

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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MAKING THE MOST OF A CHANCE

LINCOLN NE-Nebraska wasn't the first choice for this Chicago Mt. Caramel High School star. "I was recruited by George Kelly who was a coach at Marquette University," Judge McGinn said. McGinn didn't stay very long at Marquette and followed a call to the seminary but soon found the priesthood wasn't for him.

"I sent out some letters to different universities," McGinn explained. His direct mail approach got a response from an old friend. George Kelly was now one of Devaney's coaches at Nebraska. "Kelly told me they had a scholarship for me and to come on out."

McGinn packed his bags and headed for Lincoln. It was 1962 and the excitement was high in Lincoln. His first day at Nebraska was a little stressful however. "I flunked the physical," McGinn said. "I injured my shoulder in high school and it needed to be fixed."

McGinn didn't have much time to feel down about the problem, however. "Coach Devaney came up to me and told me not to worry, they would get things fixed."

"Pre-season practice wasn't as tough at Nebraska as it was in high school," McGinn recalled. "We were allowed some breaks when it was hot and they even had saltwater and orange and lemon slices for us.

Even the regular season practices were lighter. We didn't do a lot of calisthenics. If you played on Saturday, you didn't have to scrimmage the next week." Football was fun for this running back now switched to guard on offense and defense. Yes, he played on both sides of the ball.

McGinn concentrated on his studies and his goal of becoming a dentist. But that soon changed, too. "I got a D in chemistry so I dual matriculated in Arts and Sciences and Teacher's College," McGinn explained. He was going to be a coach.

McGinn didn't get to go to the first bowl game of the Devaney era because he was ineligible due to the transfer. The Huskers headed for the Gotham Bowl in New York City and beat Miami in a freezing weather squeaker, 36-34.

The next year, he was part of an Oklahoma style 5/4 defense. "There were five down linemen and 2 linebackers over the guards," he explained. Nebraska was also using an alternating squad method where McGinn would come in to sub for All-American Bob Brown.

"There were some opposition players who were happy to see me come in after having to deal with Brown for a while." Brown was 6' 5" and 270 and McGinn was right at 6' and 205, almost exactly what he is today. Not everyone on that team was a giant. There was even a tough little guy from Cleveland in the backfield by the name of Frank Solich.

McGinn went to work on his own strength and size. The famous Husker Power strength program was still a few years off."In those days there was a set of Sears weights in the field house and a big bar in the basement of the Coliseum," he explained.

The excitement was building at a record pace and along with it, seats for the sea of red started pushing out of the ground on the south end of the stadium. "By the time I was a senior, the South Stadium was done," he remembered. Along with new room for the faithful came some warmer and sunnier bowl appearances. Nebraska beat Auburn in the 1963 Orange Bowl, 13-7.

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"We played Arkansas in the 1964 Cotton Bowl and had them handled for most of the game but they started hitting on the little out patterns and we just couldn't adjust," he remembered. "I recovered a fumble but it wasn't enough, they beat us 10-7."

The football coach-to-be with a major in English and Philosophy was now a Nebraska graduate. The real world called. "I went to work at a Firestone recapping plant in Aberdeen, South Dakota," he said with a big grin. "Then I got interested in law school."

McGinn enrolled in Nebraska's Law School and clerked for county attorney Paul Douglas. When he graduated, he was offered a position with the county attorney's office and stayed there for eleven years until his appointment to the District Court by Governor Charles Thone.

"I hope I do some good by making an effort to protect society with my judging," he said. "I like the variety of experiences." But there is one type of experience that clearly troubles him. It is when a young man stands before him.

If he had his way, he would prefer that young men stand in front of people like Devaney, Osborne, and Solich rather than have to stand before him. "Kids need supervision and attention and sometimes they just don't get it," he said. "Sometimes they just don't have a chance."

Retired Judge McGinn doesn't attend all of the Husker home games but you may see him once in a while with some of his old friends. "Fred Duda and I went to the Notre Dame game and a bunch of us get together every summer.

"Chances are, they probably talk about having a chance to play football for Nebraska. Bernard McGinn made the most of his chance.