

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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SLUGGO

LINCOLN NE-Marc Munford arrived in Lincoln with sunburn. "I looked more like Herbie Husker than a backer-to-be," the Colorado native remembered about his trip from the Denver area. "My Mom and Dad drove Rod Smith and me out here. Rod and I sat in the back of the pickup on bean bags for the entire trip."

That would be the last time Munford would get to lounge around.

"Early on we all learned that it would be a little different playing for Nebraska," he said. "On one spring ball practice during my freshman year, the guard blocked down. We were taught to step up and meet the fullback when that happened. I waited for Rathman to come through the hole and I hit him. Then I heard someone screaming my name from the sidelines."

It's seems Charlie McBride noticed Munford's performance, too. "He kept screaming at me and finally came running across the field," Munford recalled. "Everything stopped. Charlie grabbed my facemask and was so mad he was spitting tobacco juice. I learned they expected 110% and nothing less."

Clearly, that lesson took hold because Munford would earn All Big 8 conference honors every year for the rest of his career at Nebraska.

The 1984 season started off with a bang with Nebraska putting Wyoming away in a 42-7 rout. Minnesota would also feel the thump 38-7.

Next came a test in Pasadena against the 8th. ranked UCLA Bruins. Nebraska took the #1 rating with them to Pasadena and proved they deserved the top spot by whopping UCLA 42-3. All that was left before a run at the Big 8 title and a shot at that National Championship was lowly Syracuse.

Yes, that Syracuse.

"It was loud and they hit us hard," Munford remembered. "Rathman got knocked out of the game early." The game was a head-knocker all the way with Syracuse pulling the biggest upset of the year in the noisy Carrier Dome, 17-9. The #1 rating went out the door and Nebraska fell to #8.

The Husker tent didn't fold, however. "We had a pretty good defense that year," Munford said. That defense was ranked 4th nationally and is still number #5 on Nebraska's all-time list with the fewest rushing yard allowed and #5 on the fewest total yards allowed in a season. The tobacco juice titans ran the Big 8 and regained the #1 spot just in time to play arch-rival #4 Oklahoma. The Huskers lost 17-7. The Huskers recovered in the Sugar Bowl and beat LSU 28-10.

The 1985 Huskers may be the "comeback kids" of Nebraska Football. They dropped the opener to Florida State 13-17 and fell to #18 in the polls but rebounded to #2 just in time for the Oklahoma game. Ugh. More Sooner Magic, a 27-7 loss.

Munford's biggest disappointment came on October 25, 1986 when Nebraska lost to Colorado. "I still hear about that game," Munford said. "I was a team captain and I was from Colorado."

Charlie McBride was also from Colorado. The two had become better friends as Munford took the lessons of his first spring to heart and roamed the secondary like a shotgun-armed farmer protecting his watermelon patch. "I accused Charlie of rigging that Colorado game," he said as he laughed.

There was another linebacker in the Big 8 that Munford and everyone else noticed. "I let it be known that I wanted to play fullback during the Oklahoma game just so I could hit Bosworth a few times," Munford said. "One practice, the offensive coaches

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came and got one of our third string backers and said they were going to run him as a full back and let him soften up Bosworth. "I went berserk," Munford said as he recalled the practical joke.

He also went berserk in the 1986 Oklahoma game by recovering a fumble, getting a sack, an interception and making 16 tackles. His helmet was bloodstained and tobacco spit free but Sooner Magic reared its ugly head and Oklahoma won in the final seconds 17-20.

Munford went on to post season play at the East-West Shrine Game. His college performance caught the eye of several pro scouts.

"I had an easier time than other backers had," Munford said as he played down his career 5 sacks, 153 unassisted tackles, 103 assisted tackles, including 15 tackles for 68 yards in losses. "Danny Noonan made it easy for me to get through," Munford said as he praised the play of the Nebraska All-American defensive lineman.

Munford's chance at pro football came during the 4th. round when Denver drafted him. He was going home. "I loved every minute of it," he said about his Denver playing time. "I really liked Dan Reeves. He was a country boy like me and called me Sluggo." Munford was cut in 1988 when he had an injury.

"Coach Reeves called me in and said, 'Sluggo, we're keeping ten guys and you're the odd man out. I stuck out my hand and thanked him for the chance.'" A few weeks later, Denver was in the market for a backer and Reeves called him. Munford spent his last pro year in Kansas City.

Munford has never left football, at least in his mind. "I am horrible to sit next to at a game because I jump and scream and wave my arms," Munford said. "I even tried coaching and loved it." Munford coached defense at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln for one season. "None of those guys were on a full-ride football scholarship. They were there because they wanted to be there."

Chances are good that just how Sluggo felt, too.