

A Story From The Stands

Stories about former Nebraska Football players and what they learned from the game.

By Kenny Miller

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A LIFETIME IN FOOTBALL

LINCOLN NE-Kent McCloughan worked in a Broken Bow, Nebraska grocery store and listened to Husker games on the radio when he was a boy. That would be the last job he held that didn't have anything to do with football.

Today, this legend of the early Devaney years works for the Oakland Raiders organization and pushes the Raiders shopping cart through the halls of college football looking for just the right match of talent and attitude to make silver and black history.

"I spend a lot of time on the road," he said during an interview from his Colorado home. "Most of my job involves talking. I talk to trainers, and coaches, and other players and try to find out how much a guy loves football and how tough he is." He also spends lots of time looking at film so on NFL draft day, he can answer a question in seconds and help the Raiders make just the right picks that may someday get them back to the Super Bowl.

That's one Nebraska record McCloughan will always hold. He was the first former Husker to ever play in a Super Bowl.

Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers with Bart Starr calling signals beat the Raiders 33-14 in Super Bowl II. McCloughan started that game as a cornerback. There is no Super Bowl Championship ring shortage in the McCloughan home, however. "I have three of them," he said.

The Raiders organization got McCloughan not through the draft, but via a telephone call from a Nebraska trainer.

"I was drafted in the 3rd round by Washington and in the 11th by Houston," McCloughan explained. "Washington had two all-pros where I would likely play and Houston never called back. That's when I called George Sullivan and he called Al Davis."

The Raiders traded for McCloughan and it has been a football love affair ever since. One of his sons works with him and is also a scout. He has two other boys, one is a scout for Seattle and the other is a homebuilder in Colorado. His wife is his Broken Bow high school sweetheart.

The talented Broken Bow running back had the attention of most of the schools in the Big 8 including interesting offers from Colorado, Kansas, and Northwestern. But Nebraska won. The Bill Jennings group had the ball rolling with a couple of noticeable upsets of Oklahoma and Bob Devaney was on the way to Lincoln.

McCloughan spent his freshman year in the Jennings era and came out firing under Devaney as a sophomore. He scored his first of eighteen career touchdowns during the 1962 South Dakota opener, a 53-0 rout.

"I am proud I was one of those guys," he said. "We got the ball rolling." Indeed they did. In the second game, Nebraska dropped Michigan in Ann Arbor, 25-13 giving Devaney his first big win. Nine wins and only a 16-7 Homecoming loss to Missouri and a 34-6 loss to Oklahoma ruined the Devaney era debut. Their reward proved to be another permanent Husker mark. This Husker team is the only Husker team to ever play a football game in Yankee Stadium. The Huskers beat Miami in the Gotham Bowl in a close one, 36-34.

"It was so cold the ground was frozen," McCloughan recalled. "My cleats didn't work so I got Coach Corgan to give me his tennis shoes."

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Even in freezing cold, Husker fever was catching on. 1963 was one of those ever-so-close almost National Championship years for the Huskers. They would go 10-1 and McCloughan remembers the loss.

"We didn't pay well against Air Force," he said. "Late in the game, they got behind us on a pass and we didn't catch up. We did beat Oklahoma which was good." The 17-13 loss to Air Force would keep the Huskers out of any title hopes but put them in the Orange Bowl and a win against Auburn, 13-7.

Nebraska was starting to get some attention by both pollsters and fans. The packed sellout record started in 1962 grew more impressive with the completion of the South stadium in 1964. By the fourth game of the season, Nebraska was rated 8th in the country and moving up each week. By the last game, Nebraska was rated 4th. Oklahoma waited patiently for the chance to get revenge and got it in Norman, 17-7. Nebraska lost the Cotton Bowl to Arkansas, 10-7.

McCloughan received All Big 8 Conference honors and All Big 8 Conference Academic honors. He was also inducted into the Nebraska Football Hall of Fame in 1993. But, unlike so many, his football days have never ended.

"I enjoy traveling around to the different universities," he said. On a recent trip to Norman, Oklahoma he noticed something in their trophy room. "There was a picture of Bud Wilkinson shaking hands with Nebraska's Bobby Reynolds. What an athlete he was. He could run sideways as well as up and down the field."

McCloughan, along with the backfield of "Thunder" Thornton, Bobby Hohn, and Dennis Claridge brought a lot of excitement to Lincoln, too. They set the bar high enough that both coaches and fans could see a National Championship just on the other side.

"I was a spoiled kid coming out of Broken Bow but soon learned how to work hard to gain what I got. We got killed on the scout team but I learned if you are going to succeed, you have to work hard. Coaches like Jim Ross made a man out of me."

And players like Kent McCloughan got the Big Red fever going..