

## 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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### THE PRICELESS GIFT

**LINCOLN NE-**"That was the most perfectly formed wall I had ever seen," said Herman Rohrig about the wall that formed on the punt return that broke Nebraska's back and heart in the 1941 Rose Bowl game. "We always punted for the sidelines but Stanford set up it perfectly and ran it back. Before that, we had them on the run."

"We felt really bad about the loss but Coach Biff Jones told us not to get down. We played a good game." That's one of the lessons Rohrig learned from the game. "Life is like football. Sometimes you lose and football teaches you about winning and losing." He has put those lessons to good use.

Nebraska's star high school back almost went to Colorado State. He and a Lincoln High buddy were almost packed when Rohrig got a call from Cy Sherman; the Lincoln Star sports editor. Rohrig's father was the janitor at the Star. "Sherman told me if I went to Colorado State instead of Nebraska, he would fire my dad." Nebraska won the recruiting battle.

At 6'4" and 217 pounds, Rohrig was a big back for his day but Coach Jones wasn't impressed.

"He called me fireplug," Rohrig said. "He made me run the stadium steps to lose weight. I thought that was a little harsh but he told me I could do it and I did." Memorial Stadium still had the new stadium smell having just been completed a few years before.

One of Rohrig's best memories of those days was the punt return he ran back against Missouri.

"Somebody was running right along with me all of the way to the end-zone. The spirited fan was Mickey Rooney. "Great run he hollered at me when we got to the end-zone."

It wasn't long until Nebraska had another date with stardom. "The train trip to Pasadena took a little detour," Rohrig recalled. "On the first day, we went to Texas and into Mexico. They wanted to let us see Mexico. The next day we were in Phoenix and then we spent a week or so in California before the game."

Even though it was billed as a study trip, the team got to hang out with some movie stars including former Beatrice resident turned big movie star, Bob Taylor. "I got my picture taken with him and Ann Rutherford. I was showing them how to throw the ball."

The players and coaches didn't watch a lot of Stanford film to get ready for the game. "Heck, we just lined up and played. Nebraska played the single wing formation but Stanford put in a new wrinkle called the T formation. Coach Lyman knew a little bit about the T from his Green Bay Packer days."

"Our formations were simple. I was the tailback so I got the snap, kind of like a quarterback today. When we lined up left, we went left. Once in a while we used a reverse but that was about it."

Most of the players on Nebraska's first Rose Bowl team had a long history together. "With the exception of one guy from Kansas, we were all from Lincoln High."

There would be more great runs in Rohrig's future. He went on to play for the Chicago All-Star team, a selection of the best college players who played the best NFL team. Rohrig also played eleven years with the Green Bay Packers.

Rohrig became supervisor of Big 10 officials. "I was 6' 4" before I started that job and at the end of 16 years, they beat me down to 5' 9".

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Rohrig has remained remarkably healthy his entire life except for breaking his nose eight times and spending lots of time with the dentist. "Remember, we didn't have face masks back then. I haven't had any joint replacements," he said, "but some of my friends thought I should look into a head replacement once."

"I dearly love football," Rohrig said. "Those guys don't realize it yet but they'll always remember the lessons of football and this game."

Herman Rohrig certainly has. It's given him the priceless gift of a lifetime.