owe them something, that almost seems too strong," he said. "But I guess it's that sort of a feeling — a feeling like 'Hey, I was walking in your shoes at one point and time and if I can help you, let me know.'"

Sundberg has kept to his commitment.

He addressed this year's freshman football players on academics and in the past has helped play a role in recruiting.

"And I still will pop my head in down there periodically and still go to the games and stuff," he said.

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— Sundberg

fan," he said. "I think because I've been on that side of the fence I may be more critical. But there's no reason in my mind to try to second-guess whatever decision coach Osborne has made because I've been there."

Osborne said Sundberg's level-headed personality and intelligence helped him during his Husker career. During his senior year, Sundberg directed Nebraska to a 10-2 record and a Sugar Bowl victory over Louisiana State — a game in which he was named Most Valuable Player.

During his senior season, Sundberg completed 53 of 84 passes for 740 yards and four touchdowns with six interceptions.

"I think Craig was a guy who got a lot out of his abilities," Osborne said. "He was probably the best at audibles of any quarterback I've had. He could really pick up blitzes."

"He was a good thrower in that he had a good sense of knowing when and where to throw the ball. He was an adequate runner and a good leader."

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