



JAMES R. BURNETT, THE WORLD-HERALD

Bill Snyder, right, went 0-9 against Tom Osborne at Kansas State, but Snyder, the recipient of the Tom Osborne Legacy Award, earned the Husker legend's admiration for turning the Wildcats into winners. "I've always put Bill pretty much at the top of the list of coaching accomplishments," Osborne said.

Snyder won games, respect at K-State

DIRK CHATELAIN
 World-Herald Staff Writer

They are two of the greatest college football coaches of all time. But their stories? So different.

One man, Tom Osborne, took over a powerhouse and raised the bar, producing a level of consistency unmatched in the sport's history. Twenty-five straight seasons with at least nine wins. He won three national championships and retired at only 60 years old.

The other, Bill Snyder, took over a laughingstock at Kansas State. A 27-game winless streak. One day during his first year, 1989, Snyder met with his players at the scene of so many embarrassments — their home field.

"This is when you could have 95 on scholarship; we had 47," Snyder said

Monday. "The lowest scholarship count in the history of college football. That's a record we still hold."

Snyder pointed to the scoreboard. This is not going to define you, he told players. What will define you is your capacity to improve in all facets of your life, including football, every single day.

The wins eventually came. Against all odds, Snyder worked 100-hour weeks and produced a contender. Winning a Big 12 title in Manhattan, Kansas? Osborne called it "miraculous."

Snyder retired in 2005, watched Wildcat football slump under his successor, Ron Prince, then returned and built it up again. At 79, he walked away for good, without a national title but with countless admirers.

"Of all the coaches I've known, he probably did about as good of a coaching job as anyone ever could," Osborne said. "If you go to USC or Texas and win a lot of games, well, that's kind of expected. But K-State won some Big 12 championships. ...

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Snyder, recipient of the Tom Osborne Legacy Award, will appear with Osborne via Zoom during Wednesday night's Outland Trophy Award dinner in Omaha, which also features Alabama offensive tackle Alex Leatherwood, the Outland winner and new national champion.

Snyder and Osborne, both north of

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80 now, have known each other half their lives, but their friendship has grown the past two decades. Their conversations often focus on mentoring; both developed successful mentoring programs in their states.

"He was more than just a football coach," Snyder said. "He is someone to be admired forever."

Snyder laughs when asked about their memorable games. "I try to forget them all."

It's true he never beat Osborne — 0-9. But the Nebraska/K-State rivalry intensified during the mid-1990s and tipped purple during the Frank Solich era. But Osborne never worried that Snyder might be cheating or lying to recruits about the Big Red Giant to the north.

"The competition was always healthy," Osborne said.

Not always natural, though. Osborne's favorite memory may be 1992, when the Huskers and Wildcats agreed to play in Tokyo. "I know I would never try that deal again," Osborne said.

Among the oddities, the Japanese crowd barely made a peep

when the Huskers scored a touchdown. But once Nebraska kicked the extra point, pandemonium ensued.

"They thought that kicking the extra point was the whole deal," Osborne said.

But most notable was the flight to and from Tokyo. Nebraska on one side of the plane; Kansas State on the other.

"It was kind of awkward to fly back with a team you'd just beaten and they're just a few feet apart," Osborne said.

Q&A with Bill Snyder

Q: Have you ever reflected on what made Nebraska's dynasty? Was there something you considered the overriding factor?

"You'd have to say the two coaches during that time. Tom Osborne and Bob Devaney. I think the Nebraska fan base has been instrumental. That's not to exclude players, assistant coaches, personnel, a lot of wonderful people, many of them I have known. But to have a leader like Tom Osborne

and Bob Devaney and a loyal fan base like the 100,000 or so you put in the stadium every single time. When you have to boil it down, you have to question whether it could happen without those three entities. Tom, Bob and the fans."

Q: What's been your sense of the challenge that faces Scott Frost in Lincoln?

"The problems they have, Scott didn't create them. Scott got in on a downward cycle. He needs a little time and he will get it done. Scott Frost is a quality person and Scott Frost is a quality coach. He'll have the right people with him and they will be successful. He's an excellent young man."

Q: How do you feel about college football playing through the pandemic?

"There was sensitivity to it, not just from me, but an awful lot of people. But I think one of the things that it seemed to do is bring a great deal more compliance with guidelines in order to be protective within programs. If you're going to play, you didn't want COVID running around your locker room. ...

It was kind of amazing in different areas. Some conferences were able to play a larger number of games than others. And some conferences, wisely so, waited before they actually began play. Not to say that anybody was right or wrong. But it played out OK."

Q: You used to recruit Omaha pretty heavily, especially as an Iowa assistant. What's your most memorable recruiting experience here?

"Larry Station would be the one. And (Central High defensive lineman) Sean Ridley came right along with him. Larry was one of the most highly recruited young people in the nation. And Nebraska obviously was high on his list. Everybody was persistent about it, but I was pleased he chose to come with us to the University of Iowa. Larry Station was and is just a quality, quality young man. Always did things the right way."

dirk.chatelain@owh.com, 402-649-1461, twitter.com/dirkchatelain