



ILLUSTRATION BY MATT HANEY/DN
 Nebraska's top coaches left to right are: Tom Osborne, Tim Neumann, Dana X. Bible, Bob Devaney, Ewald O. Stiehm, Francis Allen, Gary Pepin, John Walker, Terry Pettit and Cal Bentz

THE TEN GREATEST COACHES IN NU HISTORY

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#1 Tom OSBORNE

By **DARREN IVY**
Senior staff writer

During Tom Osborne's 36 years as a graduate assistant, assistant and finally as a head coach at Nebraska, there weren't many things he didn't accomplish.

The tall, stoic figure from Hastings won 255 games, lost 49 and tied three in his 25 years as head coach. Included in those victories were three national championships, 13 conference championships and 12 bowl victories.

Other streaks and NCAA records that are too numerous to mention also were set by Osborne, the fifth winningest coach in Division I-A college football history.

All of these accomplishments plus many other factors led the Daily Nebraskan staff to vote Osborne as the Nebraska coach of the century.

Winning games might be what fans remember about Osborne, but the man simply known by his initials, T.O., wanted to be remembered in other ways.

"I want to be remembered as someone who cared about players and tried to do the best for their athletic and personal development," Osborne said. "I wanted them to leave here with skills, values and good character."

"Of course that wasn't always the case, but I hoped they had a positive experience."

Most of the thousands of players touched by Osborne, who coached from 1973-1997, would tell you that he had a positive impact on their lives.

Players' coach

Osborne was a man of great character, said Don Bryant, former director of Sports Information.

Current Head Coach Frank Solich agreed.

"Everybody perceived him as being a really honest, caring guy. He was that," Solich said. "I think that came across to his players and coaches. He cared about what you accomplished on the field and off. He not only talked the game, but he acted it. He was a great role model."

The respect the players had for Osborne was evident at the 1998 Orange Bowl. They sent him out a winner in his final game, dismantling Tennessee 42-17.

Osborne meant so much to the players he coached and went out of his way

to help them, said offensive lineman Matt Hoskinson, a member of Osborne's last team.

"You can't put into words what kind of bond we have with Coach Osborne," Hoskinson said after Osborne announced his retirement in 1997. "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."

That unique love for his players was a constant through good and bad times.

It was what got him interested in coaching at NU, what motivated him to work ungodly hours for successful teams and what kept him at Nebraska

rather than going somewhere else.

"Looking back, I don't think I would have been happy leaving Nebraska," said Osborne about his decision to interview at Colorado in 1978. "The No. 1 reason I stayed was that I couldn't have envisioned myself going into a team meeting and telling all these guys I recruited that I was leaving. It was hard enough to tell the players I was retiring."

Solich misses the interaction with his former boss and will always respect what Osborne did for him.

"He expected everyone to do his job, but he wasn't the kind of guy who looked over your shoulder," Solich said. "That was really appreciated by me. There is no question he put a lot of trust in us."

He also put a lot of trust in his players. In his later years as a head coach, he took some public criticism for it.

Trusting his instincts

The 1990s were Osborne's most successful years as a coach, with an 88-9-1 record, but also were some of his most trying times.

Numerous off-the-field distractions and player run-ins with the law drew negative national media attention to Nebraska and Osborne.

"I generally felt I had a good working relationship with the media, but I felt there were three or four stories with an unfair and biased angle," he said.

The most criticism came after Osborne let star running back Lawrence Phillips back on the football team after he was suspended for allegedly assaulting his girlfriend.

Osborne said: "It was a little disheartening. I don't think many people

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Bob DEVANEY

By **JOHN GASKINS**
Staff writer

Jeff Kinney remembers the scene in the Nebraska locker room on that gray November day in 1971 when NU was battling Oklahoma in the "Game of the Century."

The No. 1 Cornhuskers were down 17-14 to their arch rival and second-ranked Sooners at Oklahoma and had just given up a late-second-quarter touchdown drive that gave OU its first lead of the game.

Into the locker room stormed a short, pudgy, puffy-eyed Irishman named Bob Devaney - wearing a red jacket, red hat and incredibly red face. A coach who one of his assistants once described as "someone who thought

you had to be half-mad to play football," Devaney was beyond mad. He was steaming.

"He was really, really fired up," said Kinney, NU's running back at the time and now a Husker legend. "I don't remember exactly what he said, but you could hear him screaming. He said a few words to everybody, and you knew he meant what he said."

The message must have come across, because Nebraska refused to lose. Kinney crashed through defenders all afternoon and scored all three of NU's second-half touchdowns, including a 2-yard plunge with 1:38 left that gave the Huskers their biggest win in school history - a 35-31 heart-stopper that is still considered by many the greatest college football game ever played.

That's just one Bob Devaney story. And those who knew Devaney best during his 11-year stint as Nebraska's head football coach can tell you dozens of others.

But the "Game of the Century" defined Devaney - a fiery bulldog who had the persona to affect and inspire everyone around him. And to win.

For that, Bob Devaney was voted No. 2 on the Daily Nebraskan Sports Century list. His greatness and significance to the Nebraska football program, athletic program, university and state go well beyond the glossy 101-20-2 record he posted from 1962-72.

It went straight to the heart of the people he surrounded.

Kinney - who compared Devaney's 1968 visit to his hometown of McCook to recruit him to

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Daily Nebraskan SPORTS CENTURY