

## 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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### HOW TO LIGHT A ROCKET

LINCOLN NE-Tommie Frazier may not have known the dentist working on his teeth was a Nebraska football legend, too. Both of these men were quarterbacks. Both had a part in big winning streaks. Tommie and team created one of the longest winning streaks in NCAA history and Dr. Harry Tolly and team ended the longest winning streak in conference history.

"October 31, 1959 wasn't a very nice day--kind of a rainy and dreary day," Dr. Tolly said "It was also Homecoming and Halloween." Oklahoma got the ball first and took it right down the field and scored. Most folks expected that," he says as a smile comes across his face. "The fans didn't expect us to do the same thing. We even went for a two point conversion but didn't get it. That didn't matter so much. We discovered they weren't super human and we could play with them." Tolly knew Oklahoma's 74 game conference winning streak was in trouble.

"It was a close game all of the way," Tolly points out. "We continued to hang in there with them and during the second half, the stadium started to fill."

Crowds in those days were often sparse and on this dreary day with the dreadnought of college football in town, the stadium had plenty of great seats in the East and West stadium. No North or South stadium existed, other than the knothole section, nor were there any plays for those additions. Memorial Stadium could seat 48,000 folks and Coach Jennings thought that was more than the state of Nebraska would ever need.

"I guess people were listening on the radio and suddenly realized a little college football history was unfolding at the stadium. There were around 32,000 fans there by the end of the game. That was the largest crowd I had ever seen in that stadium."

"Pat Fisher ran a punt return to the Oklahoma three yard line and if he hadn't had a sore leg, they would have never caught him," Tolly recalls. "Ron Meade did everything on that day and Don Fricke and Lee Zentic had a good game, too. Lee recovered a blocked pun and ran it in for a second half touchdown that really got us going."

It was worth the late afternoon hustle to get a seat in the drizzle. On the last play of the game, Meade made an end zone interception of Oklahoma's last hope at a another notch in their seventy-four game winning streak. Nebraska 25. Oklahoma 21. History had been made in Lincoln.

"The crowd went nuts," he said with a laugh. "The fans ripped the goal posts down and fans paraded them through the streets of Lincoln. Folks were still in the stadium after we had showered and come out of the field house."

The celebrating continued the next day with a goal post snake parade from the campus to Chancellor Hardin's home. He came out and greeted the students and called classes off on Monday to mark the Oklahoma win.

Tolly took a short detour on his journey to this day of fame. After graduating from North Platte High, he attended Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire. "Guess you could say I had my red-shirt year in high school."

His father was a coach and this very happy "upsetter" of a quarterback was following in his dad's footsteps. He was an education major and planned to go on for an advanced degree and become a coach, too.

"I had a scholarship opportunity at both Dartmouth and Nebraska. But even back then, if your were a Nebraska guy, you wanted to play for Nebraska. I took the Nebraska offer."

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With full-ride scholarship in hand, he packed his bags and headed for his destiny in Lincoln. His first varsity start came in the fall of 1957. "I don't remember what game," he says. It wasn't a memorable year--one win and nine losses. "We beat Kansas State 14-7."

His junior season was a little better--three wins and seven losses. "We beat Pittsburgh and Penn State and Iowa State that year." His grin and memory were both improving. His senior year was even a little better with four wins and six losses but this may have been the Nebraska team that "started" the rivalry with Oklahoma.

A couple of pro scouts asked if he was interested in a pro football career but he wanted to move on to his coaching future. "Mick Tinglehoff, Pat Fischer, and Ron McDole went on to play in the pros so we were well represented," he points out.

"I had an opportunity to become a graduate assistant for Bill Jennings after graduation and decided to take it," he recalls. He liked Bill Jennings and admired his approach to coaching. "We practiced a lot and some say we left some of our best games on the practice field, but I think Jennings was on the right track."

Jennings proved the point again the following year by beating Oklahoma again in Norman, 17-14, but his time at Nebraska was over and the new coach from Wyoming was setting up shop in Lincoln.

"I liked Bob Devaney but I was having second thoughts about coaching so I applied for dental school and was accepted. I told Coach Devaney about my chance to go to dental school and he told me to take it. He said if I had a chance to go to a professional school, I should do it because it would be a lot more secure than coaching." Young Coach Tolly left the sidelines for the last time during the spring of Coach Bob Devaney's first year at Nebraska.

"I knew Coach Devaney would be successful," Tolly recalled. "One of the first things he did was take those lights off of the back of the Coliseum. So much for those long Jennings practices. The players loved that."

And who did Coach Devaney name to the newly vacated graduate assistant post? "Some guy named Osborne," Tolly said with a big grin. "That was my other big contribution to Nebraska football. I made room for Tom Osborne."

Dr. Tolly is in a dental practice with his son in Lincoln's University Place suburb. You can tell he was a great athlete because he is still in top notch shape and loves to play racquetball and tennis.

Tommie picked the right dentist. After all, who would know more about smash mouth football, winning the big one, and creating a winning smile than Dr. Harry Tolly, number 21, the quarterback from the Oklahoma-beating Husker team of 1959. Harry Tolly and his teammates taught a bunch of damp Husker fans how to light a rocket, and an entire state soon learned how much fun it is to watch it fly.