

FOOTBALL NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP OKLAHOMA VS. FLORIDA

This week we will witness one of the most unique of all football national championships. Each team is quarterbacked by a Heisman trophy winner and in each case they received the award as sophomores which no other player has ever achieved.

My support must go to Oklahoma. My allegiance began with Bud Wilkinson the all-time outstanding coach of the Sooners. Wilkinson, a graduate of Shattuck School (my "prep" school) and captain of the football team went on to Minnesota where as quarterback he led the Gophers to three consecutive national titles and in 1937 led the college all-stars to a 6-0 victory over the NFL champion, the Green Bay Packers.

But it was as the coach at Oklahoma where he accomplished indelible achievements. He removed the state from its "dust bowl" image as epitomized in the book and movie "The Grapes of Wrath" and placed it in the Orange and Sugar Bowls as national champions. Wilkinson's record at Oklahoma included fourteen conference titles, three national championships, but the most enduring and significant record of all --47 consecutive victories ,a record that will never be broken in college football!

Bill Reichardt, my next door neighbor but more famously the most valuable-1951-player in the Big Ten (a fact found in Guinness 's records in that his Iowa team did not win a single conference game) wrote an op-ed piece for the Des Moines Register, "Coaches use of humiliation and fear is intolerable" for which I applauded him. But with a letter to Wilkinson from a former player I demonstrated how Bud's coaching was very different and very successful.(see attachment)

It was a meaningful youth experience that I shared with Wilkinson that informed my support for him and in turn my allegiance to Oklahoma. This is described in Jim Gant's book-"The Undefeated: The Oklahoma Sooners and the greatest winning streak in college football:

"Perhaps(Wilkinson's)most satisfying accomplishment was not only making the Crack Squad-the nationally known precision drill and rifle unit-but also excelling as it finest member. It was the Crack Squad that representatives from the War Department deemed the

greatest unit from any military school in the country. Thanks to long hours of work and discipline, the Shattuck drill unit had never lost in competition. Ten hours of practice usually equaled one minute of performance."

Thanks to John Greenebaum (Amherst'52) I revisited this mutual experience with Wilkinson at the 1971 Kentucky Derby. If you wish to read more about this story go to The Shattuck Crack Squad. In the story you will find Wilkinson, Marlon Brando, Jerry Huse, Borlaugs (father and son) and (are you surprised?) Bill Peverill.

Better SOONER than later

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