

#9 John WALKER

BY DARREN IVY
Senior staff writer

In just six years, Nebraska Women's Soccer Coach John Walker has taken Nebraska from a club sport and turned it into a top-four program.

A lifelong soccer enthusiast, Walker came to Nebraska in 1994 from Canada, where he was the director of high performance for Ontario soccer.

When Walker and Athletic Director Bill Byrne met to set goals for the first-year program, Walker gave himself five years to turn the Cornhuskers into a consistent top-25 team.

It took just three. NU finished the 1996 season ranked in the top 10 and has been there the past two years as well.

"I don't think anyone could have predicted it," said Walker, who has a 92-22-2 record in six seasons at NU.

"It is very difficult to do that. Don't get me wrong, I am not giving myself a pat on the back. It is tough to envision five years ago that we would be ranked No. 2 by one of the polls this past week."

The success story hasn't gone unnoticed. Walker was named the 1996 NSCAA/Umbro national coach of the year following a 23-1 season. These accomplishments have made Walker No. 9 on the Daily Nebraskan Sports Century list.

This past summer, national powerhouse Notre Dame courted Walker to take its vacant coaching spot, but after briefly thinking about it, Walker declined. He was rewarded for his loyalty with a large pay raise.

He still has unfinished business at NU and had invested too much of his life to leave. Walker wants to win a national championship.

Assistant Coach Megan Bechtold admires Walker's commitment to the team and program.

"He hates even missing practices with the team," Bechtold said. "He tried to have it sched-

uled so his wife, Mary, would have her child at a time so he could make practice. We told him it was all right to miss, and the players understood him not being there."

Walker hates missing practices because that is where NU makes the most improvement. The Huskers go intense day in and day out—something a lot of other teams talk about but don't do, Walker said.

The improvement of the team is evidenced in the increased attendance at home games. An average of 257 people watched NU's first season at Whittier Field.

Since then, a new complex was built, and attendance has grown to nearly 1,000 a match. Walker can take pride knowing he played a part in that growth of soccer.

#10 Cal BENTZ

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND
Staff writer

Cal Bentz's career as the Nebraska swimming coach cannot be measured in wins, losses or even conference championships.

People will look back on Bentz's career and admire the effect he has had on the sport that he loves. Ever since Bentz was a youngster in Hastings, he knew that he wanted to be involved in the sport. This love and dedication to the sport have garnered him the No. 10 spot on the Daily Nebraskan Sports Century list.

Bentz came to NU out of high school to swim, not knowing what he was going to study. He picked teaching as a career and helped coach a club team between his sophomore and junior-year.

From then on, Bentz knew what he wanted to do with his life. In 1978, Bob Devaney and Don Bryant drove to Omaha, where Bentz was coaching at Omaha Westside, and asked him to be the coach at NU.

For 24 years, he has been helping his athletes succeed in both their competitive and professional lives while compiling 16 conference titles for the men and five for the women.

"The best part of coaching has been watching the success of the athletes," Bentz said. "I have been fortunate to deal with talented and intelligent people."

Bentz has coached 19 Olympians and two world record holders—Penny Heyns and Peter Williams. He has been the conference coach of the year six times while never finishing lower than fourth in the conference standings.

With his tenure at NU, Bentz has seen a lot of things develop in and around the sport of swimming.

"The sport of swimming has changed," Bentz said. "The women are swimming as fast as the men did when I first arrived here."

Bentz said that his job is getting tougher as the years go by, and the sport is "a completely different ball game." He is quick to point out that events of today cannot be put into the context of the past because of change.

"The place is the same, but the time is different," Bentz said. "It's not the same. Monetary things mean a lot now."

But Bentz is quick to defend what is called the "purity" of the sport.

"It is different now because some athletes in high school swim for college scholarships," Bentz said. "But all in all, athletes have a real desire to excel and do things for an inner satisfaction."

Devaney 'turned the program around'

DEVANEY from page 20

"having the president of the United States come to town"—said Devaney had a knack for inspiring his players to achieve.

"In the time and place I grew up, the head coach was the kind of guy you revered and respected," Kinney said. "You always sought Bob's approval. He knew the right words to say at the right time."

Devaney inspired not only 101 victories, eight Big Eight championships and two national championships, he inspired a state full of football fans starved for a winner.

Few could comprehend in the winter of 1962—when the Michigan native stepped off the train in Lincoln from Wyoming to inherit a program that had suffered 17 losing seasons in 21 years—that he would become what former NU Sports Information Director Don Bryant called "one of the three most important people in the University of Nebraska's history."

Thanks to Devaney, Nebraska has a powerhouse football program that boasts 37 consecutive winning seasons, five national championships and 230 consecutive Memorial Stadium sellouts.

Thanks to Devaney, who served as NU's innovative Athletic Director from 1967-93, NU has one of the most highly-funded, best-facilitated,

most-respected and successful student-athlete programs in the nation.

And thanks to Devaney, Nebraska became known for more than just a state of open plains and fields of corn. That "Sea of Red," of 77,000 screaming faithful fans on Saturdays in the fall? The pride of nearly 2 million Nebraskans chewing peoples' ears off about "their" football team? It all started with Devaney.

"Bob was probably the most important coach ever at Nebraska," said No. 1 Nebraska Coach and Devaney's successor, Tom Osborne.

"He turned the program around and brought it to new heights. His influence was greater than anything I was able to contribute."

Devaney's impact was immediate.

Before he arrived, NU had trudged through several seasons of conservative, downright boring—not to mention losing—football. So in his first game as NU's coach, at home, Devaney called a pass on the first play. The pass fell incomplete.

"And the whole stadium went nuts," Bryant said. "He knew what the fans wanted and got them on his side right away."

NU won nine games in his first season and a conference championship in his second. The next three years, Devaney contended for the national title but fell short. However, by 1967 and '68, fans were calling

for his head after two poor 6-4 seasons.

The bulldog fought back. Devaney captured the elusive national title in 1970 and repeated the feat in '71—beating his old nemesis, legendary Alabama Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant in the Orange Bowl, to establish himself as a legend.

But it was Devaney's personality, not his accomplishments, that his former players, coaches and peers will remember him by.

"He was a man of a million jokes," current NU head coach and former fullback Frank Solich said. "You felt comfortable around him. As a player, he demanded that you play well, but he was light-hearted in a lot of ways. He made the game fun."

One Devaney story that personified his legacy occurred in a game against Southern California in Lincoln.

In the first half, the road team Trojans had been flagged for a few more penalties than USC Coach John McKay believed they deserved. At halftime, as McKay bitterly stomped toward the locker room and muttered to himself, he felt a hand slap him on the shoulder. It was Devaney's.

McKay turned around and looked at the grinning, red-faced Irishman.

"Well, John," Devaney said ra her sheepishly. "How did you like my brother's officiating?"

'Consistency and discipline' helped make Osborne a legend

OSBORNE from page 20

knew all the facts. We tried to act in accordance with the facts. I felt the only way to get him to stay on track and keep him going to classes was to give him the hope that he could play football again.

"Otherwise, I felt he would run back to his friends in Los Angeles and get in trouble again. It ended up that he did that when he left."

Solich said Osborne's trust in players was meaningful and something he adopted when he took over in 1998.

"Coach always understood that there were usually two sides to a story, and he realized that you can't jump to emotional decisions," Solich said. "I have tried to use that same approach."

But even using Osborne's approach, Solich has drawn criticism in his first two seasons. He's learned what it is like to replace a legend much like Osborne did when he replaced Bob Devaney.

Replacing a legend

As hard as the '90s were on Osborne, he almost didn't make it through the first five years of his career.

Despite going 48-13-2, he was criticized because he tied for only one conference title and didn't win any national championships, Bryant said. He also had five losses to rival Oklahoma.

"You look at his 25 years, and Tom wasn't the big hero the first five years," Bryant said. "He struggled in his early years. He was winning nine games, but that wasn't good enough. Bob had won national championships."

Bryant recalled a humorous example of the kind of pressure Osborne was under in his first year. It was a Thursday afternoon practice, and the players were

doing warm-ups. The quarterbacks were throwing balls to the receivers, and somebody said to Osborne: "You used to be a great receiver in the NFL. Show us how it is done."

"Tom decided to be a good sport, so he went out for this pass from Steve Runty," Bryant said. "He went up for the catch and someone popped him, and he dropped the ball. Dave Humm said jokingly to him: 'Coach Devaney would have hung on to that one.'"

Osborne finally beat the Sooners in 1978 but lost to Missouri the next week 35-31, forcing a rematch with OU in the Orange Bowl. NU lost that game 31-24.

The Orange Bowl would be the setting for many of Osborne's early heartaches and fittingly some of his best moments later in his coaching career.

Going to Miami

Eleven times Osborne's teams ended their seasons in Miami with the Orange Bowl, and only four times did he come out victorious. Three of those wins came in the '90s.

One of the toughest losses was a 31-30 setback to Miami in the 1983 Orange Bowl when NU was ranked No. 1.

Going into the fourth quarter his team was trailing 31-17. By the end the lead was cut to 31-30.

Rather than kick the extra point, settle for a tie and guarantee a national championship, Osborne opted to go for a two-point decision. It failed, and Miami captured the crown.

"Any time you lose one, you feel badly for those players," Solich said. "It was hard on everybody. That was pretty well thought out ahead of time. He had made the decision that he would go for the win."

Said Miami Coach Howard

Schnellenberger: "This was a championship game, and (Osborne) went after it like a champion."

In 1993, Osborne would come close again only to lose 18-16 to Florida State in Miami. Afterward, some wondered if Osborne would ever win a national championship. He would be asked about it until he finally captured his first one in 1994 with a 24-17 come-from-behind victory over Miami.

He would go on to win another title in 1995 and go out with a share of one in 1997. Osborne went out on top. But would it have been the same if he hadn't ever won one?

Bryant wasn't sure.

"People didn't worship him until the last five years," he said. "When he started winning national titles and went on that great string of 60 wins and three losses, he just became an icon."

To Osborne, the national titles were a bonus and not mandatory for success.

"I think I would have been satisfied even if I never won it," Osborne said. "The most gratifying thing was that people wouldn't keep asking me about it. The national title was much more of a focal point to fans and the media than me. Championship rings and trophies weren't why I was involved in coaching."

Outsmarting opposing coaches and the love of the game were what drove Osborne.

Adapting to change

Osborne had an innovative football mind. He developed and crafted the option attack, transforming it into a lethal weapon by the early 1980s.

"He did a super job of maintaining an excellent program and then taking it to a new level in the last four or five

years," Bryant said.

Solich didn't work with Osborne the first few years, but he saw him change to meet new challenges that arose.

"Tom grew in the job," Solich said. "In some respects he mellowed and became more comfortable after he beat Oklahoma and started winning Big Eight Championships. He was able to adjust. He was very flexible in that manner. When change was necessary, he would make it. He had a set of principles he always followed."

One thing that never changed was Osborne's relentless work ethic.

Working to be the best

For seven months out of the year, Osborne would work 15 hours a day, seven days a week. Since retiring, Osborne has scaled back to 10 hours a day doing work as a teacher, founder of the Teammates Program and advertising spokesperson for several companies. He still runs and lifts weights.

It doesn't surprise Bryant that Osborne is still going strong.

"The thing that amazed me was his consistency and his discipline," Bryant said. "It showed in his football and his preparation. It showed in his daily life and his workouts, which he would never miss. Tom is probably, without question, the hardest working guy I've known."

"He gave his heart and soul to that football program and probably to the detriment of other areas at times. He would work from sunrise until well into the night day after day to get that football team ready. I admired that."

Looking back, Osborne is not sure how admirable his 15-hour days were to his children.

"One thing that gnaws at me today is how much time I spent away from my

family," Osborne said. "At the time, I thought I was being a good father, going to their games when I had time, but I realize now that I should have spent more time with them."

Spending more time with family was one of the reasons Osborne decided to retire in 1997.

Leaving on top

Osborne's retirement announcement Dec. 10, 1997 came as a big surprise to everyone but Solich, who had been told of the decision at the beginning of the year, but at that time, it surprised him.

"I can't say I saw it coming," Solich said. "He hadn't slowed down. His drive and energy level on the outside were the same."

The fact that Osborne was in such good shape made it even harder to walk away, he said in a May 1998 interview with the Daily Nebraskan.

"I've deliberately kept myself pretty busy because I know it wouldn't be a good idea to all of a sudden start sitting and staring at walls," Osborne said. "A little bit is filling the void, but sooner or later, there is no question you will come face-to-face that you aren't coaching anymore, and I think that will be an adjustment and be difficult, but it's something that has to happen."

It's been more than a year since that interview, and Osborne has grown more at peace with life after football.

He still comes around Memorial Stadium, lifts weights and runs on the turf now christened with his name.

Deep down he misses the players, the assistants and the chess match every Saturday.

It's been a part of his life too long to let go.