



RYAN SODERLIN/DN

NEBRASKA COACH TOM Osborne has some words for the line judge at the Nebraska vs. Colorado game this year.

# Players remember unique relationship with Osborne

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER  
Assignment Reporter

Nebraska football players failed to find humor in one of the few jokes straight-faced Coach Tom Osborne cracked on Wednesday.

The 25-year Cornhusker coach attempted to keep things lighthearted during NU's team meeting Wednesday afternoon.

But Osborne's announcement that he would retire after NU competes for a possible national championship in the Orange Bowl Jan. 2 dampened the coach's punch lines.

"Coach came in and he tried to crack some jokes, but nobody was laughing," junior linebacker Eric Johnson said. "We knew."

"Most people sat with their heads down. And a few guys tried to smile, but even the ones who tried still had tears in their eyes."

The knowledge produced a somber scene at the South Stadium lounge as, only minutes after Osborne revealed his retirement to the media, his players struggled to find the words to describe the unique relationship they shared with the 60-year-old coach.

Osborne filled a role that stretched beyond the boundaries of a football coach for the Huskers.

Offensive lineman Matt Hoskinson said Osborne played the part of a teacher, a father and a friend.

"You can't put into words the kind of bond you we have with Coach Osborne," Hoskinson said. "You can sit and talk for hours. And I know five years from now if I see Coach

Osborne, I'll be able to give him a big hug and it will be fine.

"He has that type of relationship with everyone. He knows everyone's name, all 176 of them. I guess that might be hard for some on other teams to fathom, but that's something we have unique at Nebraska."

It's that unique relationship that players spoke of over and over again.

"You hear so many people say that he teaches us off the field," senior Jay Sims said. "He does. He teaches us about life, and about being a good person. He taught us how to talk the right way to people and to take our hats off at dinner."

Junior fullback Joel Makovicka, a former walk-on, praised Osborne and the lengths the determined coach went to in order to build a successful walk-on program.

Johnson recalled how Osborne took him under his wing as a Proposition 48 student three years ago and personally watched the junior from Phoenix to make sure Johnson completed his school work.

Senior quarterback Scott Frost remembered the support Osborne offered through difficult times throughout the season.

Vershan Jackson's eyes filled with tears when he explained Osborne's role in his life. Jackson - whose father died in 1991 - lost his mother last July.

"Coach Osborne really is like a father to me," Jackson said. "It was a really trying time, but he told me to just keep the faith and things would work out."

"He doesn't worry about the things he can't control, but when there is something he can control he dedi-

“*He teaches us about life, and about being a good person.*”

JAY SIMS  
Husker I-back

cates himself to it. That's what Coach Osborne means to me. He is all about completing the mission. My mission was to play football for Nebraska and to get a degree. I've done the football part, and I'm going to get the degree."

But even through their sorrow, the Huskers respect Osborne's decision.

And now, Jackson said, the Huskers are on a mission to help end the Osborne's 25-year-career as head coach on a high note.

Osborne will coach his last game against Tennessee in the Orange Bowl Jan. 2.

"We want coach to go out with a bang, and we're going in to make sure he does," center Josh Heskew said. "Whatever it takes. If it takes more hard work and sacrifice on our part, we'll get it done."

Sims agreed. "The most important thing he taught me is that if you want to do something, you do it all the way," Sims said. "He does not do anything less than 150 percent. We won't either."



NANCY OSBORNE, wife of head Coach Tom Osborne, offers her support during Osborne told the media her support was important to him during his career.

# Osborne family av

BY MATTHEW WAITE  
Senior Reporter

For 25 years, Nancy Osborne has been on a different kind of sideline.

Throughout the rearing of three children, she has always been the head parental coach, with only an occasional assistant coach to help out.

For the 25 years that her husband, Tom, has been head coach at Nebraska, Nancy Osborne has kept the home team together.

Now, the children are grown - grandchildren are now in the picture. And football, after the Jan. 2 Orange Bowl, is out.

Nancy Osborne is getting her husband back.

Tom Osborne, the football coach with the second-best winning percentage in college football history, retired Wednesday, ending an extraordinary career as the Husker head man.

In a news conference Wednesday, Osborne said he is stepping aside, allowing Frank Solich, assistant head coach, to step up.

Osborne, 60, said his years as head coach have been hard on his family, especially his wife. However, he joked, retirement may be more of a sacrifice for her.

"It's going to be tough having me around," he said.

Two of Osborne's three children - Mike Osborne and Ann Wilke - said their father's return home would be an

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