

Smith hopes to start MU on long road to respectability



Courtesy of the Big 8 Conference
Larry Smith is Missouri's first-year football coach.

By Derek Samson
Staff Reporter

Bill McCartney was able to do it with Colorado and Bill Snyder is well on his way to similar accomplishments at Kansas State.

But those success stories doesn't make it any easier for Larry Smith and his attempt to break Missouri into the elite of Big Eight football, which has been dominated by Nebraska and Oklahoma for the past few decades.

When Smith was hired last December to replace Bob Stull as head coach, he knew a long road was ahead of him.

But with fall practice less than a month away, the picture is more clear for Smith to reach the goal of rebuilding the Tigers' football program.

"If there is one thing that needs to be instilled here, it is the attitude of

winning," Smith said. "One big thing is to improve technique and fundamentals, but the bottom line is the attitude. We have to make these players believers in their ability."

Smith brings a 110-80-6 career head coaching record into Missouri with his latest job being a six-year stint as coach of Southern California.

He said coaching in an improved Big Eight conference wouldn't make the rebuilding process any easier.

"From what I see, the Big Eight could be the strongest it has been in a very long time from top to bottom," Smith said. "Nebraska and Colorado are definitely top 10 and maybe top five. That alone makes it a tough conference. But then you have Oklahoma, Kansas State and Kansas in there."

Nebraska coach Tom Osborne agreed that parity in recent years —

particularly last year when four teams went to bowl games — has given the Big Eight more respect.

"In the last three years, from top to bottom, this conference is as about as strong as I've ever seen it," Osborne said. "Teams like Kansas and Kansas State are about three or four touchdowns better than in the past. I think it will be a very competitive league this year."

Because of cities like Kansas City and St. Louis, Osborne said Missouri may have the least difficulty of any school in the conference to rebuild.

"I don't think Missouri has really ever had a bad program," he said. "Because of their population, of all the Big Eight states, they come the closest to the best recruits. They can get 20 to 25 players from their own state."

"I think Larry has a lot to work with at Missouri. I think it's a relatively

lucrative recruiting area and they have the past tradition to build on."

Presently, Smith is hoping to start his rebuilding on the first day of fall practice, which means it is up to the players to take care of their summer obligation.

"What I expect to happen is for all the players to show up in good shape this fall," he said. "We have a lot of work to do here and the players know they must use the month of July to get in shape during the summer workouts so we don't have to worry about that in August."

"Being a new coach, I really want to work on the technique and fundamental aspects right away. They know they have to get in shape now so we can work on things like blocking once fall practices begin. There is a lot of work to be done in August and I'm anxious to get started."

Selection of Alberts will pay off for Colts

The Indianapolis Colts made Trev Alberts a rich man Monday.

But it will be the Colts who will cash in for selecting Alberts as the fifth pick overall in last April's draft and then signing him to a reported six-year deal worth \$8.15 million and a signing bonus worth \$3.275 million.

After Alberts signed Monday, the Colts had all their draft picks signed, including former San Diego State running back Marshall Faulk, who signed a seven-year deal worth nearly \$17.2 million.

Toss in the Colts' second-round selection, guard Eric Mahoum of California, and free agent linebacker Tony Bennett, formerly a Green Bay Packer, and the Colts have done some damage to their own pocketbook that should pay off in the long run.

There is only one key position that may keep Indianapolis from being a contender — quarterback.

Apparently, the Colts consider Jim Harbaugh a franchise player. If that's true, then sign me up as his backup.

It was for this reason that all the fireworks were set off during the NFL draft when Indy opted to pass up Fresno State quarterback Trent Dilfer for Alberts with its fifth pick.

But Alberts was a pick the Colts couldn't afford to pass up, especially after picking up Bennett. The Colts may have one of the best linebacker duos in the NFL.

Where the Colts went wrong was not going after one of the quarterbacks available in the free agent market like Warren Moon, Scott Mitchell or even Erik Kramer.

But they stuck with Harbaugh, who couldn't even be a starter in arena football. The Colts did the best they could with the second and fifth overall picks in the draft —



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even though it put them in a tight financial situation.

Alberts said last week from his home in Cedar Falls, Iowa, that he knew the Colts were in for long negotiations with their top two picks.

"They (Indianapolis) are in a tough position right now," Alberts said. "Not only with Marshall and myself, but they got a high second-rounder named Eric Mahoum and we're all three penciled in as starters as of now. It makes it hard to sign three players like that right away."

Indianapolis was feeling a bit squeezed with Alberts and Faulk, Colts General Manager Jim Irsay told the Associated Press.

"The important thing was for us to lock up these two draft picks so there was no possibility of losing both as free agents in the same year," Irsay said.

And now that the Colts have locked their players up, it's time for them to reap the benefits.

At least they hope so.

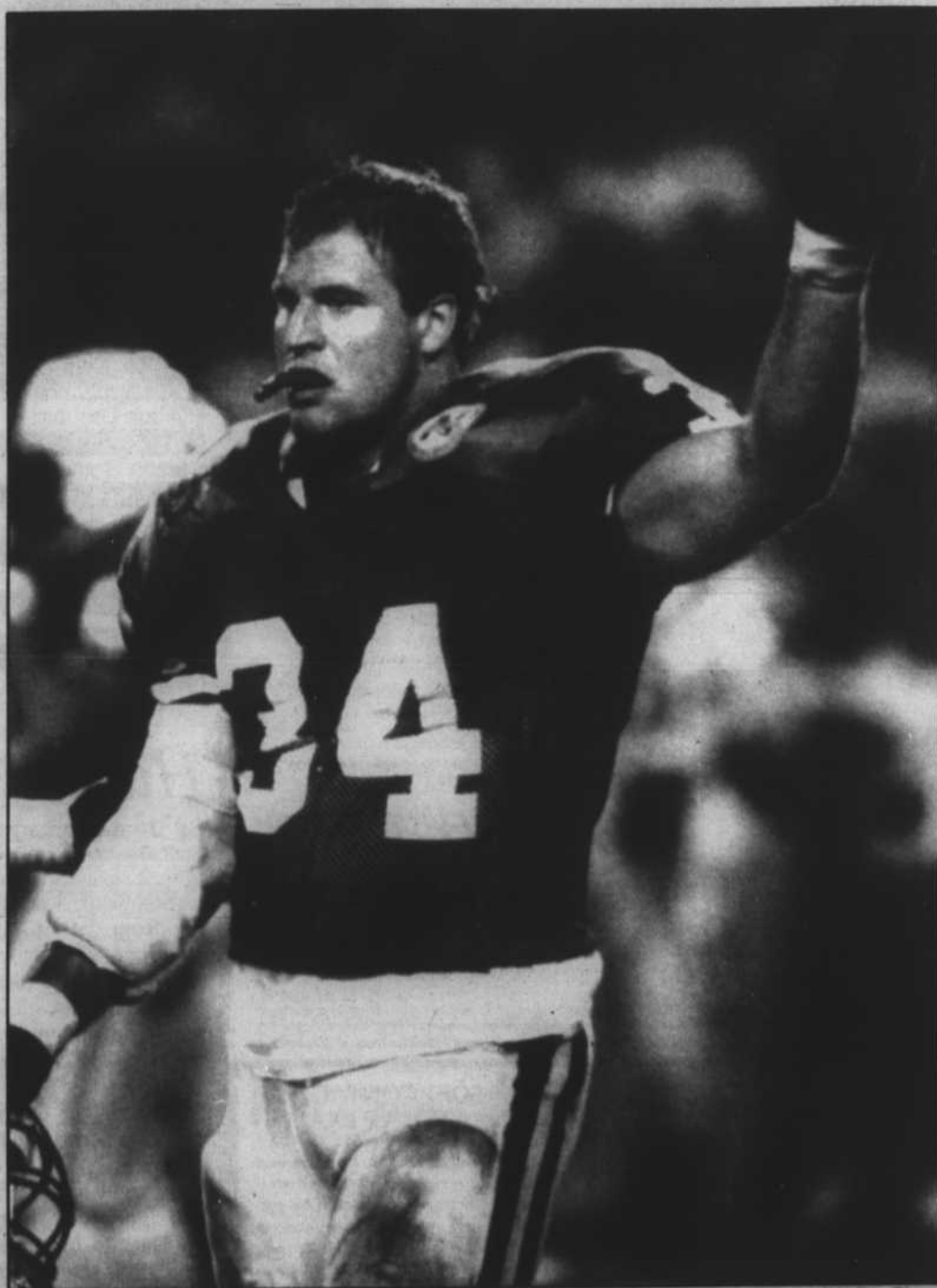
But Alberts will prove himself to be a good investment.

"My position all along is that I'm not out looking for a contract that is more than what I should be paid, but I want a fair deal," Alberts said before the signing.

For the Colts, Monday's signing of Alberts was the finish to a productive off-season.

For Alberts, it was a figure he now has to earn.

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DN File Photo

Trev Alberts was selected by the Indianapolis Colts as the fifth pick in April's NFL draft. He is shown after recording a sack in the 1994 Orange Bowl.